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# LATINO POLICY & ISSUES BRIEF

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## CALIFORNIA'S GROWING LATINO POPULATION: CENSUS 2000 DISMANTLES STEREOTYPES

by

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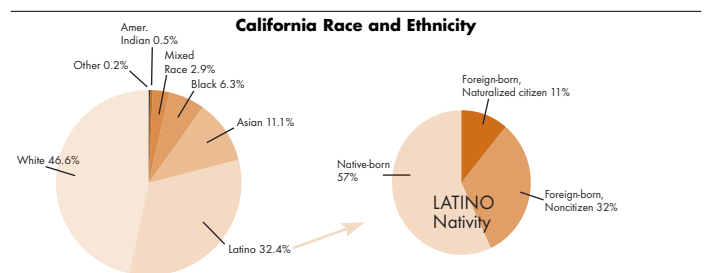
Latinos constitute a critical human resource for California. Indeed, the state's economic health is intimately tied to the productivity of this population of almost eleven million. Yet, Latino characteristics and contributions to the state remain misunderstood and Latinos' access to educational opportunity remains low.

Utilizing recently released 2000 census data, this brief elucidates California demographics, emphasizing Latino residents' geographic mobility, racial identity, and language use. It also addresses the educational standing of the Latino population and gives special attention to the Los Angeles county hub because of its concentration of Latinos and its centrality to the state economy.

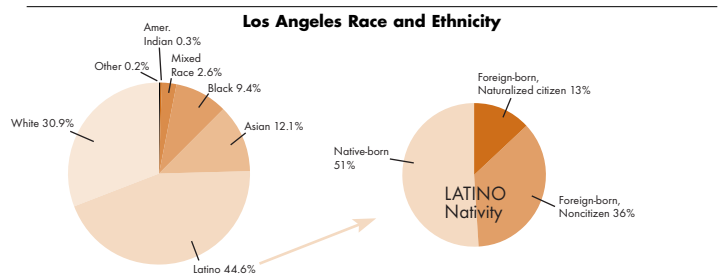
The 2000 census dramatically demonstrates that, contrary to stereotype, Latinos are mostly native-born or naturalized citizens, are overwhelmingly long-term residents who rarely move outside their county or the state, and are almost entirely English proficient and bilingual. Yet, Latinos continue to have severely limited access to educational opportunities.

### LATINOS NOT A MINORITY

Almost one-third of Californians and 45% of Los Angeles county residents are Latino or Hispanic (see figs. 1 and 2).<sup>1</sup> Statewide, non-Latino whites still constitute the plurality, but Latinos are numerically dominant in Los Angeles by a wide margin (45% Latino vs. 31% non-Latino white). The non-Latino Asian and African American populations are substantial, but even combined they do not approach Latino representation.



**Fig. 1. Almost one third of Californians are Latino. Most California Latinos are native born.** (Source: Census 2000 Summary File 3, Table P7 and Table PCT62H)



**Fig. 2. Almost half of Angelinos are Latinos. More than half of Los Angeles Latinos are native born.** (Source: Census 2000 Summary File 3, Table P7 and Table PCT62H)

### FEW LATINOS ARE RECENT IMMIGRANTS

Latinos are primarily U.S. citizens. Just over half are native-born (57% statewide, 51% in Los Angeles). Among the foreign-born, about one-quarter are naturalized citizens (see figs. 1 and 2). Even noncitizens are mainly long-term residents. Only 7% of Latinos statewide and 6% in Los Angeles are newcomers, having

arrived in the past five years (see fig. 3). Thus, the Latino population is firmly rooted in the United States.

**LATINOS GEOGRAPHICALLY STABLE**

Furthermore, California Latinos are geographically quite stable, and mobility among those in Los Angeles is markedly low. The preponderance remained in the same county from 1995 to 2000 (83% statewide, 91% in Los Angeles) and the vast majority stayed in California (see fig. 3). Given the permanence of the population, state and local policies aimed at Latinos will have long-lasting effects.

**LATINOS HAVE A RACIAL IDENTITY**

Latinos are defined as an ethnic rather than a racial group. Contrary to academic definitions, however, most Latinos consider themselves a distinct race. Faced with the census's standard race categories, the majority of Latinos identify as "some other race" (see fig. 4). (In fact, 99% of those electing "other" race are Latino.)

In the absence of a "Latino" racial category, many Latinos classify themselves as "white" (in accordance with academic categories): Latinos account for twenty-two percent of whites statewide (36% of Los Angeles whites). A substantial share also self identifies in two or more race categories—Latinos constitute just under half of the relatively small group of mixed-race individuals. Few Latinos identify with each of the other race groups, but they do constitute modest shares among Blacks and Asians (3% and 1%, respectively, both statewide and in Los Angeles) and a substantial proportion of the small American Indian population (42% California, 62% Los Angeles).

Given the socially constructed nature of race, it is telling that the majority of Latinos view themselves in racial terms (especially since this lay definition of Latinos as a race is probably shared by non-Latinos).

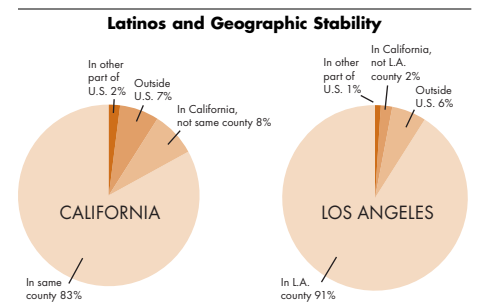
Latinos are indeed a sociologically important subpopulation. However, policy discussions must not lose sight of Latinos' overlap with other groups. The standing of mixed-race, American Indian, and white Californians is shaped by Latinos, who make up a significant proportion of these groups.

**LATINOS ENGLISH PROFICIENT AND BILINGUAL**

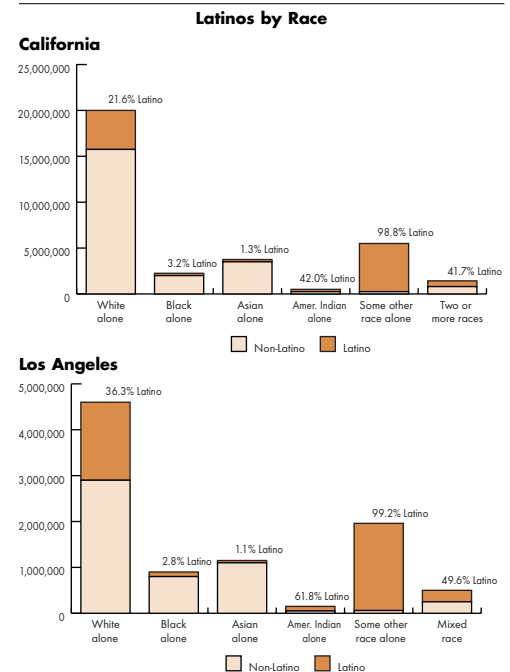
English proficiency is quite high among Latino youth (see fig. 5). Only 2% of those ages 5 to 17 are Spanish monolingual. Limited English proficiency is also relatively rare among youth, at 9%. A small proportion speaks English only (27% California, 18% in Los Angeles), but Latino youth are overwhelmingly bilingual (71% statewide, 80% in Los Angeles). Bilingualism is also the norm among adults, at 67% statewide and 71% in Los Angeles. Furthermore, English monolinguals outnumber Spanish-only speakers (though by a smaller margin than among youth). (Data available on request.) California would benefit by exploiting this widespread bilingualism, rather than treating it as a deficit.

**LATINOS UNDEREDUCATED**

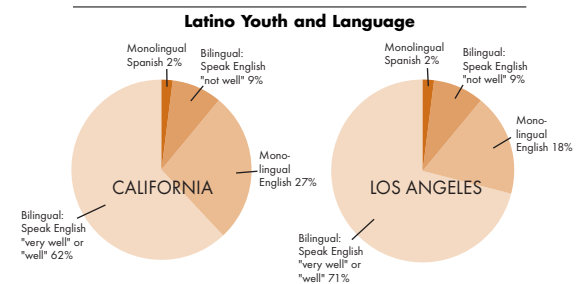
The educational standing of the Latino adult population is one of the most disquieting facts to emerge from the 2000 Census (see fig. 6). Over half of California's Latino adults lack high school diplomas, versus 10% of non-Latino whites and 20% of Blacks and Asians. Only 28% of Latinos attended college, and this includes a scant 8% who obtained a bachelor's or higher. By contrast, 69% of non-Latino whites, 56% of African Americans, and 66% of Asians/Pacific Islanders are college-educated, with sizeable shares of non-Latino whites and Asians having bachelor's or higher



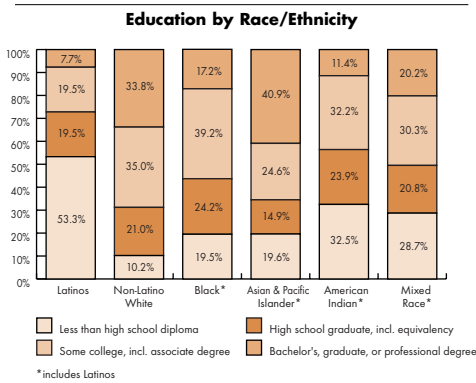
**Fig. 3. Over four-fifths of Latinos in California, ages 5 and older, stayed in the same county for at least five years (from 1995 to 2000).** (Source: Census 2000, Summary File 3, Table PCT64H)



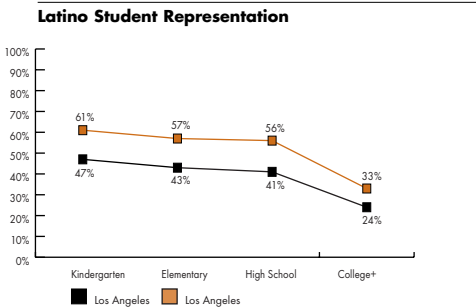
**Fig. 4. Latinos make up a significant proportion of several racial categories.** (Source: Census 2000 Summary File 3, Table P7)



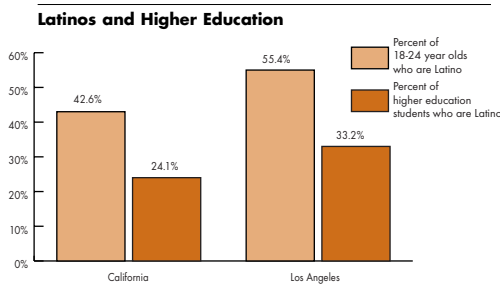
**Fig. 5. Almost 90% of California Latino youth, ages 5 to 17, speak English well. Over 75% also speak Spanish.** (Source: Census 2000 Summary File 3, Table PCT62H)



**Fig. 6. California Latinos, ages 25 and over, have lower educational attainment than any other group in the state.** (Source: Census 2000 Summary File 3, Tables P148B to P148I)



**Fig. 7. Latinos make up a high proportion of California's elementary and high school students but a low proportion of its college students.** (Source: Census 2000 Summary File 3, Tables P36 and P147H)



**Fig. 8. Latinos make up a high proportion of the California college-age population, but a low proportion of college students.** (Source: Census 2000 Summary File 3, Tables P8, P36, P145H, and P147H)

degrees (34% and 41%, respectively; 17% of Blacks). (Educational attainment patterns in Los Angeles are broadly similar to those for the state, but a larger share of Latinos is poorly educated [data available on request].) Given that Latinos compose a substantial and growing proportion of the workforce, these educational deficits are cause for concern. Promotion of adult education programs would be in California's best interest.

Current school enrollment figures illustrate the scale and impact of Latino educational disadvantage, and thus provide a window on the future (Census 2000 Summary File 3, Tables P36 and P147H). Latinos constitute more than 40% of California's kindergarten through twelfth grade pupils and well above 50% of Los Angeles's pupils, with larger shares of Latinos among younger students. For example, Latinos make up 47% of kindergarteners in California and 61% of them in Los Angeles. In the coming years, then, Latinos will constitute most of the state's workers.

Educational demographics also demonstrate a severe problem in higher education. There is a precipitous drop-off in the Latino share among college students (see fig. 8). Latinos constitute 43% of California's 18 to 24 year olds (55% in Los Angeles), but only 24% of college students (33% in Los Angeles). Latinos' disadvantage in formal schooling must be addressed, with assiduous attention to high school retention, educational outreach, and college admissions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Latinos are central to California's economic, political, and cultural life. Nevertheless, this large and growing share of the labor force is grossly undereducated. The state should address this potential time bomb by ameliorating educational disparities in the next generation. Such state policies would not be altruistic. Rather, they are crucial to the future viability of the California economy.

Therefore, to ensure the state's economic competitiveness, we recommend that the state initiate educational policies that:

- Increase adult education opportunities for working-age Latinos
- Designate bilingualism an educational asset (e.g., in admissions criteria, as with advanced placement credits)
- Improve diversity among faculty
- Strengthen retention and enrollment programs in high schools and colleges
- Preserve outreach and recruitment for higher education

NOTE

1. Figs. 1 and 2 separate Latinos from the official racial categories. Fig. 4 shows the Latino presence within these racial categories. Fig. 6 uses a mixed approach.

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U.S. Bureau of the Census. 2000. *Census 2000 Summary File 3*. Washington, D.C.: Bureau.

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Recently released data reveals Latinos are mostly native born or naturalized citizens, are primarily long-term California residents, and are almost entirely English proficient and bilingual. Yet this growing labor force remains underserved by public education.

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