

The Growth and Changing Spatial Distribution of America's Hispanic Children

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Abstract: This paper documents the changing racial and ethnic mix of America's children. Specifically, we focus on the unusually rapid growth and changing spatial distribution of America's Hispanic children. Hispanics currently represent 14 percent of the total U.S. population. Yet, between 2000 and 2007 Hispanics accounted for more than one-half of all U.S. population growth. Natural increase -- primarily high fertility rates -- played an unusually large demographic role in this regard. Our results reveal that Hispanic children accounted for roughly 25 percent of all U.S. children aged 0-4. This contrasts with much lower percentages among other age groups of children. Clearly, recent high rates of fertility among the Hispanic population are transforming the racial and ethnic mix of America's children. This pattern is diffusing spatially. Additional analyses suggest that the proportion of all children that are of Hispanic is growing rapidly both in the urban core and in rural areas.

Recent research documents the substantial increase in the size of the Hispanic population in the U.S. since 2000. Hispanics currently represent only 14 percent of the U.S. population. Yet, between 2000 and 2007 they accounted for more than half of the entire U.S. population gain. Though immigration continues to contribute to Hispanic population increase, most of the Hispanic population gain is now accounted for by natural increase (Johnson and Lichter 2008). Between 2000 and 2007, well over half of all Hispanic population growth came from natural increase. Recent research also documents the rising importance of internal migration in the spatial redistribution of the Hispanic population. Rapid Hispanic natural increase is fueled primarily by the significant number of Hispanic births. This has important implications for the child population in the U.S. Our preliminary analysis suggests that the proportion of all children that are of Hispanic

origin is growing rapidly. This poster will document the magnitude of the growth of the Hispanic child population and examine the spatial distribution of Hispanic children in the U.S.

Public policy discourse centered on rapid immigration and new immigrant destinations has sometimes distracted us from fully recognizing the growing demographic impact of Hispanic natural increase. The Hispanic population is dispersing rapidly from traditional gateway cities in the Southwest into suburban areas of large metro areas, smaller metro places, nonmetro communities, and rural areas. To be sure, the new growth of Hispanics—both native-born and immigrants—has reshaped the social and cultural fabric of many communities over the past decade (Jensen 2006; Hirschman and Massey 2008). Here we provide the first systematic and up-to-date examination of the implications of population-growth-inducing effects attributable to Hispanic natural increase for the size, composition and spatial distribution of the child population of the U.S.

Our prior research clearly reveals that Hispanic natural increase is an important but often ignored demographic component of population growth in both urban and rural areas of the U.S. (Johnson and Lichter 2008). The demographic implications for the composition of the child population also are significant. Well over one-half of Hispanic population growth over the 2000-2005 period was due to natural increase. This figure compared with about one-third of Hispanic growth for the 1990s. Clearly, Hispanic population growth is self-sustaining, even if immigration were to be seriously curtailed through new restrictive legislation. The demographic implications of this phenomenon are significant. In particular, a large secondary effect associated with this natural increase

will be an increase in the proportion of all children that are Hispanic. This is reflected in Figure 1 which reveals that the proportion of all children who are Hispanic is growing rapidly even when five year age cohorts are compared cross-sectionally.

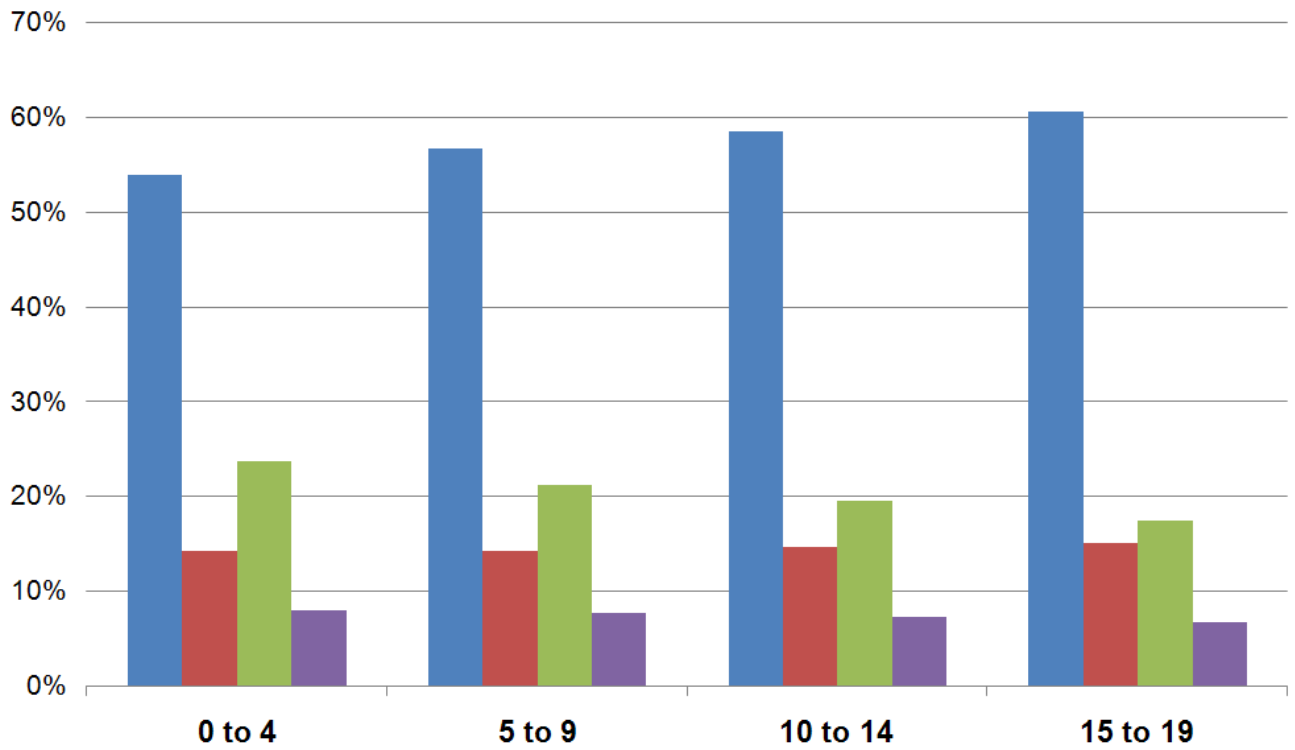
Hispanics are rapidly dispersing geographically and natural increase is fueling the demographic and economic transformation of new destination communities. Results from our previous research reveal that about one-half of the rural Hispanic population now resides outside of traditional Hispanic settlements in the rural Southwest. This percentage is substantially higher than the percentage observed among metro counties, where the overwhelming share of Hispanic growth is occurring in traditional gateway states and cities. Moreover, a substantial and growing number of nonmetro counties experienced non-Hispanic white population declines, especially in the Great Plains, but nevertheless experienced Hispanic population gains. Hispanics clearly are a source of new demographic vigor, but current patterns may also reinforce the native-white exodus and long-term population decline (cf., Griffith 2005; Grey and Woodrick 2005). As we have found over 200 nonmetro counties—double the number observed for the 1990s (Kandel and Cromartie 2004)—would have experienced population decline during 2000-2005 without the substantial influx of new Hispanics, along with their high fertility and low mortality rates. We suspect that the proportion of counties that would have experienced losses in their child population without Hispanic gains is even greater than that in the overall population. Our purpose in this research is to document the incidence and spatial distribution of such Hispanic child population gains.

To be sure, Hispanics may be revitalizing previously-declining and economically-stagnant small towns, but have also brought serious and unprecedented challenges: an

influx of Hispanic children has particularly significant implication since they have an immediate impact on the delivery of social services such as education and health care. The political and administrative challenges (e.g., welfare or food stamps) are further complicated by the fact that Hispanic children are often U.S. citizens—most have been born in America—while their parents are foreign-born and often undocumented (Leach and Bean 2008). Natural increase and the growth of a new second generation in rural America reinforce the need to address questions about immigrant incorporation, education and language, and intergenerational economic mobility.

Finally, our results will paint a compelling new demographic portrait of both urban and rural America, one showing which areas are being transformed demographically by new Hispanic arrivals. The proposed analysis also provides a window to America's future. Recent trends—high rates of in-migration and natural increase of Hispanics—portend continuing population growth in selected areas that will shape the social fabric of many communities for decades to come. The ascendancy of Hispanic natural increase and the growth in the number of Hispanic children is unlikely to stall anytime soon. Interestingly enough, population scholars have lamented for decades the decline of small towns, a result of persistent rural out-migration and economic stagnation in much of nonmetro America (see Johnson and Fuguitt 2000). Our proposed work addresses interesting and controversial questions arising from minority child population growth. And, in the case of children, they may have more to do with Hispanic natural increase and fertility than with immigration.

Share of Children by Race/Hispanic Origin and Age, 2007



Source: U.S. Census Population Estimates (2008)
Note: Children under 20 years of age

■ White ■ Black ■ Hispanic ■ Other