

HOW RURAL AREAS CAN ADAPT TO DECLINING RURAL LATINO IMMIGRATION

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This brief shows why the wave of low wage Latino immigration is ending, and argues that rural areas need to adopt practices to incorporate those newcomers who have already arrived. There is also a case for increased research into labor-saving agricultural technologies. Because international migration will soon become the primary driver of U.S. population growth for first time in nearly two centuries, supporting and integrating immigrants into the U.S. economy is of paramount importance. This brief details the demographic changes in the United States, breaking them down by rurality of county and immigrant type.

Between 2010 and 2012, the US rural population declined (Economic Research Service, 2013). In 2012, US white deaths outnumbered white births for the first time (Morello and Mellnik, 2013). Figure 1 shows how immigrants are filling the dip in population for the age group that followed the baby boomers. Maintaining a stable population helps avoid social issues, such as inadequate elder care, that have cropped up in Japan and Russia, where the birth rate is well below replacement rate.

Census data from 2000 to 2010 provide a remarkable portrayal of the shifting demographics in the

United States, especially in rural areas. The data show the Latino population increased on average in all county types, regardless of rurality. Non-Latino populations, conversely, have been declining on average in more rural counties. Figure 2 highlights this trend. In aggregate, the most rural counties (codes 7-9) in the United States declined in non-Latino population, while increasing in Latino population. These changes combine to amplify the demographic shifts in rural areas.

Rural depopulation has slowed, and in some cases reversed itself, in many areas of the United States as a result of Latino immigrants. In response to this, and with the goal of avoiding yet another wave of depopulation, myriad local initiatives are supporting incorporation of Latino immigrants. We now know that successful initiatives use persistent outreach and take advantage of immigrant networks to break down the mistrust that is often prevalent among immigrants (Hagen, 1998). A component of successful incorporation includes developing pathways to move from unskilled to other types of work. Successful initiatives could help declining rural areas maintain the critical mass of population needed for efficient provision of private and public services.

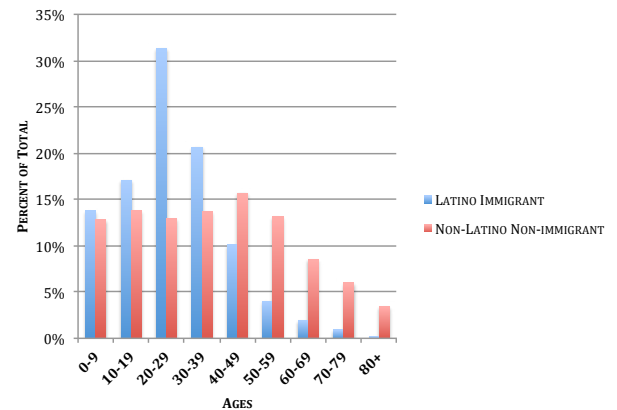


Figure 1. 2000-2008 Recent Latino Immigrant Population and Non-Latino Non-Immigrant Population Ages (IPUMS-USA).

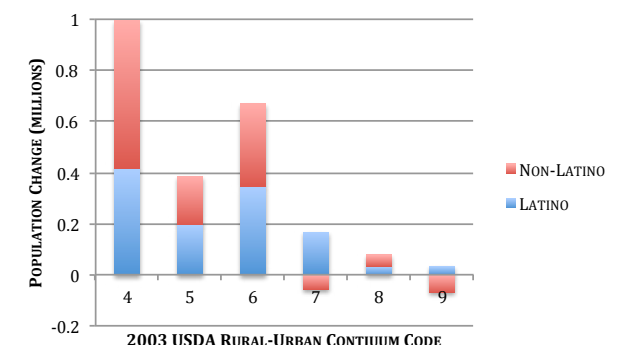
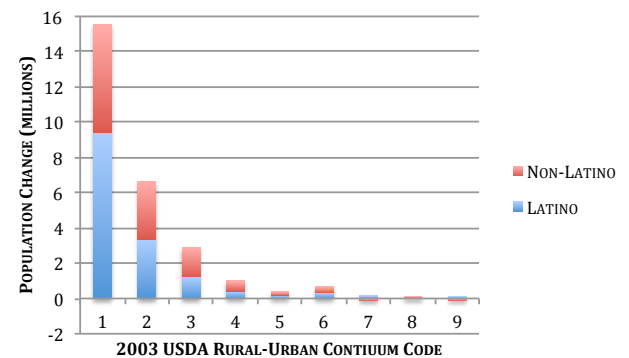


Figure 2. 2000-2010 Latino and Non-Latino Population Change by Rurality of County (Census).

Census data have also increased our understanding of the variety of recent immigrants' education levels and the predictors thereof. In general, immigrants living in more rural areas have lower education (Figure 3).

Recent data indicate a slowing of immigration into the United States. Current shortages in migrant farm worker supply are indicative of this change. Declining farm labor supply in Mexico as a result of a shift in manufacturing from China to Mexico implies that, in the future, US agriculture will have to compete with Mexican agriculture for a dwindling supply of farm labor (Taylor et al., 2012). Mexico experienced a sharp decline in its fertility rate between 1960 and 2010 (from 7.3 to 2.4 children/woman), which will reinforce this shrinking labor supply (Passel et al., 2012). As US domestic workers are unwilling to do farm work at wages similar to those offered to migrant workers, and the United States can only feasibly import cheap farm workers from a few countries in close geographic proximity, the agricultural sector needs to adjust production to use less labor. As shown in Figure 4, immigrants from more distant places tend to possess higher levels of education. Rural areas may therefore not be attractive to immigrants from further away. If the Mexican

influx into rural areas dries up as predicted, there is no easy replacement source of new immigrants.

WHAT DOES ALL OF THIS MEAN FOR RURAL AMERICA?

As mentioned previously, some communities are engaging in efforts to incorporate their newcomers into the fabric of the area. Given the overall population decline in most areas of rural America, efforts along these lines can reduce the tendency of these newcomers to follow in the footsteps of previous generations who migrated towards the cities. Transitioning Latinos from farm workers to farm owners is one strategy. In the short term, efforts to help these newcomers learn English, enroll children in schools, establish credit, and purchase homes may be another way to help Latinos develop more permanent attachment to an area. Fostering mechanisms for newcomers to share in the American dream through programs aimed at encouraging entrepreneurship could help them bridge from the old country to the new, much as has been done by generations past. Finally, the US must continue to enhance its leadership role in developing labor-saving planting, tending, and harvesting technologies to compensate for looming agricultural labor shortages. 🌱

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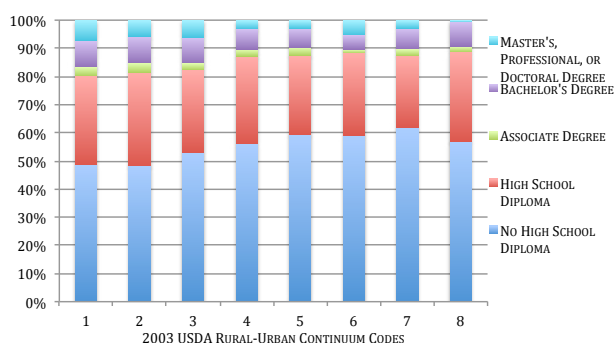


Figure 3. Educational Attainment of Recent Latino Immigrants by Rurality of County (2000 Census).

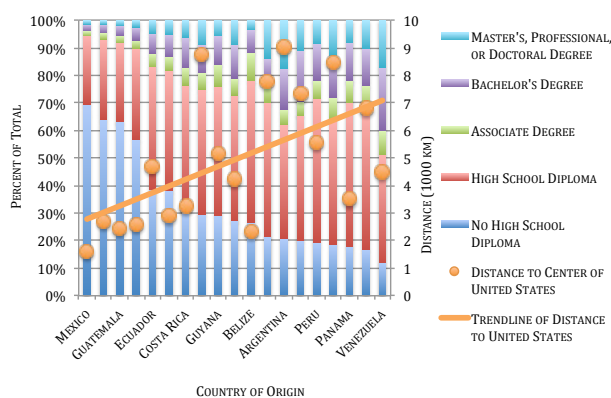


Figure 4. Educational Attainment of Recent Latino Immigrants by Country of Origin (2000 Census).