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# Why Numbers Matter: The Latino Population and Its Latest Expansion in the U.S.

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## ABSTRACT

*In this paper I will address the distribution of the Latino Population in the U.S. I will show that it is the largest minority group, including the black population. I will show as well that the Latino population is widespread all over the U.S., even if the traditionally Hispanic states continue to have the heaviest Latino population: California, Texas, New York, Florida, and Illinois. The effect of the distribution of the population is the expansion of Spanish as a heritage language and its increasing interest in academic environments. In fact, Spanish is the most widely spoken language at home and it is the most studied foreign language in schools and universities.*

The Spanish language occupies a privileged position in the linguistic mosaic of the U.S. After English, Spanish is the most widely spoken language in the States even if it is spoken in familiar and informal environments. In fact, official documents are translated into Spanish and other widely spoken languages, such as Chinese, Tagalog or Vietnamese (Parodi 2006). Moreover, even if Spanish does not have the prestige of the English language, its presence has an impact in the U.S., mainly in the Southwest as we will see shortly.

In the last 40 years, the bilingual Spanish-English population has increased from 4.7% in the 1970s to 13.3% in 2006. The projection for the year 2010 is 15.5% and is estimated to reach 24.4% in the year 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau and Decennial Censuses Population). After Mexico, which in 2008 had 108 million people, the U.S. was the country with the most Spanish speakers in the world with its 45.5 Hispanics or Latinos, as can be seen in Table 1. As a side note, it is worth mentioning that the U.S. has more Spanish speakers than Spain or Colombia which had around 45 million Spanish speakers each in 2008.

1. GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF LATINOS IN THE U.S. Most Hispanics or Latinos that live in the U.S. are of Mexican origin, either because they were born in Mexico or because their ancestors came from Mexico. In 2008, among the 45.5 million people that identified themselves as Latinos in the U.S., the Mexican population composed 65% (more than 29 million), followed by Puerto Ricans, which were 9% of those 45.5 million (or slightly more than 4 million) and Cubans who were 3.46% of the 45.5 million, or a little bit more than 1.5 million, as can be seen in Table 1.

Total U.S. population +300 million = 100%			
Hispanic or Latino population: 45.5 million = 15%			
Mexican population +29 million = 10%			
Origin	Number	% (total pop.)	% (Hispanic pop.)
México	29,318,971	10.00	65.00
Puerto Rico*	4,127,728	1.37	9.00
Cuba	1,572,138	.52	3.46
Salvador	1,477,210	.49	3.25
Rep. Dominicana	1,249,471	.41	2.75
Guatemala	915,743	.30	2.01
Colombia	822,036	.27	1.80
Honduras	543,274	.18	1.20
Ecuador	541,051	.17	1.19
Perú	466,733	.15	1.02
España	454,299	.15	.99
Nicaragua	313,646	.10	.69
Argentina	196,139	.06	.43
Venezuela	188,138	.06	.41
Panamá	139,905	.04	.30
Costa Rica	116,376	.03	.25
Chile	114,932	.03	.25
Bolivia	87,950	.02	.19

TABLE 1. Hispanic or Latino population in the U.S. (2008)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. *American Community Survey: 2008*

In Table 1 the first row indicates the ethnic origin or the place which the Latino population came from. The second row shows the number of people that came from the country mentioned in row 1 (recently and not so recently). The third row shows the percentage that the ethnic group in the first row has with regards to the total population in the U.S. (slightly more than 300 million). The fourth row shows the percentage that the ethnic group in the first row occupies with regards to the Latino population of the U.S. (around 45.5 million).

Table 1 shows that the numeric difference between Mexican and other Latino ethnic groups is outstanding. While the 30 million plus Mexicans counted as the 10% of U.S. population and 65% of the Latino population in 2008, the almost 4 million Puerto Ricans—that were the second largest Latino population in the U.S.—counted as a modest 1.4% of the total population and 9% of the Latino population in the U.S. It is important to stress that the 4 million Puerto Ricans in the U.S. were half of all Puerto Ricans: 4 million in Puerto Rico, and 4 million on the Main Land. Instead, Mexicans in the U.S. counted as the 27% of the total population of Mexico that year. That is, 108 million. It is important to clarify that the numbers and projections of the Census are relative, since there is a huge unknown number of Latino non-documented immigrants. In 2008, for example, the Census projected around 12 million of undocumented immigrants, 9 million of which or 75% were Mexican. This would raise the total percent of Mexicans to 84% of the Latino population according to Passel and Cohn (2009).

The Latino population lives throughout the U.S., but tends to cluster in certain areas of the Nation more than other, according to its ethnic origin. Florida has mostly Cubans, New York has abundant Puerto Ricans and Dominican, Illinois and the Southwest (mainly California, Texas and Arizona) have numerous Mexicans. As can be seen in Table 2, in 2008 three of the five states with the greatest Latino population in the U.S., had an overwhelming Mexican majority. Among all Latinos, in California there were 11 million Mexicans (83%), in Texas there were 7 million Mexicans (85%) and in Illinois there were almost 2 million (78%).

State	Num. Hispanics	Place of origin	% Mexicans
California	13, 219, 000	<i>México</i> , Salvador, Guatemala, other	83
Texas	8, 591, 000	<i>México</i> , Salvador, other	85
Florida	3,751, 000	Cuba, Nicar., Hond., other	16
New York	3,147, 000	P. Rico, Dominican R., <i>México</i> , other	13
Illinois	1, 923, 000	<i>México</i> , P. Rico, Guatemala, other	78

TABLE 2. States with highest Latino population in the U.S. (2008)  
 Source: Pew Hispanic Center. “Demographic Profile of Hispanics: 2007”

The geographical areas in the U.S. that have attracted Latinos of the same ethnic group have been the same in the last 50 years. Three of the five states in Table 2 have the largest Mexican population: California, Texas and Illinois. In New York County the number of Mexican is not statistically significant, but it is the minority that has grown the

most in Manhattan. Regarding Florida, the majority of Latinos—mainly in Miami—are of Cuban origin (50%), followed by Nicaraguan and Honduran.

New Latino communities have been forming lately in Alaska, Delaware, Rhode Island, and other states that previously did not attract Latinos due to their weather and lack of a Hispanic population. It is surprising that in Kansas and Oklahoma more than 80% of the Latino population is Mexican and that there are Mexicans even in Hawaii. States such as Rhode Island that has only 6% or slightly more than seven thousand Mexicans (among 123 thousand Latinos) and Washington D.C. that has a small Latino population of 49 thousand are unusual in the U.S. Since the seventeenth century, the pattern of predominance of the Mexican population in the Southwest has been constant. The data in Table 3 show that this trend still holds at the present times.

State	# of Hispanics	% Mexicans	# of Mexicans	Range
California	13,219,000	83	10,971,770	1
Texas	8,591,000	85	7,302,350	2
Arizona	1,893,000	89	1,684,770	3
Illinois	1,923,000	78	1,499,940	4
Colorado	968,000	71	687,280	5
Florida	3,751,000	16	600,160	6
Nevada	643,000	78	501,540	7
Washington	611,000	80	488,800	8
Georgia	734,000	64	469,760	9
Nuevo México	873,000	52	453,960	10
Nueva York	3,147,000	13	409,110	11
Carolina del Norte	636,000	65	407,040	12
Oregón	392,000	83	325,360	13
Michigan	395,000	72	284,400	14
Utah	307,000	75	230,025	15
Indiana	302,000	75	226,500	16
Oklahoma	262,000	83	217,460	17
Kansas	247,000	84	207,480	18
Nueva Jersey	1,379,000	14	193,060	19
Wisconsin	268,000	72	192,960	20
Nebraska	184,000	82	150,880	21
Minnesota	208,000	72	149,760	22
Tennessee	212,000	66	139,950	23
Ohio	283,000	48	135,840	24
Idaho	148,000	89	131,720	25

State	# of Hispanics	% Mexicans	# of Mexicans	Range
Virginia	489,000	25	122,250	26
Missouri	170,000	69	117,300	27
Arkansas	146,000	76	110,960	28
Carolina del Sur	168,000	63	105,840	29
Pennsylvania	565,000	18	101,700	30
Iowa	116,000	82	92,800	31
Louisiana	135,000	67	90,450	32
Alabama	122,000	70	85,400	33
Maryland	347,000	22	76,340	34
Kentucky	87,000	61	53,070	35
Connecticut	411,000	10	41,100	36
Massachusetts	510,000	8	40,800	37
Mississippi	52,000	71	37,920	38
Hawaii	102,000	30	30,600	39
Wyoming	37,000	73	27,010	40
Delaware	51,000	47	23,970	41
Alaska	39,000	59	23,010	42
Rhode Island	123,000	6	7,380	43
D. C.	49,000	12	5,880	44
New Hampshire	33,000	17	5,610	45
Montana	94,000	n/a	--	
South Dakota	23,000	n/a	--	
North Dakota	9,000	n/a	--	
West Virginia	18,000	n/a	--	
Maine	14,000	n/a	--	
Vermont	6,000	n/a	--	

TABLE 3. Ranking of Latinos and percentage of Mexicans in the U.S., 2007  
Source: Pew Hispanic Center. "Demographic Profile of Hispanics: 2007."

In 2007 21 million or 75% of the Mexican population in the U.S. were concentrated in the first five states included in Table 3: California, Texas, Arizona, Illinois and Colorado.

As far as cities are concerned, most Mexicans are in Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, San Antonio and Phoenix and they speak Chicano Spanish (Parodi 2011). This variant of Spanish in the U.S., which is derived from rural Mexican Spanish, is widely spoken in the Nation, excluding Florida, where Cuban Spanish prevails, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and New York where Nuyoricano Spanish dominates and Washington DC and Maryland, where Central American Spanish, mainly Salvadoran Spanish, is widely spoken (Moreno Fernández, 2009).

The effect of the distribution of the Latino population and its constant presence in the U.S. since the seventeenth century to this day and age is the growth of Spanish as a heritage language and Latino culture, and its increasing interest as a matter of study in academic environments. In fact Spanish, mainly Chicano Spanish—a linguistic variant derived from Mexican Spanish—is the most widely heritage language spoken in the U.S. and it is the most studied foreign language in schools and universities in the Nation, as will be shown in this volume. Moreover, there are areas in the Southwest, Florida, Illinois and New York where Spanish and English go hand in hand in a widespread bilingualism. This is not surprising due to the numbers of Latinos in the U.S. In fact, Spanish is one of the native languages of the U.S. That is why studying Spanish in the U.S. is more than learning a second language. It is studying an important part of the linguistic and cultural background of the Nation.

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