

# Latinos in america research paper examples

[Sociology](#), [Immigration](#)



Despite its wide usage, the term Latino has no precise definition, rather its meaning depends on the context of use. Understanding the meaning of the term is imperative as there are several terms often used as its synonyms. Terms such as Hispanic and Chicano are in some contexts used interchangeably with Latino, despite the fact that they all refer to different people with different cultures (Delgado, 12). The confusion of the terms is based on the emphasis on the shared origin or heritage, while at the same time ignoring other differences. In deed the term Hispanic was coined in the 1970s to add a new race to the existing two, and effectively lamped all people with a shared origin (Delgado, 11).

Delgado (2007) in providing what he considers a good definition of the term, states that the term is used in reference to people from Spanish-speaking countries, whether citizens of the United States or immigrants (13). This definition is not strictly speaking precise, as to some extent subsumes the definition of Hispanic. However, this paper adopts this definition with a restriction to people of Latin America.

It is also important to note that classifying such people as Latino does not mean that they are a homogeneous group. As a matter of fact, there are over 70 sub groups within this term, key among them Guatemalans, Nicaraguans, and Panamas, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans among others. Though this may lead one to conclude that all Latinos came or migrated to America, it is imperative to note that the origin of Latinos in America is intertwined with the origin of Anglo Americans, and to some extent African - Americans. The contemporary America was fashioned by English and Spanish settlers who arrived in native America from the early 1500s (Gonzalez, 4). Each of

these settlers left distinct marks, key among them the shaping of Latin Americans and Anglo Americans. The Latin Americans, or Latinos, owe their origin to the Spanish colonization, whereas the Anglo Americans trace their origin to the English. Despite this common history, the Latinos and Anglo Americans are invariably in conflict (Gonzalez, 4), which mirrors the historical rivalry between the Spanish and the English.

Contemporarily the rivalry is not about finding colonies, but about recognition and equality; economically, politically and socially. The increasing Latino population has become fodder for more conflict, with some people perceiving it as an eminent takeover of America by Latinos. This perception has led to what has been referred to as suppressing the 'Latino threat' (Gracia, 7). This fear has led to perception of Latinos as immigrants or at least not part of America, and posing a threat to the American society. The debate about 'Latino Threat' has also caused conflict among Latinos and Hispanics. Whereas the two share common heritage, they are nevertheless different in many ways (Bergad and Laird, 7). In deed both Latinos and Hispanics dislike the lumping together of their races since the generalization leads to stereotypes. An understanding of the history of Latin Americans can address some of the issues precipitating the 'Latino threat' Historically, Latinos have been a minority group and as such have experienced the downsides of being a minority group. As a minority, the poverty level among the Latino has always been high coupled with the attendant lack of social amenities. Throughout the nation's history Latinos have agitated for equality and recognition, particularly during the era of civil movement.

In the 1960s, the Chicano Movement fought for the civil and political rights of Latinos. It however became too politicized and radical to the extent that it started agitating for the return of land that was lost in the era of Mexican war (Rosales, 23). This radical stand hampered the struggle for rights as the government considered the Movement as a threat to the security of the nations. Even among the Latinos the Movement lost support due to the radical stand. Accordingly, the struggle for equality and recognition took a downward trend.

In the last two decades however, the Latino have become vocal on their rights. This time the struggle is different as they have more resources, influence, and numbers. Of these resources, numbers is the most crucial. As per the 2010 census, Latinos accounted for 16 per cent of the population, which is slightly over 50 million, effectively making Latinos the largest minority group in the country (as per the census African Americans number slightly over 37 million). The increase accounted for the bigger share of the country's population growth, at 56 per cent. Of these numbers Mexicans are the majority followed by Puerto Ricans.

Having numbers means that Latinos can get political attention, and indeed both the Democrats and Republicans have sought the attention and support of the Latino. Both parties have adopted policies and measures aimed at getting the support. For instance, even though traditionally the Republicans spent little on adverts targeting Latinos, in 2000 Bush spent more on such adverts than the Democratic candidate Al Gore (Bedolla, 14).

The numbers however have caused fear of a possible takeover in the future. Chavez (2013) highlighting this fear records that there is a conspiracy theory

that the Latinos want to recoup the Southwest (1), which was lost during the Mexican war. This theory is fueled by the fact that the Southwest, especially Arizona, Texas, and California accounted for more than half of the total number of Latinos.

Besides the current numbers, the rate of increase has raised concerns over immigrants in the nation, especially in relation to Mexican immigrants. To curb the increase, several states have adopted strict laws and policies on immigration, key among them Arizona (Chavez, 1). Even though the Supreme Court in *Arizona v. U. S.* struck down a bigger part of the law, nevertheless the ideals and policies behind it still remain. What is ironical in the immigration debate is that the government has historically been actively involved in the immigration of Latinos into America, even at times encouraging it and favoring some immigrants over others (Bedolla, 12). Whereas it is good to be concerned about immigration and population increase, the concern in this context has been fueled by stereotypes, misinformation, and ignorance. For instance, it has led to the perception of all Latinos as immigrants, even those whose origin is U. S. The net effect is that Latinos are perceived as people who are socially and culturally incompatible with the American culture and society; that they are unable to integrate with other races in the American society (Chavez, 17).

The whole idea of 'Latino Threat' presents Latinos as a single and united front. This is not true as they are as divergent as Anglo Americans and African Americans are. Latinos have different views on just about every social issue, indeed many a times they have similar views with the same people that consider them incompatible with the American society.

One outstanding area where Latinos hold differing views is politics. Though majority may have similar views, nevertheless not all of them have similar views. For instance, whereas in 1996 majority of Latinos supported the Democrats, the support dwindled in 2004 and 2006. The support shifted again in the 2008 and 2012 elections where majority of the Latinos supported the Democrats. Key among the reasons for the Democratic support is their policy on immigration. The fact that some Latinos overlooked this and supported Republicans, despite their policy on immigration clearly shows that the Latinos are not a united front as the ‘Latino Threat’ idea propounds.

Even on participation in politics, not all Latinos have the same interest in participation and engagement. For instance, Bedolla (2009) opines that Mexicans and Puerto Ricans tend to shy away from active engagement in politics, whereas Cubans are more actively involved (26). On the same breadth, she argues that the Mexicans and Puerto Ricans are more likely to be involved in political protest than the Cubans (26).

The divergence in views and opinions also applies within the Latino sub groups. For instance, whereas many Puerto Ricans favor statehood, there are some opposed to the idea. The very fact that the referendum conducted on the issue did not have an overwhelming majority points out the divergence in views. Even the territory’s governor, Alejandro Garcia Padilla has been vocal against the commonwealth of Puerto Rico becoming a state. Again, this highlights that Latinos have divergent views even on issues that are pertinent to them, which if the ‘Latino Threat’ ideal was true, they would be united.

It follows then that though Latinos present a challenge to the nation, this challenge should be construed like other challenges facing the nation. It is therefore not right to consider Latinos as a threat. It should not be lost that Latinos play a big role in the development of not only the U. S. but also the neighboring countries. Apart from the foregoing role in politics, Latinos also play an important role economically and socially.

Economically, Latinos have an estimated \$ 1 trillion buying power, and this is estimated to reach \$ 1. 5 trillion by 2015. This added to the human capital they provide highlights their economical importance. In terms of culture, the Latino culture has added flavor to the American culture. Latino foods are slowly becoming favorite dishes. Their music too not only provides entertainment but also employment. Outside the U. S. Latinos living in the country influence the political and economical scenes. For instance, Dominicans living in the U. S. to a large extent influence the political scene in their mother country. Having experienced best practices, they export the same to their countries, with the effect that these nations are slowly embracing ideals such as democracy and good governance.

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