

A Profile of Latinos in Rural America

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Latinos are increasingly found outside of places where they have traditionally resided. Because they are younger and giving birth at higher rates than their non-Latino counterparts in nonmetropolitan America, Latinos represent a significant growing segment of the nation's rural population. This brief uses recent data from the Census Bureau's 2006 American Community Survey (ACS) to present a snapshot of the Latino population in the nonmetropolitan United States.¹

Key results include:

Nearly 3.2 million Latinos live in rural areas of the country, comprising 6.3 percent of the nation's nonmetro inhabitants.

The nation's Latino population is diverse, with persons from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Spain all represented. Three-fourths of all Latinos in nonmetro areas are Mexican. The ten largest categories of Latinos in these places include Mexican (close to 2.4 million), Puerto Rican (168,000), Spanish (98,000), Guatemalan (48,000), Spaniard (42,000), Cuban (37,000), Salvadoran (35,000), Spanish American (26,000), Honduran (24,000), and all other Hispanic (259,000).

Seven states in the Southwest and South have at least 100,000 nonmetro Latinos: Texas, New Mexico, North Carolina, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, and California. The seven states account for 57 percent of the nation's nonmetro Latino population. Texas (approximately 868,000), New Mexico (284,000), and North Carolina (150,000) have the largest nonmetro Latino populations. Nine other states including Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Michigan, Illinois, and Georgia have over 50,000 Latinos living in rural areas in the state.

The Latino population is young. Approximately three in ten Latinos in nonmetro areas are younger than age 15 (Figure 2). In contrast, children make up smaller portions of the non-Hispanic white and black (herein referred to simply as "white" and "black," respectively) populations in nonmetro areas.

A higher percentage (9.2%) of Latinas aged 15 to 50 in nonmetro areas gave birth within the last year than white (5.5%) or black (6.3%) nonmetro women. About 61 percent of these Latina mothers are currently married compared to 71 percent of white mothers and 27 percent of black mothers.

Nearly four-fifths of nonmetro Latinos age 5 and older speak English, either speaking English at home or speaking a language other than English (e.g., Spanish and others) at home while speaking English well or very well. About one-fifth speaks Spanish or other non-English languages at home but cannot speak English fluently.

One-third of Latinos in nonmetro areas were born outside the United States and because Latino immigrants are drawn to rural areas to work in jobs that are typically male-dominated, males outnumber females by about 16 percent.

Latinos age 25 and older in nonmetro areas have lower levels of education than whites or blacks. About 55 percent have a high school diploma while only 7 percent have a bachelor's degree.

Three-fourths of Latino households in nonmetro areas constitute family households compared with two-thirds of white and black households.

About 28 percent of Latinos in nonmetro areas are living in poverty, twice the rate of whites but less than the rate among blacks. Approximately one-third of Latino children are poor. More than one in two Latino children living in single-mother families are living in poverty. Latino children who live with both parents are not necessarily shielded from poverty—slightly more than one in five is poor.

Roughly two-fifths (40.6 percent) of Latino households/families in nonmetro areas have incomes below \$25,000. In contrast, 55 percent of black households have incomes below this threshold. Differences are similar for food stamp use in the last year.

Latino men and white men and women aged 25-54 in nonmetro areas are frequently employed (unemployment rates of 5.5 percent for Latino males), while Latina women and black men and women face greater job uncertainty.

Latino job-holders tend to work in a wide variety of occupations, although greater shares of Latino men work in two types of occupations (farming, forestry, and fisheries; and construction, extractive, maintenance, and repair occupations) than their white and black counterparts. Latina workers are more likely to work in service, sales and office, and farming, forestry, and fisheries occupations.

In summary, the rural Latino population continues to spread to points beyond the traditional Southwest where they have been clustered in the past. The rural Latino population is young and faces social and economic challenges associated with low levels of education and high rates of poverty. This is also a population that has high levels of employment in jobs that typically offer no—or at best, limited—benefits such as health insurance. Given that many rural communities are growing in numbers largely due to the Latino population, rural policymakers and community leaders need to develop routes for upward mobility to ensure that Latinos prosper in their communities.

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FIGURE 1: PROFILE OF LATINOS, NON-HISPANIC WHITES, AND NON-HISPANIC BLACKS IN THE NONMETROPOLITAN UNITED STATES, 2006*

Selected Indicators	Latino	Non-Hisp. White	Non-Hisp. Black
Population	3,168,196	40,692,180	4,225,998
Pct. younger than age 15	29.6	17.3	22.5
Pct. 65 or older	5.4	16.8	9.8
Males per 100 females	116.3	97.2	101.4
Pct. foreign-born	32.6	1.0	1.4
Educational Attainment of Persons 25 and Older			
Pct. high school graduates	54.6	83.8	68.1
Pct. college graduates	7.1	18.2	8.2
Language Spoken by Persons 5 and Older			
Pct. speak English at home	28.2	97.3	97.5
Pct. speak other language at home and English well/very well	50.6	2.3	2.3
Pct. speak other language at home and English not well/not at all	21.2	0.3	0.3
Household Type			
Family Households:			
Pct. in married couple households	52.5	55.0	29.6
Pct. in male (no spouse) households	9.0	3.9	6.0
Pct. in female (no spouse) households	15.8	9.1	30.6
Nonfamily Households:			
Pct. of householders living alone	16.5	27.2	30.4
Pct. of householders not living alone	6.1	4.9	3.4
Pct. of women 15 to 50 giving birth in past 12 months	9.2	5.5	6.3
Pct. of women giving birth who are married	60.7	70.6	27.0
Poverty Status			
Pct. of all persons	27.7	13.1	34.5
Pct. of persons 0-17	33.9	16.4	46.3
Pct. of persons 65 and older	26.1	10.2	31.8
Poverty Status by Family Type			
All Families	24.8	9.4	30.3
Married couple families			
With related children	21.1	7.2	14.3
Without related children	12.0	3.9	9.2
Male householder (no spouse) families			
With related children	24.9	20.4	37.4
Without related children	11.4	8.7	18.4
Female household (no spouse) families			
With related children	56.2	41.2	57.2
Without related children	21.4	11.4	23.9

Pct. households with income below \$25,000	40.6	30.3	55.0
Pct. families with income below \$25,000	37.8	19.7	47.1
Pct. households receiving food stamps	17.7	8.8	27.4
Pct. 25–54 year olds in civilian labor force unemployed			
Males	5.5	4.7	10.9
Females	9.2	4.9	11.2

Occupation Distribution by Sex

Male:

Management, professional, and related occupations	9.6	24.9	10.9
Service occupations	15.3	11.4	19.4
Sales and office occupations	9.1	14.2	11.6
Farming, forestry, and fisheries occupations	12.1	2.2	2.9
Construction, extractive, maintenance, and repair occs.	25.1	22.2	15.7
Production, transportation, and materials moving occupations	28.8	25.1	39.4

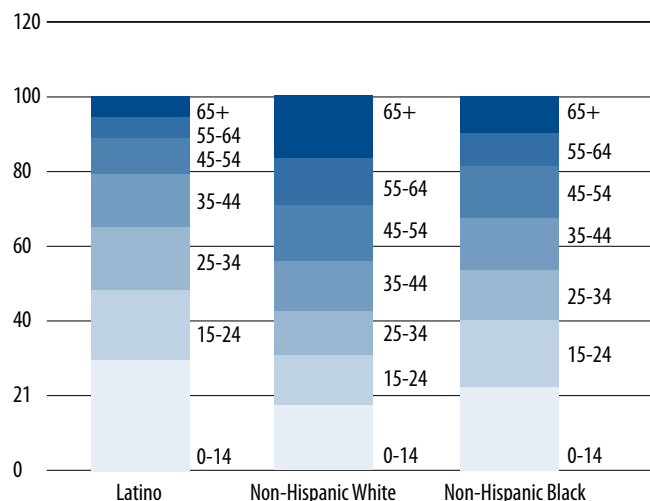
Female:

Management, professional, and related occupations	19.3	33.6	22.1
Service occupations	32.9	21.7	34.0
Sales and office occupations	27.7	34.6	25.6
Farming, forestry, and fisheries occupations	3.8	0.5	0.4
Construction, extractive, maintenance, and repair occs.	0.9	0.9	0.8
Production, transportation, and materials moving occupations	15.3	8.6	17.1

*Non-Hispanic Whites and Non-Hispanic Blacks include individuals who indicated that they were not Hispanic or Latino and who identified their race as White or Black, respectively.

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2006

FIGURE 2: AGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE NONMETRO LATINO, NON-HISPANIC WHITE, AND NON-HISPANIC BLACK POPULATIONS



¹ We use the terms “rural” and “nonmetro” interchangeably in this brief. Nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) populations (that is, persons not living in Metropolitan Statistical Areas [MSAs]) were obtained by subtracting population totals in MSAs from the national population totals. Metropolitan areas are based on the Census Bureau’s definition as of June 1999. Information on the list of counties and New England towns that compose metropolitan areas is available at <http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/metro-city/99mfips.txt>.