

# LIMEN

Journal of the International Network for Immigration Research

7–8 (2023/1–2)



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MIGRATION  
RESEARCH  
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for Immigration Research  
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Limen is a semiannual International Journal of the International Network for Immigration Research (INIR) published by the Hungarian Migration Research Institute. Articles published in the journal reflect the views of their authors and do not represent the official positions of INIR or the Migration Research Institute.



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## **Frontispiece:**

Warning sign near the US-Mexico border, Arizona. Photo: shutterstock.com

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## Lectori Salutem!

When we launched Limen as the journal of the Migration Research Institute (MRI) in 2020, our main goal was to increase the number of our English-language publications to support the internationalization of the institute. In the past four years, we met and collaborated with numerous leading scholars of immigration studies and its related disciplines. Their contributions not only increased the relevance and academic merit of Limen, but also helped us to build a network which can give a new impetus to our activities.

In November 2023, MRI and four other research centers established the International Network for Immigration Research (INIR). The members of INIR consider immigration a topic that should be assessed with a multifaceted approach that takes into account both the benefits and the challenges. The members of the network share the principle that host countries are sovereign nation states with the right to pursue and enforce their chosen immigration policies that reflect the perspectives of their societies. Instead of merely making normative declarations based on an ideologically driven approach dominated by a strong humanitarian agenda, member organizations address the political, social, economic, and security considerations of immigration in order to develop realistic, long-lasting and responsible policy on this crucial issue.

To further their aims, the members of INIR decided to form an international advisory board for Limen that will serve as a publishing platform for multidisciplinary research and scholarship on migration and its related phenomena. In this double issue, the experts of INIR are elaborating on topics that were raised at the first joint workshop held by the network in Budapest in 2023. The timely issues covered include a rethinking of the international asylum system, the instrumentalization of migration, the shifts in the political preferences of the Hispanic population of the United States, and the challenges posed by immigration and integration in France.

Budapest, 28. 06. 2024

**Viktor MARSAI** PhD  
Executive Director  
Migration Research Institute

# America's Enormous Hispanic Population Is Shifting to the Right Politically with Vast Consequences for the United States

Jim Robb

## Abstract

In the United States, the political balance has been challenged by the millions of new immigrants from Spanish-speaking nations. Now approaching 20% of the U.S. population, Hispanics, as these persons and their descendants are called, are becoming a larger portion of U.S. voters. Like most immigrant groups, Hispanics began as mostly supporters of the Democratic Party. However, as Hispanics assimilate into the economic, cultural, and political life of the country, more and more are voting Republican. This article explains what is behind this political shift. It also gives a short history of Hispanics in the U.S. and looks at possible futures.

**Keywords:** United States, Hispanics, demography, voter behavior, politics

## Introduction

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Many nations have complicated domestic politics due to their heterogeneous populations. Notable examples include South Africa, with its large white and mixed-race minorities and sometimes tense relations between its various tribal groups, and Brazil, with 88 million Whites, 92 million mixed-race individuals, and 21 million Blacks, not including Indians. Nothing political can be attempted in these nations without giving thought to how various ethnic groups will receive it.

The United States's ethnic mix is also complex and changing fast. As of the 2020 decennial census, 57.8% of the population was non-Hispanic White. A further 12.1% was Black, and 6.1% was Asian. By far the largest minority group in the U.S. is now its gigantic Hispanic population, at 18.7% of the total.<sup>1</sup>

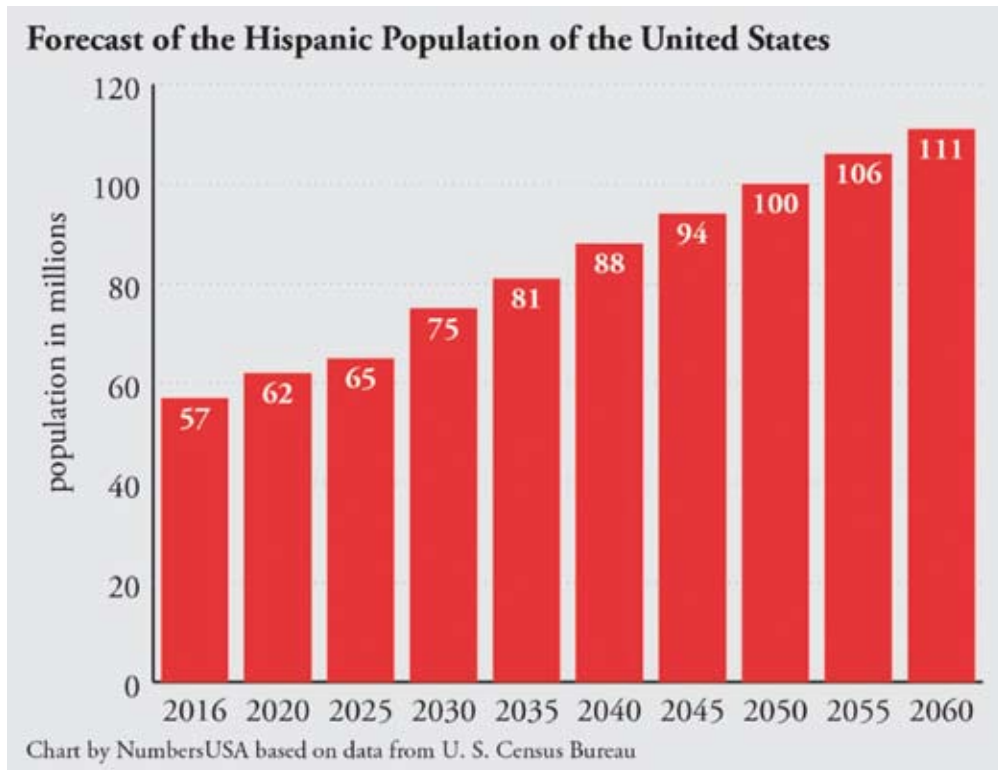
This translates to 62.5 million residents out of 329.5 million of the 2020 population total. This number is similar to the entire population of the United Kingdom or of France. Moreover, Hispanic numbers are expanding very rapidly. The 62.5 million is up from 35.7 million who lived here in the year 2000. That's 74% growth in just

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<sup>1</sup> UNITED STATES CENSUS BUREAU 2021a.

20 years. Hispanics are now closing in on being one-fifth of the U.S. population. The speed of this increase almost beggars belief, especially when you consider there were relatively few Hispanics in this country 50 years ago—only nine million!

Yet even these numbers seem modest compared to the projected size of the Hispanic population by the year 2060. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, unless government immigration policy changes, the Hispanic population will nearly double *again* by 2060, to about 111 million! That’s more than the entire U.S. population during the First World War!



Of today’s 62 million Hispanics in America as of 2020, two-thirds were born here. Plus, almost eight million foreign-born Hispanic adults have been naturalized as citizens and are now eligible to vote.<sup>2</sup> In the 2020 presidential election, 16.6 million

<sup>2</sup> Number of 18+ Hispanics as of June, 2022, 43,824,210. Number of U.S.-born 18+ Hispanics, 23,050,545. Number of foreign born 18+ Hispanics 20,773,665. Number of foreign-born 18+ Hispanic naturalized citizens, 7,991,798. Source: These numbers are based on an analysis of the June 2022 public use file of the Current Population Survey, which is collected each month by the Census Bureau for Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Hispanics did vote,<sup>3</sup> a rise of six million from the 2016 election.<sup>4</sup> That's 10.4% of the total votes cast. Put it another way, the Hispanic vote count increased 31% in just four years.

I will divide this study into two major sections. First, I will focus on the political alignment of Hispanics in the United States. Second, I will review the questions of how Hispanics came to be in the U.S., their economic prospects, and how assimilation is proceeding.

## **The political alignment of U.S. Hispanics**

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Until very recently, it was assumed that Hispanic Americans would always tend strongly Democratic, save for a few special cases, such as Cuban immigrants in South Florida who were focused on resisting Castro's communist revolution, and perhaps recent arrivals from other Latin America nations mauled by left-wing revolutions or revolutionary movements. The Hispanic allegiance to the Democratic Party is not hard to understand. Most newly established immigrant communities have voted for Democrats for two centuries. As the traditional party of outsiders, newcomers, and people needing a helping hand, the Democratic Party was the political embarkation point for Hispanics in America.

The results of the 2020 presidential election, plus the evidence of a myriad of political polls taken since the election, including a major poll commissioned by NumbersUSA, and also the results of a number of elections held since 2020, have forced just about everyone who studies politics for a living to agree that something potentially momentous is happening.

Hispanics are on the move politically. Unlike most Black Democrats, they seem unlikely to remain a predictable and endlessly patient voting bloc, frequently unhappy with positions taken by their party but too alienated from Republicans to contemplate a change. Instead, this vast population, so recently migrated from Spanish-speaking nations, is now involved in a *political* migration. Where they end up, nobody can know for sure. But their political trajectory may be similar to several earlier immigrant groups, such as Italians, who after voting mostly Democratic for the first several decades in the U.S., eventually stopped seeing themselves primarily as immigrants. When they made that transition, they started voting more Republican, which had always been the more immigration-restrictive

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<sup>3</sup> HERNDON – DIAZ – RUIZ – MASUOKA 2020.

<sup>4</sup> UNITED STATES CENSUS BUREAU 2022a.



party. Will the same thing happen to Hispanics? Many political analysts are pondering this question, and it is the subject of this article.

The political stakes could not be higher. Axios stated in its July 2018 article, “Republicans are becoming more working-class and a little more multiracial. Democrats are becoming more elite and a little more white. Democrats’ hopes for retaining power rest on nonwhite voters remaining a reliable part of the party’s coalition. Democrats’ theory of the case collapses if Republicans make even incremental gains with those voters. Even small inroads with Hispanic voters could tip a number of Democratic-held swing seats to the GOP.”<sup>5</sup>

Especially interesting have been the views of a group of middle-aged, Clinton-era Democratic political gurus who were around when the White working-class began to defect to the GOP in large numbers. They think they’ve seen all this before and are giving urgent warnings to their fellow party members.

The dean of this group is Ruy Teixeira, the Yale University-educated expert on political demography<sup>6</sup> best known for co-authoring the 2002 book, *The Emerging Democratic Majority*. The book prophesied that the rapid growth of America’s Hispanic and Asian populations, together with the steady relative decline of America’s White working-class population, would likely result within a few years in a long-term, sustainable Democratic voting majority.

Teixeira, and just about everybody else writing on the subject in the early 2000s, presumed that the new Hispanic and Asian voters who would join the electorate in the coming years would support Democratic candidates for office, just as earlier voters from those groups had tended to do earlier in U.S. history. He put it this way, “It is fair to assume that if Democrats can consistently take professionals by about 10 percent, working women by about 20 percent, keep 75 percent of the minority vote, and get close to an even split of white working-class voters, they will have achieved a new Democratic majority.”<sup>7</sup>

In the 2020 presidential election, indeed, although Pres. Joe Biden and the Democrats again were terribly beaten among the White working-class, earning just 33% of their votes, they greatly improved with suburban voters (54%).<sup>8</sup> Most importantly, 73% of minority voters voted for Biden, not far off the 75% Teixeira

<sup>5</sup> KRAUSHAAR 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Demographics are the statistical data of a population, such as age, income, education, etc.

<sup>7</sup> JUDIS – TEIXEIRA 2002, 67.

<sup>8</sup> IGIELNIK – KEETER – HARTIG 2021.

predicted they'd need to win elections consistently.<sup>9</sup> But the *makeup* of Biden's 73% is what has been causing alarm among Democratic Party officials.

Mitt Romney earned only 27% of the Hispanic vote in 2012,<sup>10</sup> and Donald Trump scored just 29% in his first campaign in 2016.<sup>11</sup> But after four years of border crackdowns and building the Wall, plus some shockingly ill-advised rhetoric from Trump about Mexican "rapists" and other criminals, Trump stunned everybody by gaining between 37% and 38% of Hispanic voters in 2020. Instead of driving Hispanic voters away, President Trump *attracted* many new Hispanic voters. To put this achievement in context, the 6+ million Hispanic votes Trump earned in 2020 is greater than the *total* number of votes cast by Hispanic voters for all candidates together in the 2000 presidential election, just two decades before.<sup>12</sup>

In the most recent U.S. election, the 2022 Congressional midterms, political observers were anxious to learn whether the Hispanic vote share for the right-leaning Republican Party would continue growing or would fall back to earlier, smaller levels. When the votes were counted, the CNN television network reported that the Hispanic GOP vote moved up yet again--to 39%.<sup>13</sup>

What is behind this rightward shift in Hispanic voting? Today, Ruy Teixeira leads a small but vocal and influential group of Democratic analysts who are warning that Hispanics are slipping from their grasp in the Biden era. Teixeira's *Substack* column, "The Democrats' Hispanic Voter Problem: It's Not As Bad As You Think – It's Worse," practically says it all:

"The Democrats are steadily losing ground with Hispanic voters. The seriousness of this problem tends to be underestimated in Democratic circles for a couple of reasons: (1) they don't realize how big the shift is; and (2) they don't realize how thoroughly it undermines the most influential Democratic theory of the case for building their coalition."<sup>14</sup> Working-class Whites began to shift toward the Republican Party around 1972, when so many voted to re-elect Richard Nixon, and even more shifted to the GOP when Ronald Reagan was first elected president. The movement of this group towards the GOP has continued, with some interruptions and hiccups, ever since. Famously, the huge swing of White

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<sup>9</sup> SANTHANAM 2020.

<sup>10</sup> EDISON MEDIA RESEARCH 2012.

<sup>11</sup> EDISON MEDIA RESEARCH 2016.

<sup>12</sup> SHEPHARD 2002.

<sup>13</sup> HARRISON – VILCARINO 2022.

<sup>14</sup> TEIXEIRA 2021.

working-class voters in the upper Midwest toward Donald Trump in 2016 put him into the White House.<sup>15</sup>

Whereas 60% of Whites who are at least 25 years old lack a four-year college degree, among Hispanics this number is 81%.<sup>16</sup> A key idea I've proposed in my book *Political Migrants: Hispanic Voters on the Move* and in other writing is that the migration of Hispanic voters, both working-class and college graduates, into the Republican Party is not a unique phenomenon. Rather, it is the next and natural development in the movement of the White working-class into a party that more closely aligns with the general policy priorities, social views, and cultural sensibilities of working people of all ethnicities in this country. Overall, the Hispanic vote swing from the Democratic to the Republican column between 2016 to 2020 was eight points, with an even greater swing in certain Hispanic demographics.<sup>17</sup>

A massive amount of mostly Democratic Party-aligned research suggests this shift is not a one-time fluke. And that the shift is being fueled by a general distaste for the progressive social and economic positions that are dominant in today's Democratic Party. Indeed, it appears many Hispanic voters are turning to the Republicans not *in spite of* the greater Republican emphasis on controlling immigration, but *because* of this emphasis. Years of careful polling conducted by the Rasmussen organization and sponsored by my organization NumbersUSA strongly suggests that Democrats have missed the mark with likely Hispanic voters by basing their aggressive immigration stance on mass amnesties, less enforcement, and higher levels of foreign workers.

In Rasmussen polling conducted March 21, 2024, likely voters were asked, "On the question of illegal immigration, is the government doing too much or too little to reduce illegal border crossings and visitor overstays?" Of Hispanic voters, 55% said the government was doing "too little" to stop illegal immigration. Only 21% said "too much." In the same poll, 57% of Hispanic voters said that legal immigration should be reduced in number, as opposed to only 8% who said the number should be increased.

The one point of majority Hispanic agreement with the Democratic immigration agenda is on a limited amnesty for illegal immigrants already present in the United States. However, overwhelming Hispanic voter agreement is found in the desire for *more* enforcement at the border rather than *less*, and for employers to be required to use E-Verify to keep illegal workers from getting jobs. Most Hispanic voters

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<sup>15</sup> COHN 2016.

<sup>16</sup> UNITED STATES CENSUS BUREAU 2020a.

<sup>17</sup> SHEPARD 2021.

insist that employers claiming labor shortages should work harder to recruit non-working Americans rather than be allowed to bring in foreign workers, both lower and higher skilled. They also support ending immigration of relatives other than spouses and minor children.<sup>18</sup>

Democrats, by shifting their immigration policies sharply toward post-national globalism in the 21st century, may have cost themselves the votes of not just one working-class population (the White working-class) but of two. The second working-class group they may be losing is U.S.-citizen Hispanics.

## Who are Hispanic Americans, and how did they end up in the United States?

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To better understand these Hispanic political trends and where they might go, we need to look a lot deeper at who these Hispanic voters are, where they've come from, and what their political history has been.

A big part of what makes Hispanic voters so interesting for our political future is how many there are, how many more there will be in just a few years, and how very little political thinkers seem to understand them. Earlier in this article, I placed a chart showing that the Census Bureau estimates the Hispanic population to grow from today's 62 million to 111 million by 2060.

The chart below shows just how rapidly the Hispanic population has already grown.

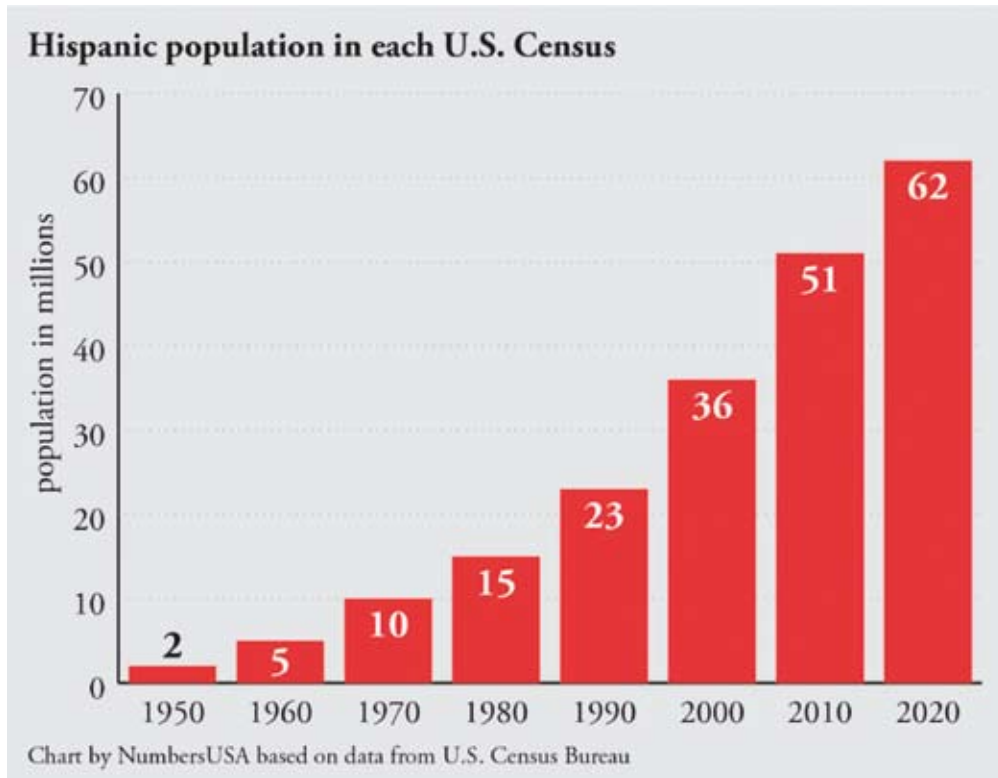
Seventy years ago, just after the end of World War II, there were just over two million Hispanics living in the U.S. As of 2022, there are 62 million. In other words, the U.S. Hispanic population has mushroomed almost *30 times* in just seven decades!

To put the number 62 million in perspective, again, think about the United Kingdom. That's England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Lots of Brits, right? Total population? 68 million. America's northern neighbor, Canada, has only 38 million people. Within eight years the U.S. Hispanic population will be about *double* that of the entire Canadian population!

What does the term "Hispanic" even mean? This is surprisingly tricky to answer. The people we call "Hispanics" in the U.S. aren't really one people group. They

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<sup>18</sup> RASMUSSEN REPORTS 2024.



come from more than 20 nations and territories that share the Spanish language and/or culture. They are White, they are Black, they are American Indian, they are mestizo, and of other mixed races. Most—but far from all—speak Spanish with varying degrees of fluency. Though most relate to some Christian tradition, some are Jewish, some follow indigenous creeds, and a growing number claim no religion at all.

A fascinating study by Pew Research Center explains, “The most common approach to answering these questions is straightforward: Who is Hispanic? Anyone who says they are. And nobody who says they aren’t.”

For the most part, Hispanics are found only in the United States because “Hispanics” is a word adopted by the U.S. government, first appearing in the 1970 Census, as a catch-all term to cover the widely diverse population of residents described above. Spanish-speaking Guatemala, for example, is not filled with Hispanics. But

its citizens become “Hispanics” in the eyes of the U.S. government when they move to the United States.

On the decennial (every 10 years) census, and in all the other census questionnaires the U.S. Census Bureau runs, the form first asks people what their race is. Then, *separately*, it asks if the person is Hispanic.

**Is this person of Hispanic, Latino, or Spain origin**

No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin

Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano

Yes, Puerto Rican

Yes, Cuban

Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin – *Print for examples, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, Guatemalan, Spaniard, Ecuadorian, etc.* ↗

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Below is the way the question appeared on the most recent Census form.

Since no U.S. law actually defines who Hispanics are, *self-reporting* is the rule. The interesting thing is that many people in America who are from families with roots in Spanish-speaking nations do not report themselves as such, and so they aren’t counted as Hispanic.

Two-thirds of U.S. Hispanics were born in this country. That bears repeating. About 40 million Hispanics in the United States were born here, citizens at birth. The ancestors of some few of these settled here before there was even a United States. Others have come to this country only in the last few years. Some are wealthy, some are poor, and some are middle class. They include U.S. Senators and farm laborers. It’s impossible to generalize.

Why has the federal government separated out Hispanics as a group different from other Americans, and why are they regarded as so distinct politically? After

all, in several key ways, they are not unlike most other Americans. Like most White Americans, for example, the preponderance of Hispanic Americans are at least partially of European descent. And the fact that the first American in most Hispanic families arrived in this country speaking a language other than English doesn't make them distinct, either. The majority of other American ancestors also arrived in the United States speaking a non-English language. Yet, there are cultural and historical reasons Hispanic voters as a whole might respond differently to various political issues.

We need a quick review of how the Europeans in the United States differed from, and interacted with, the Europeans in Latin America. Let's think back to the Americas before Columbus sailed here in 1492. There were two gigantic continents Europeans had never seen before,<sup>19</sup> but they weren't at all empty. Estimates vary wildly, but there were at least several million native people living in the Americas. There are no written records to tell us. Natives had built great empires in Peru (Incans) and Mexico (Aztecs), and several large confederacies of tribes in North America.

The Incan and Aztec empires were sophisticated. They mined gold, made metal weapons, built elaborate cities, and developed intricate government bodies. They were warlike; no pushovers militarily. But they were not a match for mounted, armored European soldiers with firearms, much less the new diseases the Europeans brought with them. For about 100 years after Columbus found the Caribbean islands and claimed all the Americas for Spain, the Spanish and the Portuguese dominated European colonization, and they concentrated on South America and the Caribbean Islands. Gradually they expanded into Florida, parts of what is now Texas, California, and some of the territory in between. Eventually, the Spanish and Portuguese settled around a million Europeans in the New World. Additionally, they also brought in more than one million kidnapped slaves from Africa to work the fields. Many Indians were also enslaved and worked in mining and agriculture.

Beginning in the early 1600s, England and France also sent explorers and colonists to the Americas, concentrating their efforts in the Caribbean and Eastern North America. We all know that England planted 13 colonies that thrived along the eastern seaboard, in addition to colonizing various "sugar" islands in the Caribbean, including Jamaica and Barbados. The British came to stay, and more

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<sup>19</sup> With the possible exception of Vikings and other seafaring traders and warriors, who established settlements as far as Greenland and perhaps on what is now the eastern shore of the U.S. around the year 1000 A.D.

than a million British colonists came to America during the colonial period. By the time of the American Revolution, the population of the 13 colonies exceeded 2 million. Additionally, the British transported 3.1 million slaves to North America, but only 2.7 million arrived alive after their hellish passage in slave ships. Many of the slaves went to the islands and not the 13 colonies.

Diseases imported into the Americas, especially smallpox, wiped out the largest portion of the native Indian populations. The survivors lost control of their lands and were relegated to marginal areas or were assimilated over time.

The French sent many fewer settlers to North America. Many were trappers or traders, with fewer of them farmers than in the English colonies. They settled chiefly in Eastern Canada but also extended settlements into what is now the American Midwest and down to the port of New Orleans.

In the 1760s, war broke out between France and England over control of North America. In America, we call this the French and Indian War, but it was merely one theater of a larger, global war called the Seven Years' War that was fought by the two titanic powers of Europe. In the end, England decisively triumphed, ejecting the French government, if not the actual French people or culture, from Canada.

Chasing the French out of Canada caused England to run up a massive war debt. To help pay down this debt, the King's government was determined to begin direct taxation on its American colonists. That is, money collected from colonists in America was to be taken back to the mother country. (American colonists were largely self-governing and had always taxed themselves for their colonial government expenses.) The colonists famously objected to the tax scheme on the grounds that they had no representatives in the British Parliament, and therefore they had no responsibility to pay for British government expenses. ("No taxation without representation!") It came to war, seven years of it. Fortunately for the Americans, the French wanted revenge for the loss of French Canada, and they sent soldiers and a navy to back up the Continental Army. In the end, General George Washington and his small army won the day.

The United States was formed. In 1803, France, under Napoleon Bonaparte, was facing yet another major war with Great Britain, and it needed cash. Also, with



the British in firm control of the transatlantic trade routes, France had no real way to exploit its American territories. So, France sold the huge portion of land it claimed in the middle of North America, called the Louisiana Territory, to the United States for \$15 million, or just 3 cents an acre. That coup was followed by the U.S. obtaining Florida from Spain in an 1819 treaty.

So, England continued to control Canada. The United States controlled much of the rest of North America. While France and Britain fought their endless wars in Europe and elsewhere for supremacy, Spain was undergoing a deep and permanent decline. The Spanish did not manage to use the massive treasure in gold taken from the New World to transform itself or its colonies into modern, productive economies. Poor economic performance led to military weakness. By the early 1800s, Spain lost control of its American colonies. By the second decade of the 19th century, revolution broke out throughout Latin America. Mexican residents began their revolution in 1810, and it took 11 years to gain independence. The areas of Mexico located in Central America did not wish to be included in Mexico, and they were allowed to form their own nations. Similarly, countries independent of Spain or Portugal were formed throughout South America.

So which group are the ‘real’ immigrants to America? With regularity, Hispanic activists have noted that it is a miscarriage of justice that their people who move into the United States from Mexico, Central America, or other parts of Latin America are called immigrants when so much of the current United States was once under the political control of Spain, then Mexico. Which group is the immigrants? One recently published book summarizes it in the title: *The Border Crossed Us: The Case for Opening the US-Mexico Border*.<sup>20</sup>

There are a lot of ways to answer that question. One is that most people living in America are descended from immigrants. Even Native Americans migrated here thousands of years ago from Asia. Only the descendants of American slaves can rightly say they never immigrated—they were kidnapped and carried to these shores against their will. The real question is not *whether* Americans came originally from other places, but *when* they made those moves. Although Spain and Mexico claimed large portions of the American West until the mid-19th century, they never really populated it.

Mexico’s 1821 population of 6.65 million<sup>21</sup> was not much less than the United States’ 10.3 million.<sup>22</sup> The difference was that only about one percent of the

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<sup>20</sup> CHACÓN 2021.

<sup>21</sup> STATISTA 2022.

<sup>22</sup> UNITED STATES CENSUS BUREAU 2020b, 1168.

Mexican population lived in the areas that are now part of the U.S.<sup>23</sup> That wasn't enough to wrest the land away from the fierce Indian tribes that dominated the Southern plains states, most especially the Comanches.

I spent much of my childhood in Abilene, Texas, a railroad town built in the 1880s as a stop for the Texas & Pacific Railroad (later absorbed into the Union Pacific Railroad), located between Ft. Worth and Midland. When I lived there in the 1960s and early 70s, Abilene had about 100,000 residents, three church-related colleges, lots of banks and independent oil drilling outfits, a small Black population, and an even smaller Hispanic one. Since one of the Comanche key hideouts was in nearby Buffalo Gap, no settlers dared live there until after the Indians were defeated. When settlers came, the Civil War was over, so no one was brought out to that arid place as a slave. Remarkably, when I think back on it, there were relatively few Hispanic people in Abilene when I was a boy. I never even tasted Mexican food until I was 10 or 11 years old. The Spanish language was rarely heard. The reason was simple: the same hostile Native American population that had kept out most White settlers also kept out Hispanics until the Comanches finally surrendered in 1875.<sup>24</sup>

In fact, American settlers were first brought into Texas to help quell the Comanches. Outside of their small strongholds in the Rio Grande Valley and the mission town of San Antonio, Indians had prevented much settlement by Mexican people. The Americans were used to fighting Indians. The newly formed Mexican government instructed the American settlers to free any slaves they brought with them and practice the Roman Catholic faith when they arrived. The Americans were willing to fight the Comanches, but they did not free their slaves nor did many practice Catholicism.

By 1834, over 30,000 U.S. citizens already lived in Texas, most of them just recently having emigrated into that part of Mexico and overwhelmingly outnumbering the 7,800 Spanish-descent Mexicans who were settled there.<sup>25</sup> The Mexican government, sensing trouble looming, tried to reassert control, but it was already too late. The American settlers soon rebelled against Mexico, and they won their independence after several months of fighting, surrounding Mexican president Santa Ana and his army at the Battle of San Jacinto in 1836. Although the new Republic of Texas was not recognized by Mexico nor invited yet to be an American state, U.S. settlers poured in from mostly southern states, bringing their slaves

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<sup>23</sup> GRATTON – GUTTMAN 2000, 137–153.

<sup>24</sup> For ease of communication in this article, I use the term “Hispanic” in its modern U.S. meaning when referencing the past, even though Spanish-descent residents of those times would not have used it.

<sup>25</sup> MENCHACA 2001.

with them. By 1845, Texas already had 125,000 people, including 30,000 slaves, but very few people of Mexican heritage.

In 1845, the United States annexed Texas, and that, plus a boundary dispute, erupted into the Mexican-American War, a large-scale conflict with many bloody battles, all fought in Mexico. Many of the prominent American Army officers who would later lead both sides in the Civil War, such as Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant, first gained real battle experience in Mexico. After two years of grueling warfare, the American victory was total, and Mexico was forced to sign over vast lands in exchange for \$15 million. Immediately after gaining these new territories, the United States started forming states and territories out of them. Again, hordes of American settlers poured in, eager to get cheap or free land. Of the small Mexican population in Texas at the time, some moved south out of the state while very few additional Mexicans moved north into Texas.

California was also seized and annexed by the United States in 1848 at the conclusion of the Mexican-American War. It had only an estimated 6,500 White and Mestizo residents of Spanish descent at that time. The Indian population has been estimated at between 30,000-150,000. There were also a few hundred U.S. citizens there at the time of the changeover. But the very first year of American control, a huge vein of gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill, California, and the news caused a worldwide stampede of would-be prospectors and merchants to cross deserts and oceans to stake their claim.

Within two years, the U.S. Census counted 92,597 persons in California, excluding Native Americans. After 20 years of U.S. stewardship, by 1870, the non-Indian population stood at 560,247. Yet the Hispanic portion of that number was just 22,409, less than 4 percent of the total. They went from being the dominant non-indigenous group to being a tiny minority. Although Mexico had once owned territory that now made up much of the western United States, Hispanic people had never really occupied it. . . not until the mass immigration of the late-20th century.<sup>26</sup>

## Characteristics of American Hispanics

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Understanding who Hispanics are takes time and more than a little bit of patience. Again, this is not a homogenous group.

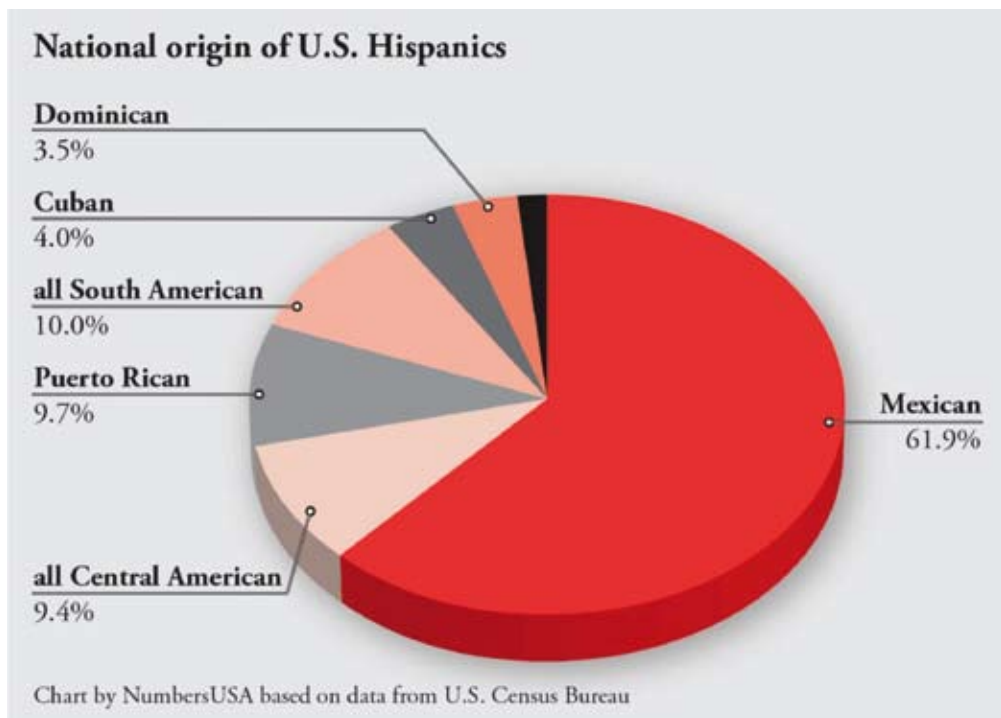
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<sup>26</sup> GIBSON – KAY 2022.

The word “Hispanic” itself is a one-size-fits-all moniker for an enormous population of American residents whose ancestry and/or language and/or culture have some connection with Spain. Here are some questions that show why getting your mind around who Hispanics are is so difficult. Below are some basic questions that are often asked, and their answers.

Are all Hispanics descendants of people who came to the Americas from Spain?

No, not at all. Many Hispanics are largely descended from African slaves who were brought to Spanish colonies sometime in the past. Others are mainly of Indian heritage, not having many or perhaps any European genes. Still others have European ancestry, but those ancestors are not from Spain or Portugal. Many Hispanics in the U.S. are descended from Italian, German, French, or other nationalities that first immigrated to a Spanish-speaking country before finally settling in America.



Further, although more than half of Hispanics in America trace their roots to Mexico, other large groups are from Puerto Rico, a U.S. territory whose residents

are all born U.S. citizens, Central America, South America, and various Caribbean islands, such as Cuba. It's important to remember that although Puerto Ricans who have moved to the 50 states are counted as part of the Hispanic population, they are not really immigrants, since Puerto Rico is a territory of the U.S.

## **Do all Hispanics speak Spanish?**

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No. Fourteen million Hispanics, about a quarter of the total, speak only English in their homes. As of 2019, approximately 47% of U.S.-born Hispanics spoke only English at home.<sup>27</sup> Some Hispanic people speak no Spanish at all. Not surprisingly, the more time that passes between the original immigration experience of a family, the less Spanish is spoken. By the third generation in America, fewer than a quarter of Hispanics can really speak the Spanish language. But is knowledge of the Spanish language necessary to being Hispanic? No! According to the Pew Research Center's rule of thumb, you're Hispanic if you call yourself such.<sup>28</sup>

## **Are Hispanics members of a particular race?**

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No. "Hispanic" is not a term for a race. In fact, a growing number of Hispanics in America tell the Census Bureau they consider themselves White. A good example of this is the Rio Grande Valley region of Texas, that area in the southernmost tip of the state that touches the Rio Grande River and borders Mexico. The population there is 93.5% Hispanic, according to government data, but 88% of the residents also describe themselves as White, with another 9% calling themselves "some other race," and 1.4% saying that they are of two or more races.<sup>29</sup>

If this feels confusing, don't worry: Everyone is confused by it, including Hispanics! The government describes "Hispanic or Latino" as "a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American or other Spanish culture or origin *regardless of race*"<sup>30</sup> (emphasis added). But if they don't all descend from Spanish or other European countries, and they're not of a particular race, how can you describe them?

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<sup>27</sup> KROGSTAD – BUSTAMANTE 2021.

<sup>28</sup> FLORES 2017.

<sup>29</sup> RGV HEALTH CONNECT 2024.

<sup>30</sup> UNITED STATES CENSUS BUREAU 2022b.

“Throughout history, Latinos have been both colonized and colonizers,” writes Geraldo Cadava. “By this, I don’t mean simply the obvious: that Latinos are mestizos, the mixed-race descendants of Indigenous Americans, Spaniards, Middle Easterners, Africans, and other ethnic and racial groups. I also mean that Latinos have identified not only as survivors of imperialism and its ills, but also as supporters of imperial and national powers.”<sup>31</sup>

## Are Hispanics all Catholics?

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No. Although the Roman Catholic Church was the established state church of Spain and so held a virtual monopoly on religious expression in the Spanish Empire that settled most of Latin America, other faiths have been gaining strength in Latin America and amongst Hispanics in the United States over the past century.

A titanic 2014 study of religion among U.S. Hispanics found that 48% considered themselves Catholics, with another 25% belonging to a Protestant Christian church, most of these being Evangelicals. Additionally, one percent was Jewish. Twenty percent were unaffiliated with any religious group. Of these, two percent were Agnostic and another two percent were Atheist.<sup>32</sup> The religious affiliation of Hispanics is important in predicting their political alignment, as with all other groups of American voters. More religious persons tend to vote for more conservative parties and candidates. And as was stated above, two-thirds of Hispanics now residing in the U.S. were born in this country (including Puerto Ricans living here). About 20 million, however, are immigrants. Millions of these immigrated legally, usually by virtue of family categories commonly known as chain migration. As of the 2020 Census, at least 8.7 million had either crossed the border illegally or overstayed visas to become illegal aliens.<sup>33</sup> Unless they receive some sort of citizenship-track amnesty, these individuals will not be eligible to vote. However, the federal practice automatically gives citizenship to the children of even illegal immigrants if they are born on U.S. soil.

The illegal alien population has been expanding very fast since Joe Biden became president in January 2021 and immediately began relaxing border security and asylum measures. In fact, during the first three years of Pres. Biden’s term, an estimated 5 to 6 million *new* illegal immigrants succeeded in evading border

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<sup>31</sup> CADAVA 2022.

<sup>32</sup> PEW RESEARCH CENTER 2022.

<sup>33</sup> MIGRATION POLICY INSTITUTE 2019.

authorities or were arrested at the border and then released on parole to travel and work inside the United States.<sup>34</sup> An unknown number of these are of Hispanic heritage.

Because of legal and illegal immigration, the Hispanic population is currently increasing by more than two million a year.

## **Are all Hispanics in America called Hispanic?**

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NO! Since the government and all other data-gathering entities use *self*-reporting to determine whether someone should be termed Hispanic, it gets much trickier to keep track as immigrants become children and grandchildren of immigrants. By the fourth generation in this country, only *half* of Hispanics are still willing to describe themselves as “Hispanic,” although some of them might answer that they are of Hispanic heritage.<sup>35</sup> As assimilation does its wonderful work, many people just want to be known as Americans, but that will make counting the numbers harder and harder as time goes by.

Hispanics are a very young population: 31% are under 18, and only 7.7% are over 65.<sup>36</sup> That contrasts with the U.S. population as a whole which is 22.1% under 18<sup>37</sup> and 16% over 65.<sup>38</sup> And despite Hispanics’ domination of immigration flows over the last half-century, it is a mistake to conclude that most Hispanics are foreign-born or that most immigrants are Hispanics. Only a third of Hispanics are foreign born, and only 40% of immigrants in this country are Hispanic. Of these, only about 35% came to this country illegally (as of the 202 U.S. Census).<sup>39</sup> Nearly eight million of the Hispanic immigrants have already become U.S. citizens.<sup>40</sup>

## **Why did Hispanic immigrants come to America?**

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Hispanics have been present in what is now the United States since the beginning of the republic, but only in tiny, tiny numbers. Most Hispanics in America today

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<sup>34</sup> CAMAROTA – ZEIGLER 2022.

<sup>35</sup> LOPEZ – GONZALES-BERRERA – LOPEZ 2017.

<sup>36</sup> USAFACTS 2022.

<sup>37</sup> UNITED STATES CENSUS BUREAU 2021b.

<sup>38</sup> THE ADMINISTRATION FOR COMMUNITY LIVING 2021.

<sup>39</sup> CAMAROTA – ZEIGLER 2021.

<sup>40</sup> USA FACTS 2022.

come from immigrants who've arrived since the end of World War II. As stated earlier, a third of Hispanics are immigrants themselves. Of the two-thirds who were born here, most of their first American forbears have come since 1980. In general, America's Hispanics are a recently arrived immigrant group.

Why did Hispanics move to this country? In almost every case, it was to get jobs here. Yet unemployment rates are not currently sky-high in most countries the immigrants hailed from. Mexico's official unemployment rate in 2021 was only 4.4%. Honduras, 8.5%. El Salvador, 5.9%.<sup>41</sup> What motivates people coming from countries where jobs are not scarce to migrate to the U.S.?

Part of the answer is that immigration comes in waves. When a country finds itself in trouble because of natural disasters, like hurricanes as did several Central American nations periodically over the past few decades, or succumbs to civil war, as happened in both El Salvador and Nicaragua in the 1980s, or when personal security for normal people collapses as it has in parts of northern Mexico because of drug cartel mayhem being experienced right now, countries can temporarily become extremely hard to live and work in. One neighbor told me he decided to leave his native El Salvador for the U.S. during their civil war when rebel troops landed in his town by helicopter one day, and they began firing on civilian men of military age.

Those are the times many people choose to try another country within a relatively short period. During the 1980s, for example, half a million Salvadorans moved to the United States, most illegally.<sup>42</sup> Again, in 2001, when El Salvador suffered two large earthquakes, another big group left for north of the Rio Grande. But these setbacks in various nations are often temporary. Even today, with relatively good economic conditions, which translates into enough jobs for the local workforce, Central Americans and Mexicans still make the trip north. Why?

One argument is that Central America and various other Hispanic nations are perpetually violent places, that criminality there is committed on such a vast scale that living in those countries is equivalent to being in a war. A Doctors Without Borders study, for example, states that the "extreme levels of violence experienced by people fleeing from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, and underscores the need for adequate health care, support, and protection along the migration route through Mexico."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> THE WORLD BANK 2024.

<sup>42</sup> MENJÍVAR – GÓMEZ CERVANTES 2009.

<sup>43</sup> MÉDECIN SANS FRONTIÈRES 2017, 5.



How true is this? In 2018, El Salvador reported a murder rate of 52 per 100,000 residents. The equivalent figure for all of the United States for that year was 4.96.<sup>44</sup> So, 10 times higher in El Salvador. But most Salvadorans move to or near America's big cities where murder rates can be similarly horrific. In 2019, for example, the most murderous city in the United States was St. Louis, with 64.5 murders per 100,000 residents,<sup>45</sup> higher than any nation in Central America.<sup>46</sup>

Although migrants from Central America and Mexico are usually portrayed in American media as leaving countries full of miserable people, the World Happiness Report of 2022, powered by Gallup surveys, found the populations of those countries reporting a level of happiness that ranked in or near the top third of all nations. The widely referenced report ranked Honduras 58th, Nicaragua 54th, El Salvador 48th, Mexico 35th, and Guatemala 30th, just two spots below Italy. (The United States was ranked 19th, behind No. 16 Costa Rica.)<sup>47</sup>

The biggest draw of America has always been lots of high-paying jobs. Even if jobs can be found in sending countries, wages are much lower. In the United States, the average after-tax monthly salary is \$3,619, whereas in Mexico it's only \$628, and in El Salvador a mere \$377 per month.<sup>48</sup> Of course, the cost of living is also amazingly higher in the U.S., so not all of the extra money made here results in higher living standards. Yet enough of the money earned in America can be saved and sent home that such "remittances" make up 23% of the entire Gross Domestic Product of El Salvador.<sup>49</sup>

## Hispanics in the American workforce

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What jobs do Hispanics do in America? Since we're talking about millions of individuals from more than 20 nations, and with two-thirds of them actually born here, obviously the answer is every job there is!

However, there are concentrations in certain industries. The Department of Labor says Hispanics hold 18% of all jobs in this country. That's up from only 8.5% just 30 years ago. Nationally, 35.7% of construction workers are Hispanic; 43%

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<sup>44</sup> WORLD POPULATION REVIEW 2024.

<sup>45</sup> FIELDSTAT 2022.

<sup>46</sup> WORLD POPULATION REVIEW 2024.

<sup>47</sup> HELLIWELL – HUANG – WANG – NORTON 2022.

<sup>48</sup> WAGE INDICATOR FOUNDATION 2022.

<sup>49</sup> AP NEWS 2021.

of those in “farming, fishing, and forestry” occupations have Hispanic heritage; Hispanics hold 37.9% of “buildings and grounds, cleaning and maintenance” jobs, and hold 27.3% of “food preparation and serving” jobs.<sup>50</sup>

On the East and West Coasts, and in states like Texas and Arizona, even those large numbers may feel low. Yet there are enormous swaths of the country with relatively low immigration where few Hispanics yet live. On the non-service industry side, 10.7% of all management positions are now held by Hispanic workers, a percentage that has doubled in the past two decades.

It’s not surprising that Hispanics have become such an enormous slice of service sector jobs for several reasons:

### *Incredible supply of young workers*

62 million Hispanics lived in America as of the 2020 Census, and that was 18.7% of the population. Hispanics are about nine years younger than non-Hispanic Americans on average, so they are proportionally more likely to be in the labor force and also able to do the hard physical jobs best suited to younger workers.

### *Less education than the average American resident*

As of the year 2016, only 16% of Hispanic adults had earned a 4-year college degree or higher, compared to 37% of Whites.<sup>51</sup> This means that the vast majority of Hispanic workers in this country are working class. (Again, the term “working class” is used only to refer to educational attainment, not to whether people hold jobs, etc. Working class simply means you have less education than a four-year college degree.) So not only are there tons of young Hispanic workers, fewer of them have the kind of education that leads to professional jobs.

### *Lower wages among Hispanic immigrants*

As noted, two-thirds of America’s Hispanics were born in this country, but a third moved here from less developed nations, all of whom feature sharply lower wages. As said above, Salvadoran wages are about 1/10th that of American wages. Immigrants from poor countries may be more than willing to accept wages that

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<sup>50</sup> DUBINA 2021.

<sup>51</sup> SCHAK – NICHOLS 2017.

are far less than that offered to native-born persons who may have held the jobs previously.<sup>52</sup>

*Illegal immigrants who often remain in low-level service sector jobs*

Of the perhaps 9 million Hispanic illegal immigrants in America, upward mobility is tough. To knowingly employ an illegal alien is itself illegal, so they often work in the service sector, sometimes being paid under the table. Most prestige jobs require vetting with the government's E-Verify system to check if the person is actually authorized to work in the United States.

That all said, America's Hispanic population is so vast that there are also millions of highly educated Hispanics working at the very top levels of their fields. Examples include Lin-Manuel Miranda, the *wunderkind* who brought the musical "Hamilton" to Broadway at age 35. Successful Hispanic politicians include Senator Ted Cruz of Texas. Supreme Court Associate Justice Sonia Sotomayor is obviously at the top of her field. Ellen Ochoa, a NASA astronaut, logged over 1,000 hours in space and was the 11th director of the Johnson Space Center in Houston.<sup>53</sup>

About 233,000 Hispanics were currently serving in America's armed forces in the year 2021. Twenty-three percent of the U.S. Marine Corps was of Hispanic heritage that year.<sup>54</sup> During the Afghanistan war, this included my nephew, Luke, a Peruvian native who served our nation as a Marine, winning a Purple Heart after being wounded in combat. (Luke fully recovered.)

The U.S.-Mexico border is a current and perennial security and law-and-order problem for our nation. Recently – December 2023 – almost 250,000 persons were being arrested each month as they attempted their illegal entry into the United States. Currently, the Biden administration is allowing well more than half of these detained individuals to proceed into the interior of the country, often with work permits, cell phones and bus tickets, all courtesy of the U.S. taxpayer. This breakdown of order has become one of Pres. Biden's biggest political problems and is actually working to shift more Hispanics AWAY from Biden's party and toward Republicans. Significantly, few realize that Hispanics are heavily represented in the U.S. Border Patrol ranks, making up about half of all agents serving.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> OECD 2022.

<sup>53</sup> ALVAREZ KLEINSMITH 2021.

<sup>54</sup> DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION 2001.

<sup>55</sup> LARSON 2018.

In several elite professions, however, Hispanics are severely underrepresented. Only about 6.5% of U.S. doctors are Hispanic.<sup>56</sup> And only 8% of STEM workers (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) are Hispanic.<sup>57</sup> The relatively short period of time that most Hispanic families have been in America probably accounts for some of this, since it has always taken time for most immigrant families to fully establish themselves in the country.

Considering that 19.3% of America's college students are of Hispanic heritage, however, a number in line with their overall share of the U.S. population, better days are ahead for Hispanic representation in good-paying jobs.

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<sup>56</sup> NORTON 2021.

<sup>57</sup> FRY – KENNEDY – FUNK 2021.

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