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TRENDS IN FAMILY AND COMMUNITIES

Integrating Latino Immigrants in New Rural Destinations

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The number of Latino immigrants in rural areas has increased substantially since 1990. Furthermore, many Latino immigrants are moving to rural communities in the Southeast, Midwest, and Northwest, which historically have not been immigrant destinations. This recent, rapid, and unexpected population growth in new rural destinations has focused public attention on immigration reform and fostered a mostly qualitative literature on immigrant integration. This brief quantifies the process of Latino immigrant economic and social integration in new rural destinations. At a time when many rural areas are grappling with how to respond to the rapid growth in Latino immigration, we use the most recent data available, the American Community Survey 2005–2006, to provide a comprehensive picture of the status of Latino immigrants in these new rural destinations.

Movement to Rural Areas

Latinos are the fastest growing demographic group in rural America. Rural-based industries, such as meat processing and other manufacturing industries, are recruiting workers to meet their rising demand for mostly low-skilled and low-paying jobs. At the same time, many rural Latino residents are migrating from larger metropolitan areas in search of better-paying jobs, lower-cost housing, safer schools, and a higher quality of life. Furthermore, for the first time in U.S. history, more than half of all rural Latinos live outside the traditional Southwestern settlement states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Texas. Rapid growth of the Latino foreign-born population is a growing public policy focus in many new rural destinations—states such as Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oregon, and Washington.

FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

Latino immigrants in new rural destinations are:

- More often male and young
- Disadvantaged by lower levels of education and limited length of residence in the U.S.
- Less likely to own a home than those in traditional rural destinations
- More isolated linguistically than their counterparts in both traditional and metropolitan areas
- More economically secure than their counterparts in traditional rural destinations in terms of lower poverty and higher full-time work rates

When compared with larger metropolitan communities and rural areas with a tradition of settling immigrants, new rural destinations find immigrant integration especially challenging because of limited local resources and inexperience with developing and implementing integration policies. Many rural communities are unprepared for significant numbers of newcomers who may seek inexpensive housing, require distinct social services, struggle to learn English, and enroll their children, some lacking English proficiency, into public schools. These challenges have resulted in visible social and political conflict in rural communities exemplified by a growing number of anti-immigrant measures enacted by local governments.

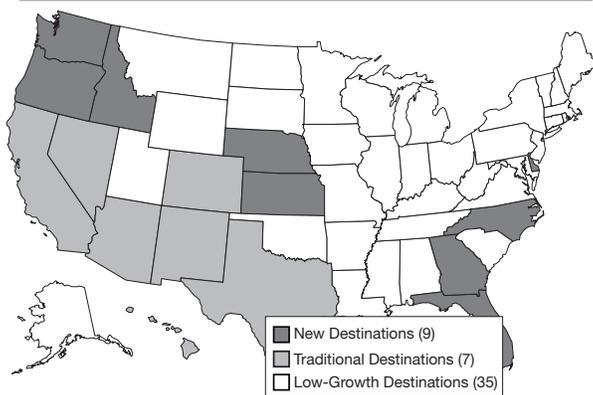
Like earlier generations of immigrants to the United States, contemporary Latino immigrants' prospects in rural America hinge on integrating socially and economically into their communities through acquiring well-paid employment, English-language skills, and citizenship. This brief provides a broad and representative picture of the current social and economic integration of Latino adult immigrants in new rural destinations. It defines new and traditional rural destinations, describes the demographic characteristics of Latino immigrants in new rural destinations relative to their counterparts in traditional rural destinations and metropolitan areas, and examines differences in their economic and social integration by destination.

Defining New Rural Destinations

Traditional rural destinations for Latino immigrants include rural areas in states with historically large Latino populations. New rural destinations are in states without historically large Latino populations, which experienced rapid increases in these groups since 1990 (Figure 1). (A detailed explanation of the methods is presented at the end of the brief.)

Currently, seven percent of Latino immigrants live in rural areas, with the balance living in metropolitan areas. Though the percentage of Latino immigrants in rural areas is small, the number has tripled since 1990 (analysis not shown). As a result of this rapid population growth, the distribution of Latino immigrants across traditional and new destinations has become roughly even—with about 37 percent living in each type of rural area. The remaining 26 percent live in rural areas with low growth in their immigrant populations. Immigrants in these low-growth rural areas are not included in the analyses here.

Figure 1: States with New, Traditional, and Low-Growth Destinations, as Defined by Latino Immigrant Populations in Rural Areas in 1990 and 2005–2006



Note: New Jersey; Washington, DC; and Rhode Island have no rural areas. Source: U.S. Census of Population and Housing 1990; American Community Survey 2005–2006.

Characteristics in New Destinations

Latino immigrants in new rural destinations are more often male and young, likely reflecting their concentration in physically demanding jobs (Table 1). In fact, almost half of Latino immigrants in new rural destinations are employed in either manufacturing or agriculture (27 percent and 22 percent, respectively), compared with under a third in traditional rural areas (14 percent and 15 percent, respectively), and under a fifth in metropolitan areas (14 percent and 3 percent, respectively).

Latino immigrants in new rural destinations are disadvantaged by lower levels of education and their more limited tenure in the U.S., as measured by their length of residence here. Forty-four percent of Latino immigrants in new rural destinations have less than a ninth-grade

TABLE 1

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS BY DESTINATION, 2005–2006 (Percentages)

	New Rural Destinations	Traditional Rural Destinations	Metro-politan Areas
Male	60	53**	54**
Age			
16-24	22	16**	16**
25-44	60	55**	58**
45-64	18	29**	26**
Education			
Less than 9th grade	44	40**	30**
9th to 12th grade	17	18**	16**
12th grade or more	38	42**	55**
Length of Time in U.S.			
5 years or less	29	18**	21**
6 to 10 years	25	17**	20**
More than 10 years	47	65**	59**
Employment by Industrial Sector ^a			
Manufacturing	27	14**	14**
Agriculture	22	15**	3**
Low-skilled services	19	25**	32**
Construction	17	16**	19**
Other	10	16**	21**
Education/health services/public admin.	5	14**	11**

^aincludes only those who are employed.

** indicates characteristics are statistically significantly different from new destination areas at the .01 level.

Note: All analyses are restricted to Latino immigrants between the ages of 16 and 64.

Source: Unless noted otherwise, data source is the American Community Survey 2005–2006.

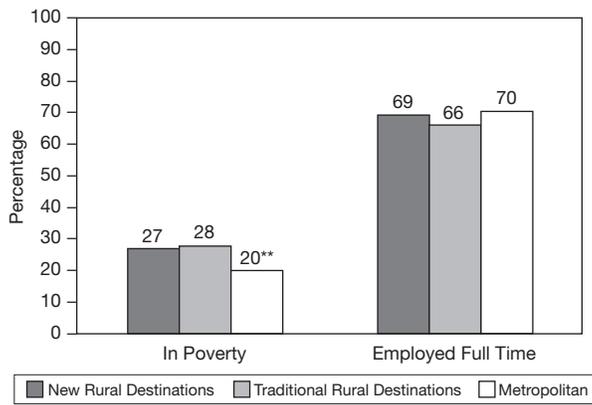
education, compared with 40 percent in traditional rural destinations and just 30 percent in metropolitan areas. Twenty-nine percent of Latino immigrants in new rural destinations have lived in the U.S. for five or fewer years, compared with 18 percent in traditional rural areas and 21 percent in metropolitan areas.

Integrating Latino Immigrants in Rural Areas

Economically, Latino immigrants in new rural destinations are similar to immigrants in traditional destinations, despite their demographic disadvantages. They are as likely to be employed full time and to live in poverty, relative to Latino immigrants in traditional rural destinations (see Figure 2). Latino immigrants' median hourly wage of \$9.16 is statistically significantly higher than the median hourly wage of Latino immigrants in traditional rural destinations (\$8.94). In contrast, Latino immigrants in metropolitan areas have higher median hourly wages (\$10.20) and lower poverty rates, relative to new rural destinations.

There are striking differences by destination in measures of social integration, including home ownership, linguistic isolation, and citizenship. Latino immigrants

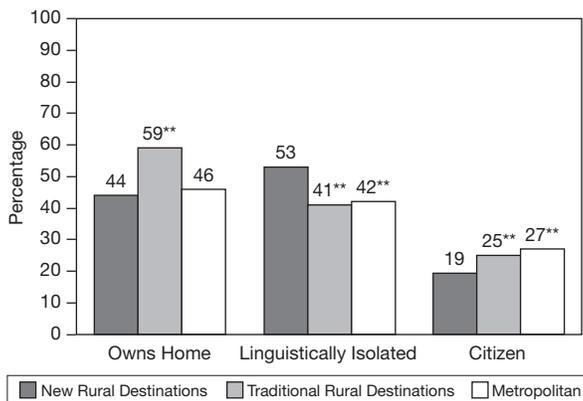
Figure 2: Economic Integration Measures by Destination, 2005–2006



** indicates that the outcome differs significantly from new rural destinations at the .01 level.
 Note: All analyses are restricted to Latino immigrants between the ages of 16 and 64.

in new rural destinations are less likely to own a home than are Latino immigrants in traditional rural destinations (Figure 3), though their home ownership rate is similar to that for metropolitan immigrants. New rural Latino immigrants experience higher levels of linguistic isolation (that is, living in a household in which no one over age 13 speaks English well) and lower levels of citizenship, relative to immigrants in other destinations.

Figure 3: Social Integration Measures for Latino Immigrants by Destination, 2005–2006



** indicates outcome is significantly different from new rural destinations at the .01 level.
 Note: All analyses are restricted to Latino immigrants between the ages of 16 and 64. Home ownership is defined as living in an owner-occupied home. Data on individual level home ownership are not available.

Social and Economic Integration

Immigrants in new rural destinations are likely disadvantaged, relative to those in other destinations, by their lower education levels and shorter residence in the U.S. We examined how immigrants with similar characteristics fare across destinations using logistic regression and controlling for demographic character-

istics, to calculate odds ratios for economic and social integration outcomes for immigrants living in new rural destinations relative to those in traditional rural destinations and in metropolitan areas. Table 2 shows the odds ratios of each outcome for Latino immigrants in new rural destinations relative to those in traditional rural destinations. It also shows the odds ratios of each outcome for Latino immigrants in new rural destinations relative to those in metropolitan areas.

TABLE 2 INTEGRATION MEASURES BY DESTINATION, CONTROLLING FOR DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS		
Integration Outcomes	Odds Ratio for Immigrants in New Rural Destinations Compared with	
	Traditional Rural Destinations	Metropolitan Areas
Poverty	0.8**	1.3**
Employed Full Time	1.3**	1.0
Owns Home	0.8**	1.3**
Linguistically Isolated	1.3**	1.1**
Citizen	1.0	1.0

** indicates odds ratio is statistically significant for new rural destinations at the .01 level.
 Notes: Analyses are restricted to Latino immigrants between the ages of 16 and 64. Controls for birthplace, length of residence in the U.S., length of stay in current residence, gender, age, marital status, presence of child, and education are included in the regression models. The model for full-time employment includes only immigrants in the labor force.

Latino immigrants in new rural destinations fare better economically, as measured by poverty levels and full-time employment status, relative to their counterparts in traditional rural destinations with similar characteristics. Immigrants in new rural destinations are significantly less likely to be poor (odds ratio of 0.8) and more likely to be employed full time (odds ratio of 1.3). In contrast, immigrants in new rural destinations are more likely to be poor than those in metropolitan areas (odds ratio of 1.3), but they are equally likely to work full time. Hourly wages are statistically similar across traditional and new rural destinations but are significantly higher in metropolitan areas (not shown).

On the other hand, Latino immigrants in new rural areas fare worse on social integration measures than their counterparts in traditional rural areas. Latino immigrants in new rural destinations are less likely than immigrants in traditional rural destinations to own a home (odds ratio of 0.8), though they are more likely to own a home than are immigrants in metropolitan areas (odds ratio of 1.3). Latino immigrants in new rural destinations are significantly more likely to be linguistically isolated than those in traditional rural destinations (odds ratios of 1.3) or metropolitan areas (odds ratio of 1.1). After controlling for demographic characteristics, citizenship rates are similar across destinations.

These results highlight differences in integration patterns across destinations for Latino immigrants with similar demographic characteristics. Latino immigrants in new rural destinations are more economically secure than their counterparts in traditional rural destinations in terms of lower poverty and higher full-time work rates. On the other hand, home ownership is lower among immigrants in new rural destinations compared with traditional rural destinations. Patterns for metropolitan areas are generally reversed: Latino immigrants there earn higher wages, experience lower poverty, and are just as likely to be employed full time as those in new rural destinations, but they are less likely to own their homes. Latino immigrants in new rural destinations are linguistically more isolated relative to their counterparts in both other areas.

What Lies Ahead

Many rural areas are struggling with how to respond to rapid, unexpected, and recent immigrant population growth. This study sheds light on issues germane to integration of new immigrants into rural communities in the U.S.

Compared with those living in traditional rural destinations, Latino immigrants of similar age, education level, and length of residence in the U.S. who live in new rural destinations are faring better economically. This may reflect that Latino immigrants are often attracted to new rural destinations because of the growth in employment opportunities there. In particular, the high rate of employment in manufacturing (27 percent) may signify the availability of full-time, stable, well-paying jobs for immigrants in new rural destinations.

At the same time, Latino immigrants in new rural destinations experience strikingly low levels of citizenship and high levels of linguistic isolation, potentially hindering access to social services and job opportunities. Furthermore, tensions in receiving communities have often centered on speaking English in schools and other public spaces.

Despite their economic advantages, immigrants in metropolitan areas are *less likely* to own their homes than those in either new or traditional rural areas, possibly because homes in rural areas are typically cheaper. This finding suggests that the lower cost of living—and presumably higher quality of life made possible by home ownership—will continue to draw immigrants to rural areas where there are employment opportunities.

Limitations

Our analysis has three limitations. First, no data are available to examine differences in Latino immigrants' legal status by destination. Unauthorized immigrants have been at the center of many debates, and this analysis does not shed light on their integration into

rural areas. Second, the analysis does not determine the direction of causality between place of residence and integration outcomes. Some integration measures, such as gaining citizenship, may occur prior to moving to one's current residence. However, other measures of integration, such as home ownership, employment, and income, can be assumed to occur after moving to a particular area. Finally, the data described in this brief are for 2005-2006. Since that time, the housing market and the economy have worsened, which could affect immigrant economic well-being and integration. Future analyses will be needed to examine immigrant integration, given recent shifts in the economy.

Data and Methods

Data. All analyses presented in this brief are based on the combined 2005 and 2006 American Community Survey (ACS), one percent Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS) data. The two years of data were combined to create a 2 percent sample of the U.S. population and thereby increase sample sizes. Data sets on immigrants in rural areas are limited, and the PUMS data sets for the ACS and decennial Censuses, with their large sample sizes, are generally considered the best available data on rural immigrants.

Defining New Rural Destinations. First, areas were identified as rural if they were not metropolitan areas, according to the Census definition of metropolitan. The Census and ACS data rely on Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) based on population sizes—in rural areas these often consist of several contiguous counties. The ACS data identified most PUMAs as either metropolitan, non-metropolitan, or mixed metro, non-metro. We relied on an algorithm developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, to define the “mixed” PUMAs in the data as either metropolitan or non-metropolitan, based on the proportion of the PUMA's population that lived in the underlying metropolitan or non-metropolitan counties.

Traditional and new rural destinations were identified by examining the proportion of rural residents who were of Latino descent in each state in the 1990 Census and in the 2005–2006 American Community Survey. Rural areas of states were identified as traditional rural destinations if on average 10.3 percent of county populations (one-half of a standard deviation above the mean county proportion across all states) were Latino in 1990. To identify new rural destinations, growth rates in the proportion of rural residents who are Latino among all counties between 1990 and 2005–2006 were examined. New rural destinations were those that had a change in the average county growth of more than 3.4 percent, which is one-half of a standard deviation above the mean growth rate across all counties. States identified by this method as being traditional and new destinations are generally

consistent with those identified through other methods or studies. The primary difference is our categorization of Florida as a new destination. Florida is generally considered a traditional metropolitan destination for Latino immigrants; however, an examination of rural areas in Florida suggests that only recently have they become destinations for Latino immigrants.

Sample Sizes. Our analyses were restricted to Latino immigrants ages 16 to 64, which includes 86 percent of Latino immigrants, in order to focus on adult immigrants of working age. Typically adults make the decision whether to immigrate, while children do not, and the process of immigration is often driven by employment opportunities. Those living in group quarters are excluded from ACS data. Sample sizes were 6,173 for new rural destinations; 6,786 for traditional rural destinations; and 201,953 for metropolitan areas.

Measures of Integration. The following measures were used as integration outcomes:

Full-time work: The individual worked more than 1,750 hours per year (at least 35 hours per week for 50 weeks per year) during the previous year. Full-time work was only measured for those in the labor force.

Poverty: The individual lives in a family with annual income below the federal poverty level, which was \$19,350 for a family of four in 2005.

Wages: Hourly wages for the most recent job were only measured for those who reported non-zero wages.

Linguistic isolation: No household member over age 13 speaks English very well.

Citizenship: The immigrant is a naturalized U.S. citizen.

Home ownership: The individual lives in a home that is owner-occupied. Data on individual level home ownership are not available in the ACS.

Statistical Analyses. All statistical tests accounted for clustering at the household level when estimating standard errors. All statistical tests were calculated for the .05 level. Logistic regression was used to estimate odds ratios. Ordinary least squares regression was used for the analysis of wages, which were transformed to log wages to account for the skewed distribution of wages. Weights provided with the ACS data were used in all analyses.

Odds Ratio. An odds ratio is a way to quantify the relative chances that immigrants in new rural destinations will have an outcome, compared with immigrants living

in the other destinations. An odds ratio of one represents “even odds,” meaning there is no difference between groups in the likelihood of the outcome. An odds ratio less than one means immigrants in new rural destinations are less likely to have the outcome relative to those in the comparison group (either traditional rural or metropolitan areas, depending on the column in Table 2). For example, in the first column and first row, the odds ratio of 0.8 means that Latino immigrants in new rural destinations are 80 percent as likely (approximately 20 percent less likely) to be in poverty compared with their counterparts in traditional rural destinations. An odds ratio greater than one means that Latino immigrants in new destinations are more likely to have the outcome, relative to those in the comparison group. For example, in the first row and second column of Table 2, the odds ratio of 1.3 indicates that Latino immigrants in new rural destinations are 30 percent more likely to be in poverty, relative to their counterparts in metropolitan areas.

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