

PUBLIC POLICY IMPACTS OF RURAL HISPANIC POPULATION GROWTH

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Overview:

- Hispanics are a relatively new and widely felt presence throughout many rural regions of the U.S., particularly in places where this group has not settled in large numbers in the past.
- The *rates* of increase in nonmetropolitan counties exceeded that in metropolitan counties as well as the rates of increase of all other racial/ethnic groups in both types of counties.

About the Data:

- The data presented in this Policy Brief are from William A. Kandel and Emilio A. Parrado, “Rural Hispanic Population Growth: Public Policy Impacts in Nonmetro Counties,” in *Population Change and Rural Society*. Edited by William A. Kandel and David L. Brown. 2006. Springer.
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Public Policy Impacts of Rural Hispanic Population Growth

Half of all nonmetro Hispanics live outside the rural Southwest, comprised of Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas. This issue brief discusses how Hispanic population growth has altered the demographic profiles and indicators of socioeconomic well-being for many nonmetro counties.

Self-selection of New Rural Hispanics

If the demographic profile of the recent rural Hispanic population resembled that of non-Hispanic residents, changes in social services would reflect only the increase demanded from population growth. Substantially different demographic characteristics, however, mean that rapid Hispanic growth can alter the profile of counties to which they move, which will trigger new public policy needs. New migrants change the demographic profile of new destination counties because the jobs that pull migrants to new places have narrow skill requirements. Further, the challenge of international migration itself, in combination with the job-types, tend to self-select labor migrants for initiative and youth. New migrants tend to be young males from rural economically depressed Latin American communities who are neither middle class nor extremely poor. On average, they have fewer than ten years of formal education, speak little English, and begin migrating without documentation. Like all young adults, they are in the early

stages of family formation. If their families do not eventually join them, they may marry and have children in this country. This demographic profile of recent Hispanic residents, distinct from that of native residents, influences public policy challenges and attendant economic and social impacts in new rural destinations.

A Typology of Nonmetro Hispanic Population Change

Using only three factors, (a) the Hispanic proportion of 1990 county population, (b) its change during the 1990s, and (c) total county population change during the 1990s illustrates that there are four types of nonmetro counties: those 1) with *rapid*

Hispanic population growth in new regions of the country; 2) with more *established Hispanic* population; 3) whose populations grew in the 1990s without significant Hispanic influence or *rapid growth non-Hispanic* counties, and 4) that had *slow growth or population decline*. To avoid misleading values from minor absolute changes in numbers, counties whose total populations in 2000 were less than 5,000 were excluded. Established Hispanic counties, not surprisingly, predominate in traditional rural Hispanic settlement areas of the Southwest. Rapid Hispanic Growth counties tend to be concentrated in the Midwest and Southeast, and Slow Growth and Loss counties dominate the Southern, Central and Northern Great Plains.

Hispanic and Total Nonmetro County Population Figures by County Type

County Type	Number of counties	Total Population		Hispanic Population	
		In 2000	Percent change, 1990-2000	In 2000	Percent change, 1990-2000
Established Hispanic	362	20,351	12%	3,474	42%
Rapid Hispanic Growth	468	22,792	11%	707	308%
Rapid Growth Non-Hispanic	756	20,119	10%	192	105%
Slow Growth or Loss	415	15,305	-2%	132	75%

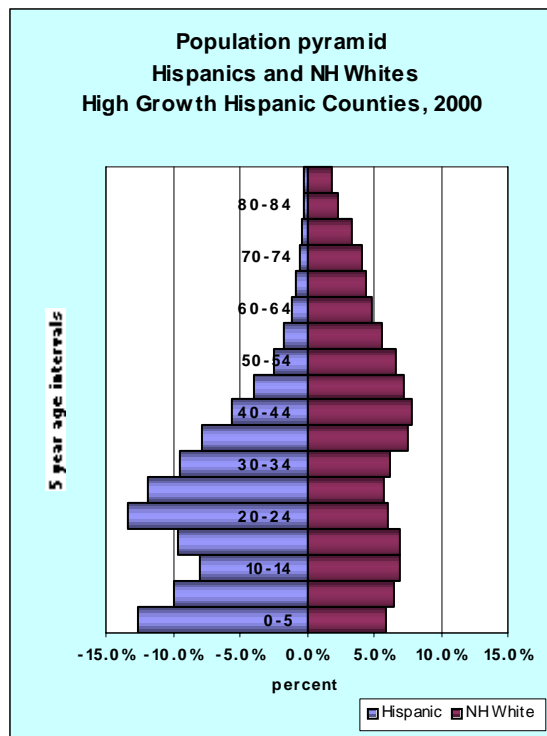
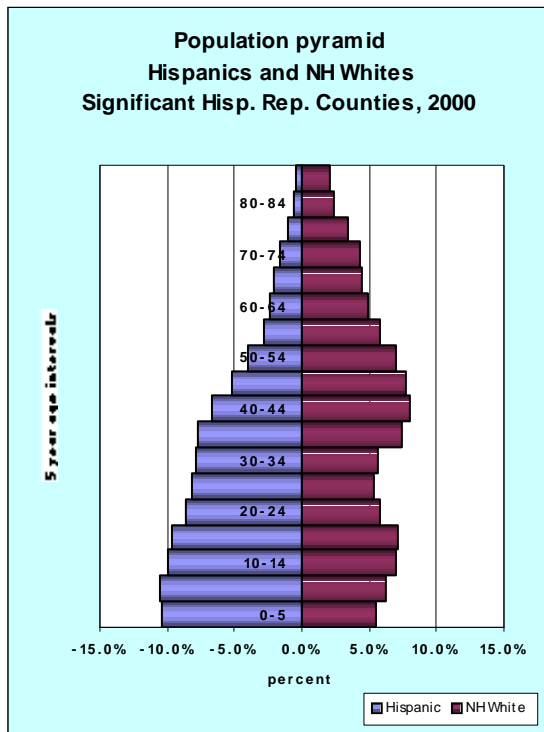
Source: computed by authors from Census 1990 and 2000 data, SF1.

The first three county types show similar total population figures and growth rates over the decade but very different Hispanic population growth rates. Even in Slow Growth and Loss counties, Hispanics grew in proportion and absolute numbers, ameliorating and often reversing total population loss. The following analysis demonstrates how this relatively modest three percent population composition can significantly influence county-level statistics and indicators.

Hispanic Age Distribution

Population pyramids above illustrate the age distribution for Hispanics (Blue) and non-Hispanic Whites (Red) with each horizontal bar representing the proportion of the total population within a five-year age group. While the age structure of non-Hispanics Whites is similar across county types, it is heavily tilted toward prime working ages and young children for Hispanics in Rapid Hispanic Growth counties. This reflects a younger working age population and slightly higher fertility rates. Similarly, Rapid Hispanic Growth counties have higher male-to-female ratios than other county types.

Population Pyramids for Established and High Growth Hispanic Counties, 2000.



Source: Figures computed by authors from Census 2000 data, SF1 file.

Public Policy Challenges

Public Health

What do shifts in age composition imply for public policy? Rapid population change is likely to affect health policy demands, which impact state and local budgets. Hospitals in rural areas often struggle to provide a relatively complete range of health services for their dispersed populations. Hence, if significant numbers of relatively younger Hispanics move to a county with an aging population – a typical scenario for nonmetro counties – they may alter the demand for, and provision of, specific health services.

For instance, lower median ages for all Hispanic populations means that Hispanic women, on average, have far more childbearing years ahead of them than non-Hispanic White women. Therefore, while fertility rates declined throughout the nation between 1990 and 2000, those in Rapid

Hispanic Growth counties declined the least compared to all other nonmetro county types. This clearly demonstrates that relatively small population subgroups with distinct population characteristics can disproportionately impact the demographic profiles of entire counties.

Similar trends also influence death rates by introducing greater numbers of relatively younger persons with lower mortality risks into nonmetro counties. Crude death rates in the U.S. have been rising for decades due to population aging, and these rates increased during 1989-99 for Established Hispanic, Rapid growth Non-Hispanic, and Slow Growth or Loss Counties. However, the reverse is true for Rapid Hispanic growth counties, which experienced declines in crude death rates over the past decade, especially deaths from heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic diseases. In other words, one public health policy impact from Hispanic population

growth is that medical centers with stable caseloads of patients with chronic disease may need to reallocate resources to meet

greater demand for obstetrics and pediatric services.

Percent change in demographic and social welfare indicators, 1990-2000

	Established Hispanic	Rapid Hispanic growth	Rapid growth Non-Hispanic	Slow Growth or Loss
General fertility rate	-6.3%	-3.8%	-6.6%	-8.9%
Crude death rate	1.2%	-1.0%	0.4%	5.2%
Number of crowded rental units	26.0%	38.9%	6.7%	-15.6%
Enrollment rate, Grades K-8, NH White	-2%	9%	10%	-8%
Enrollment rate, Grades K-8, Hispanic	96%	525%	246%	122%

Source: Figures computed from Area Resource Files using three-year averages, 1988-90 and 1998-2000; Census 1990 and 2000 data, SF1, SF3 and SF4 files.

Housing

New rural Hispanic residents working in predominantly low-wage and/or unstable employment are less likely to possess the financial capital necessary for homeownership and more likely to affect the rental housing market. Ethnographic accounts of migrants living in new rural destinations routinely describe substandard and exploitative living conditions characterized by overcrowding, poor housing quality, and excessive rents. While shared housing and overcrowding can also

assist migrants to maximize savings and financial remittances to family members in countries of origin, it also removes some of the potential positive economic impacts that migrants could offer in new communities.

Rapid Hispanic Growth counties experienced the largest percentage growth in the absolute number of crowded rental units. These aggregate measures reflect the influence of a relatively small portion of the total population and accordingly mask differences by race and ethnicity.

Economic indicators by county type, 1990-2000

Indicator		Established Hispanic	Rapid Hispanic growth	Rapid Growth Non-Hispanic	Slow Growth or Loss
Unemployment rate, 2000	NH White	4.9%	4.5%	5.3%	5.5%
	Hispanic	9.7%	8.6%	8.8%	9.7%
Poverty Rate, 2000	NH White	10.5%	10.4%	11.5%	11.9%
	Hispanic	23.5%	25.1%	21.2%	21.0%
Per-capita income gap, Hispanics and NH Whites	1990	\$5,076	\$4,052	\$3,445	\$4,348
	2000	\$8,088	\$8,576	\$6,932	\$7,302

Source: computed by authors from Census 1990 and 2000 data, SF3 and SF4 files.

Specifically, when Hispanics and non-Hispanic Whites are compared, there are very different rates of overcrowding, with the highest levels for Hispanics occurring in Rapid Hispanic Growth counties.

Public Education

School enrollment rates provide some of the most pronounced evidence of social change associated with changing rural Hispanic demography. Lower median ages and relatively higher fertility rates of Hispanic in-migrants have yielded a Hispanic school-age population growing far more rapidly than the non-Hispanic White school-age population, a contrast with considerable implications for rural school districts in new destination places. In Rapid Hispanic Growth counties, enrollment rates for Hispanic children increased by over 500 percent for grades K-8. While not shown, similar enrollment changes occurred in high school. Although Hispanics are still, on average, a relatively small proportion of the total school-age population in nonmetro counties, enrollment growth foreshadows considerable challenges facing rural schools that must devote substantial resources to address this population's distinct needs, including additional classroom space, English as a Second Language (ESL)

Hispanic Adaptation and Incorporation

[Figure 3 about here: Percent Foreign born by county type]

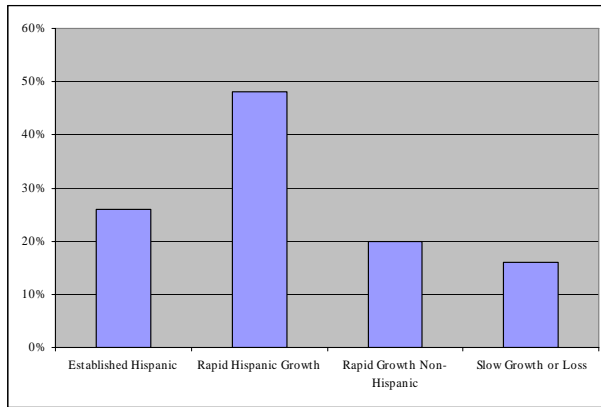
Foreign-born status is an important socioeconomic indicator because it provides some measure of probable English language facility, legal residence, and years of U.S. experience. Almost half of all Hispanics living in Rapid Hispanic Growth counties were born outside of the United States., roughly double the rate of Hispanics in Established Hispanic counties. However, foreign birth does not necessarily imply lack

classes, and orientation seminars and translation services for their parents. Schools facing state and national mandates, including the "No Child Left Behind" policy, are at a distinct disadvantage for achieving such standards during periods of limited or declining public education budgets.

Economic Well-Being

Despite lower unemployment in Rapid Hispanic Growth counties, average Hispanic poverty is the highest and non-Hispanic White poverty the lowest of in these counties. Moreover, the income gap between Hispanics and Non-Hispanic Whites was also highest relative to other county types in 2000, a substantial change from 1990. Thus, while employment opportunities appear greater in new destinations, apparently low Hispanic incomes have done little to alleviate their relative disadvantage. Their economic fortunes and those of the non-Hispanic White population appear to be diverging. This trend stems in part from the concentration of Hispanics in less-skilled and lower-paid jobs. From a policy perspective, these results suggest that social services for the poor may require expansion and a greater orientation toward Hispanics. of U.S. experience. Sizable proportions of Hispanic newcomers to nonmetro counties possess substantial U.S. experience and have relocated to rural destinations for employment and quality of life reasons.

Percent foreign-born by county type, 2000



Source: computed by authors from Census 1990 and 2000 data, SF3 and SF4 files

Implications and Conclusions

Hispanic population growth is transforming rural places, altering the demographic, economic, and social profiles as well as the stereotypical image of small town America. On average, Hispanics in new nonmetro destinations possess different socio-demographic characteristics than Hispanics in other nonmetro county types. In Rapid Hispanic Growth counties, they are younger and more economically disadvantaged despite lower unemployment rates. Hispanic age composition is a critical factor underlying social service needs and

local public policy implications. Younger Hispanic populations alter the per-capita calculus for health care delivery, place substantial demands on local housing markets, and raise significant needs and opportunities for public education. Despite small absolute numbers, high rates of Hispanic population growth have altered demographic profiles of counties throughout rural and small town America, implying future shifts in public service spending and provision.

Nevertheless, it is important to remember that rural Hispanic population growth is often a response to labor demand in industries that either cannot or do not pay wages that attract native workers. Other contributions of migrant workers typically include providing a more youthful population, taxes and Social Security withholdings, and local economic multiplier effects. In light of the economic forces that generate Hispanic population growth in new rural destinations, measures of fiscal impacts, state and federal support, and the economic contribution of newcomers would be fruitful areas of research.