The Economic State of the Latino Community in America

More than 55 million people of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity live in the United States, comprising 17 percent of the country’s total population. Hispanics are the nation’s largest ethnic group and their share of the U.S. population is expected to grow. Nearly one in three people living in the United States will identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino by 2060.

The Latino community trails the majority non-Hispanic white population in many important indicators of economic well-being, including employment, income and wealth accumulation. The gaps are largest for Latinos born outside the United States. However, Latinos born in this country—although still lagging by some measures—are making progress on many fronts.

Hispanic women (Latinas) face special challenges. The median Hispanic woman earns only 88 percent of what the median Hispanic man earns, and she earns little more than half of the median white male earns. Moreover, most Latinas have little access to services like day care or parental leave that would allow them to balance work and family and to earn higher wages.

Nevertheless, there are reasons to be hopeful. The relative youth of the Hispanic population, the push toward greater education and an entrepreneurial drive present opportunities for the future.

This report examines multiple aspects of the economic state of the Latino community in the United States, including population growth, geographic presence, demographics, educational attainment, employment and earnings, the role of Latinas, wealth and retirement security. Together, these data help paint a portrait of Latinos and their economic prospects for the future.

Key Facts

- By 2060, **one in three** people living in the U.S. will be Latino.
- The “typical” (median) Hispanic worker earns **72 percent** of what the “typical” non-Hispanic white earns.
- Hispanic women earn just **55 cents** for every dollar earned by non-Hispanic white men.
- The median income of Hispanic households is $42,500—**nearly $18,000** less than the median income of non-Hispanic white households.
- The median net worth of Hispanic households is approximately **one-tenth** that of non-Hispanic white households.
- Hispanic households are **twice** as likely to live in poverty as non-Hispanic white households.
- U.S.-born Latinos are almost **twice** as likely to have a bachelor’s degree as foreign-born Latinos.

Note: In this report, the terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” are used interchangeably.
**Population Growth**

During the 1990s and 2000s, an influx of immigrants from Latin America and Mexico fueled a period of rapid growth in the number of Latinos in the United States. At the peak between 1995 and 2000, the Latino population grew by an average of 4.8 percent per year.4

Over the past four years, growth has slowed to an average of 2.2 percent per year.5 Even at this pace, Hispanics are the second fastest growing racial or ethnic group, trailing Asians.6

Last year alone, the number of Hispanics living in the United States increased by over 1.1 million, accounting for almost half of the growth in the U.S. population in 2014.7 While immigration used to be the primary driver of growth in the Hispanic population, it accounted for less than one-quarter of this most recent increase, which was due to “natural growth” — the fact that the number of Latino births in the United States exceeded the number of deaths.8

Over the long term, the growth of the Hispanic population will reshape the United States. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that the Hispanic share of the population will grow from 17 percent in 2014 to almost 30 percent in 2060. In comparison, the non-Hispanic white share of the population, currently 62 percent, is projected to decline to less than 44 percent in 2060. The Asian share of the population is expected to increase from 5 percent to 9 percent, while the non-Hispanic black share will edge up from 13 percent to 16 percent.9

**Geographic Presence**

The Hispanic population is spread throughout the country. California has the largest number of Latinos—nearly 15 million. Other states with large numbers of Latinos include Texas (10.4 million), Florida (4.8 million), New York (3.7 million) and Illinois (2.2 million). In fact, over 60 percent of the entire U.S. Hispanic population lives in one of these five states. Another 3.5 million Latinos live in Puerto Rico.10

Hispanics make up the largest share of the total population of the state of New Mexico, where nearly half (47.7 percent) of the residents are of Hispanic origin. They also make up a large percentage of the population of California (38.6 percent), Texas (38.6 percent), Arizona (30.5 percent) and Nevada (27.8 percent).

A large percentage of the total U.S. Latino population is clustered in 10 metropolitan areas, led by Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, New York-Newark-Jersey City and Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach. The Latino populations of these 10 cities alone make up 45.7 percent of the total U.S. Latino population (see Table 1).
Demographics

Origin. While immigrants used to make up the majority of the U.S. Hispanic population, today almost two-thirds (64 percent) were born in the United States. The remaining 36 percent are foreign-born.\(^{11}\)

Latinos originate from many different countries. The majority of the U.S. Latino community is of Mexican origin (65 percent), followed by Puerto Rico (10 percent), El Salvador (4 percent) and Cuba (4 percent). Smaller shares are from countries in Central America, South America and Spain.\(^{12}\)

Across all Hispanic origin groups, the share of Latinos who are foreign born is declining. However, individuals from other countries such as Venezuela, Peru, Guatemala and Honduras are more likely to have immigrated, while those from Puerto Rico, Spain and Mexico are more likely to have been born in the United States.\(^{13}\)

There are important differences between Latinos born in the United States and those who are foreign-born. By most economic indicators, U.S.-born Latinos fare better than those who immigrated to the United States.

Age. The U.S. Latino population is younger than the general U.S. population. The median age of Hispanics in the United States is 28.4 years—almost 10 years younger than that of the overall population (37.7 years) and 15 years younger than the non-Hispanic white population (43.1 years).\(^{14}\) However, there is a very large difference between the median age of foreign-born (40 years) and U.S.-born Hispanics (19 years).\(^{15}\)

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**Table 1. Top 10 Metro Areas by Hispanic Population**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Metro Areas</th>
<th>Hispanic Population</th>
<th>Share of U.S. Hispanic Population</th>
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<tr>
<td>Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA</td>
<td>5,978,000</td>
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<td>New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA</td>
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<td>8.7%</td>
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<td>Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, FL</td>
<td>2,567,000</td>
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<td>Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land, TX</td>
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<td>Riverside-San Bernardino- Ontario, CA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chicago-Naperville- Elgin, IL-IN-WI</td>
<td>2,072,000</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX</td>
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<tr>
<td>San Antonio-New Braunfels, TX</td>
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<td>San Diego-Carlsbad, CA</td>
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<td>San Francisco-Oakland-Hayward, CA</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>25,282,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>45.7%</strong></td>
</tr>
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**Source:** JEC Democratic staff tabulations of data from the 2014 American Community Survey (1-year estimates) using American FactFinder.

**Notes:** "Metro" refers to "Metropolitan Statistical Areas". "Hispanic" refers to "Hispanic or Latino Origin". Population rounded to nearest thousand.
Nearly one-third (32 percent) of Latinos today are younger than 18, compared to less than one-quarter (23 percent) of the overall population, and less than one-fifth (19 percent) of non-Hispanic whites. Notably, approximately one out of every four children living in the United States is Hispanic.

Latinos are under-represented in older age groups. Just 6 percent of the U.S. Latino community is 65 or older, compared to 14.5 percent of the overall population and 10 percent of the non-Hispanic white population. Only one out of every 13 individuals over the age of 65 is Hispanic.

**Citizenship.** Latinos make up a large share (46 percent) of the foreign-born population in the United States and a majority of the unauthorized/undocumented resident population. According to the Pew Research Center, there were 8.3 million unauthorized residents from Mexico, Central America and South America residing in the United States in 2012. These individuals comprise 74 percent of the total unauthorized population of 11.2 million residents. One-in-three (33 percent) Latinos 18 years and older are not U.S. citizens compared to only one-in-10 (8 percent) of the overall adult population.

**Education**

Less than two-thirds (64.7 percent) of Hispanics over the age of 25 have a high school degree. They are four times less likely to have completed high school than non-Hispanic whites.

But over the past several decades, more Latinos have pursued higher education. The percent with a bachelor’s degree nearly doubled from 8 percent in 1990 to 15 percent in 2014. The share of recent high school graduates enrolled in post-secondary education has increased from 43 percent in 1990 to 60 percent in 2013.

There are large differences in the levels of education attained by first-generation Hispanics (born outside the United States) and later generations. Seventy-five percent of U.S.-born Hispanics have graduated from high school; only half of foreign-born Hispanics have high school degrees. Eighteen percent of U.S.-born Hispanics hold a bachelor’s degree; just over 10 percent of foreign-born Hispanics hold a bachelor’s degree.

The increasing rates of educational attainment have paid off for Latino families in terms of higher incomes and wealth. Latino families with a college-educated head of household earn 2.2 times more income and have net worth 4.1 times greater than those without a college education.

The relationship between education and economic well-being is complex. Over the long-run, the benefits of a college degree are smaller for Latinos and African Americans than for whites and Asians. Even for Latinos with a college degree, the unemployment rate is 3.9 percent, a full percentage point higher than the unemployment rate for whites (2.9 percent).
Employment

Latinos play an important role in many industries and collectively they hold 16.3 percent of private-sector jobs.

Latinos are over-represented in several sectors, including construction where they hold more than one quarter of all jobs. They also make up disproportionate shares of employment in low-paying industries such as agriculture and leisure and hospitality, where they hold over one-fifth of all jobs (see Figure 1).

On the other hand, Latinos are under-represented in several high-paying industries, including professional and business services, financial activities and information. They are also under-represented in the education and health services industry—one of the most rapidly expanding sectors of the economy.28

More than one-quarter (27 percent) of Latinos work in service occupations compared to 17 percent of whites. These occupations include food service, grounds keeping and maintenance jobs. Very few Hispanics work in typically higher-paying jobs, including architecture and engineering, which employ less than 1 percent of Hispanics workers.29

Unemployment rates for Latinos have consistently been higher than for non-Hispanic whites and for the population as a whole. During the Great Recession, Hispanic unemployment soared to 13.0 percent—three points higher than the unemployment rate for the general population (10.0 percent). However, the unemployment rate for Latinos has recovered somewhat more quickly than for others (see Figure 2).

Since 2010, Hispanic employment has increased by over 4.7 million workers, accounting for about 40 percent of total employment gains in the United States. This is partly due to the fact that Hispanics are more likely to work in the recently booming mining industry and the recovering construction industry.30

The current unemployment rate among Latinos is 6.4 percent—almost 1.5 times the rate for whites (4.4 percent).31 Over the past 12 months, the unemployment rate for Hispanic men has averaged 6.4 percent, 1.6 percentage points higher than the unemployment rate for white men (4.8 percent). Over the same period, the unemployment rate for Hispanic women averaged 7.2 percent—2.6 percentage points higher than the rate for white women (4.6 percent).
The unemployment rate is particularly high for Latino youth. One-in-five (19.3 percent) of Hispanics in their late teens and one-in-10 (10.1 percent) Hispanics in their early twenties were unemployed over the past 12 months. High unemployment rates for young workers can hurt their long-term employment and earning prospects.

Hispanic workers also are more likely to be underemployed. For example, among individuals working part time, one-in-three Hispanic workers are doing so because their hours have been cut or they cannot find full-time work. This is true for only one-in-five white workers.

### Income and Earnings

The fact that many Hispanics work in lower-paying occupations means that they generally earn less than non-Hispanics. Median weekly earnings of Hispanic workers employed full time are 27 percent less than median weekly earnings of non-Hispanic white workers—$602 per week versus $829 per week.

The earnings disparity faced by Hispanic workers translates to lower incomes for Hispanic households. In 2014, median income of all Latino households was $42,500, $17,800 less than the median income of non-Hispanic white households ($60,300) (see Figure 3). Foreign-born Latinos fared worse with a median household income of $34,600, while U.S.-born Latinos fared somewhat better with a median income of $47,000.

Latinos are under-represented in top income brackets and over-represented in bottom brackets. Even though roughly 13 percent of U.S. households are Latino, they make up only 7.1 percent of households in the top fifth of the income scale. On the other hand, they make up 15 percent of households in the bottom fifth of the income scale.
Poverty

Higher rates of unemployment and lower earnings make Hispanic families among the most likely to be in poverty. In 2014, 13.1 million Hispanics, including 5.7 million children, lived below the poverty line.\(^39\)

The poverty rate for Hispanics (23.6 percent) is more than 10 percentage points higher than the rate for the non-Hispanics (12.9 percent), and 14 percentage points higher than the rate for non-Hispanic whites (10.1 percent).\(^40\)

Growing up in poverty has serious consequences for children’s economic well-being and future outcomes. Almost 30 percent of Latino children live in a food-insecure household.\(^41\) Latino children are 50 percent more likely to be raised in the bottom 20 percent of the income distribution as children in white households.\(^42\) Research shows that children raised in households at the bottom of the income scale are more likely to remain there as adults.\(^43\)

The Role of Hispanic Women in the Workforce

Over 27 million Latinas live in the United States, including 18.6 million who are 18 years or older. Latinas make up 7 percent of the total workforce and 15 percent of the female workforce.\(^44\) Those shares likely will increase as the Hispanic population continues to grow.

Latinas play an important role in the economic security of their families and they make significant contributions to the economy. Over 55 percent of Hispanic women are in the labor force, including 62 percent of mothers with children younger than 18.\(^45\) According to the Center for American Progress (CAP), 40 percent of married Latinas earn more than half of their family’s income.\(^46\)

But Hispanic women suffer vast disparities in the workplace. A typical (median) Latina woman earns 88 cents for every dollar earned by a typical Latino man.\(^47\) She earns only 55 cents for every dollar earned by a non-Hispanic white man (see Figure 4).

There are several factors that contribute to the pay gap facing Latina workers. First, they are more likely than white women to work in low-paying jobs in service and sales and office occupations. According to an analysis by CAP in 2014, 62 percent of Latinas worked in one of those job groups, compared to 51 percent of white women.\(^48\) On the other hand, only 26 percent of Latinas worked in higher-paying jobs including management and professional occupations, compared to 43 percent of white women.\(^49\)
Second, Latinas generally have lower levels of education than white women. Only 16 percent of Latinas 25 and older have earned a 4-year degree, compared to 33 percent of white women 25 and older, making white women twice as likely as Latinas to hold a bachelor’s degree.\(^5\)

Third, Latinas are more likely to work in jobs with reduced hours and to work part time involuntarily.\(^5\) Researchers have shown that workers experience a wage bonus for putting in longer hours, and a wage penalty for working fewer hours, a consequence that disproportionately hurts minority women.\(^5\)

Finally, Latinas are also more likely to earn the minimum wage—currently $7.25 per hour. The Economic Policy Institute has estimated that raising the minimum wage to $12.00 per hour would benefit more than four in 10 working Latinas.\(^5\)

An additional challenge for Latinas is that they are often employed in jobs with no access to paid sick leave, paid family leave and flexible schedules, making it more difficult to balance work and family responsibilities.\(^5\) The disparity in access to these benefits is especially problematic for single mothers. About a third (30.5 percent) of Hispanic families with children under 18 are headed by a single mother, compared to one-fifth (21.4 percent) of white families with children.\(^5\) Almost half (46.3 percent) of families headed by a Hispanic single mother are in poverty.\(^5\)

**Economic Influence and Entrepreneurship**

The Latino community accounts for a combined $1.3 trillion in economic activity. Their contributions are projected to top $1.7 trillion by 2020.\(^5\)

Latinos own 3.2 million businesses in the United States, according to the U.S. Small Business Administration. Together, those businesses generate almost $500 billion in economic activity annually.\(^5\) Hispanics are 1.5 times more likely than the general population to become entrepreneurs, according to the Kauffman Index of Entrepreneurial Activity.\(^5\) The vast majority (90 percent) of immigrant entrepreneurs are Hispanic.\(^5\) In recent years, Hispanics have become entrepreneurs at a faster rate than all of the other major racial/ethnic groups.\(^5\)

Latinas have been strong contributors to the high rates of entrepreneurship among Hispanics. According to an analysis by the Center for American Progress, Latina-owned businesses are “the fastest-growing segment of the women-owned business market, and are starting up at six times the national average.”\(^5\)

However, the robust entrepreneurship in the Hispanic community also comes with challenges. Latino business owners are more likely to be low-income entrepreneurs than white business owners. This is largely due to the fact that a high number of Hispanic entrepreneurs are immigrants.\(^5\) As a result, Latino business owners often must overcome large hurdles to be successful, including lack of access to capital and high rates of failure.\(^5\)

**Wealth, Homeownership and Retirement Security**

White households typically have 10 times more wealth than Hispanic households. In 2013, the median net worth of Hispanic households was only $14,000 compared to about $142,000 for white households—a difference of $128,000.\(^5\) The wealth divide has increased since the Great Recession. The median net worth of Hispanic households fell by over 40 percent from 2007 to 2013, compared to a drop of 26 percent among white households.\(^5\)
The composition of wealth is also different for Hispanic and white households. Home equity makes up a higher proportion of overall wealth for Hispanic households, despite the fact that they are much less likely to own their own homes. Currently, 45 percent of Latino households own their homes (compared to an almost 72 percent ownership rate among white households).

Research suggests that in the period leading up to the financial crisis, Hispanic borrowers were more likely to hold subprime mortgages, even after accounting for differences in income and credit scores. While the reason for this are not clear, it may have been that this market was underserved by traditional lenders offering conventional loans. The consequences have been severe for the Hispanic community.

Hispanic homeowners have experienced high rates of delinquency and foreclosure. And although home values have rebounded in recent years, the recovery has not kept pace with returns in the stock market, leading to a slower recovery for Hispanic households.

Disparities in employment, earnings and wealth all contribute to the fact that Hispanics are generally less financially prepared for retirement than groups. Latinos also are less likely to be covered by employer-sponsored retirement plans. Only 12 percent of Latino households have access to a defined benefit pension that guarantees lifetime income—half the rate of white and black households. Less than 70 percent of working-age Latino households do not own assets in a retirement account compared to 37 percent of white households. According to a 2013 report by the National Institute for Retirement Security, four out of five Latino households headed by someone between the ages of 24-64 have less than $10,000 in retirement savings, while half of white households have more than $10,000.

Sources

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/DC</th>
<th>Hispanic Share of State Population</th>
<th>Unemployment Rate</th>
<th>Household Income (Median)</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*NA* data omitted due to low sample size.

* The poverty rate was derived using the American Community Survey, which gives a higher estimate (15.5 percent for the entire population in 2014) than the official poverty rate (14.8 percent), which uses the Current Population Survey.

Source: JEC Democratic staff tabulations of data from the 2014 American Community Survey (1-year estimates) using American FactFinder.

Notes: Hispanic may be of any race as data refer to anyone who identifies as “Hispanic” or “Latino,” alone or in combination with other races. White refers to non-Hispanic white, not in combination with any other race. Household income data are rounded to nearest hundred dollars.