

Latino Children: A Majority Are U.S.-Born Offspring of Immigrants

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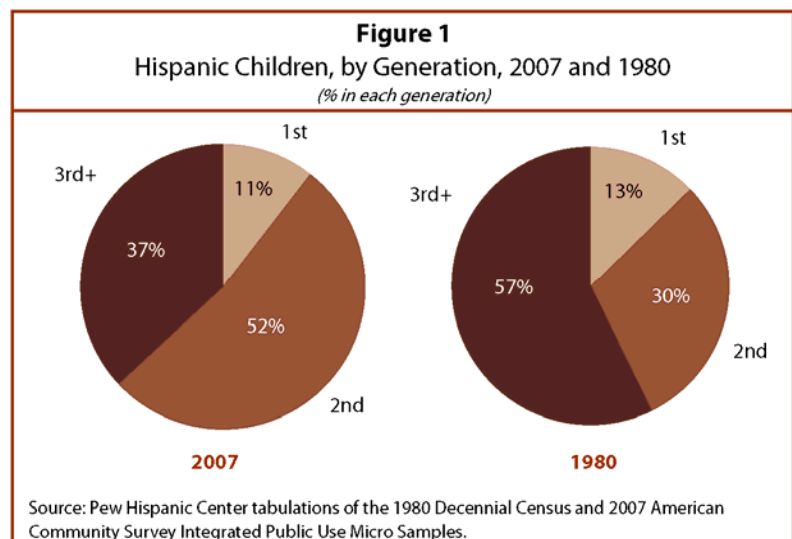
Executive Summary

Hispanics now make up 22% of all children under the age of 18 in the United States—up from 9% in 1980—and as their numbers have grown, their demographic profile has changed.

A majority (52%) of the nation’s 16 million Hispanic children are now “second generation,” meaning they are the U.S.-born sons or daughters of at least one foreign-born parent, typically someone who came to this country in the immigration wave from Mexico, Central America and South America that began around 1980. Some 11% of Latino children are “first generation”—meaning they themselves are foreign-born. And 37% are “third generation or higher”—meaning they are the U.S.-born children of U.S.-born parents.

In 1980, only three-in-ten Latino children were second generation, while nearly six-in-ten were in the third generation or higher. These shifts are noteworthy because many social, economic and demographic characteristics of Latino children vary sharply by their generational status. A Pew Hispanic Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data finds that:

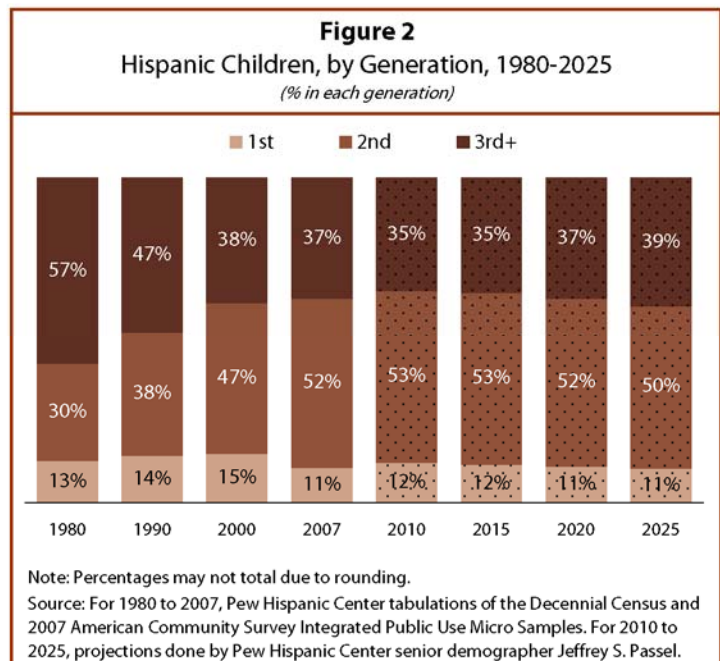
- 43% of first-generation Latino children, 21% of those in the second generation and 5% in the third generation or higher are not fluent in English.
- 47% of first-generation Latino children have parents who have less than a high school education, compared with 40% of second-generation children and 16% of Latino children in the third generation or higher.
- 34% of first-generation Latino children live in poverty, compared with 26% of those in the second generation and 24% in the third generation or higher.



- 69% of first-generation Latino children live in married-couple families, compared with 73% of second-generation children and just 52% in the third generation or higher.

Most of these data reflect the classic pattern of socioeconomic gains for immigrant families from one generation to the next. However, there are also some contrary trends. As indicated above, the chances of being raised by a single parent are much greater among Latino children in the third generation or higher than among first- or second-generation Latino children.¹

Another characteristic that separates Latino children along generational lines is their legal status. Building on earlier research², the Pew Hispanic Center estimates that 7% of all Hispanic children are unauthorized immigrants. But this share varies sharply by generational status. Two-thirds of the 1.7 million foreign-born Hispanic children are unauthorized, while none of the 6 million Hispanic children in the third generation or higher are unauthorized (as the U.S.-born children of U.S.-born parents, by definition they are U.S. citizens at birth). As for those in the middle—the second generation—about four-in-ten have at least one unauthorized immigrant parent and are therefore living in a family whose immigration status is legally mixed.



¹ On a number of other social- and health-related indicators, children of Latino immigrants experience better outcomes than do Latino children in the third or higher generation. For example, the children of immigrants are less likely than the children of U.S.-born Latinos to have low birth weights, to die within the first year of life or to experience a variety of childhood health problems (Hernandez, 1999). In addition, Hispanic adolescents in the third generation or higher are more likely than the children of immigrant parents to use cigarettes, alcohol or illegal drugs and to engage in delinquent or violent behaviors (Harris, 1999).

² See Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn. “[A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States.](#)” Washington, D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center (April 2009).

Projections by the U.S. Census Bureau indicate that by 2025, nearly three-in-ten children in this country will be of Latino ancestry. Pew Hispanic Center population projections indicate that the generational composition of Hispanic children will change yet again between now and then. Today's large cohort of second-generation Hispanic children will eventually form families and produce third-generation offspring. The Center's projections show that the share of Hispanic children who are second generation will likely peak not much above the current level of 52% and then begin falling roughly a decade from now. The share of Hispanic children who are third generation or higher will likely hit bottom at 35% around 2015 and then begin rising. Given past trends, this change in the generational composition of Hispanic children could well have an impact on their employment, educational and social outcomes in future years.

About this Report

This report presents findings from several existing and new Pew Hispanic Center analyses of U.S. Census Bureau data as well as Pew Hispanic Center population projections. The analysis of the legal status of Hispanic children underlying Table 1 utilized the augmented March 2008 Current Population Survey. See Passel and Cohn (2009) for further details. The methods and assumptions underlying the generational projections of Hispanic children from 2010 to 2025 are described in detail in Passel and Cohn (2008). The historical and current profile of Hispanic children derives from new analyses of Decennial Census and American Community Survey data. See the data appendix for further details.

A Note on Terminology

Unless otherwise noted, this report uses the following definitions of the first, second, and third or higher generations:

First: Foreign-born; an individual who is not a U.S. citizen at birth or, in other words, who is born outside the U.S., Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories and whose parents are not U.S. citizens.

Second: An individual who is a U.S. citizen at birth (including people born in the United States, Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories, as well as those born elsewhere to parents who are U.S. citizens) with at least one first-generation parent.

Third or higher: An individual who is a U.S. citizen at birth with both parents U.S. citizens at birth.

The terms “Latino” and “Hispanic” are used interchangeably in this report, as are the terms “foreign born” and “immigrant.”

About the Authors

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Jeffrey S. Passel is a senior demographer at the Pew Hispanic Center. He is a nationally known expert on immigration to the United States and on the demography of racial and ethnic groups. In 2005, Dr. Passel was made a fellow of the American Statistical Association, which cited his outstanding contributions to the measurement of population composition and change. He formerly served as principal research associate at the Urban Institute’s Labor, Human Services and

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1. The Legal and Generational Status of Hispanic Children

The nation’s 16 million Hispanic children and its 31 million Hispanic adults have very different generational and legal status profiles. Only 11% of Hispanic children were born outside of the United States (Table 1). In contrast, 55% of Hispanic adults were born in another country and migrated to the United States. As a result, far fewer Hispanic children than Hispanic adults are unauthorized immigrants. Building on prior research on the size and characteristics of the undocumented immigrant population (Passel and Cohn, 2009), the Pew Hispanic Center estimates that 1.1 million Hispanic children, or about 7% of all Hispanic children, are unauthorized immigrants (based on March 2008 data collected by the Census Bureau). In contrast, about one-fourth of all Hispanic adults are undocumented migrants.

The Growth of Hispanic Children

The nation’s 16 million Hispanic children will likely continue to be one of our fastest-growing child populations. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that the number of Hispanic children will rise to 24 million by 2025 (Census Bureau, 2008). The share of children who are of Latino origin is projected to rise to 29% in 2025 from 22% today. In contrast, the Census Bureau projects that the share of children identifying as either non-Hispanic white or non-Hispanic black will continue to fall.

Table 1
Hispanic Children Less than 18 Years of Age, 2008

Generation and Legal Status	Population	%
Total	15,902,000	100.0
First Generation: Foreign Born	1,677,000	10.5
Unauthorized	1,107,000	7.0
Naturalized citizens and legal permanent residents	570,000	3.6
Second Generation: Native Born of at Least One Foreign-born Parent	8,226,000	51.7
Native born of at least one unauthorized parent	3,264,000	20.5
Native born of authorized parent(s)	4,962,000	31.2
Third Generation or Higher: Native Born of Native Parents	5,999,000	37.7

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations from augmented March 2008 Current Population Survey. See Passel and Cohn (2009) for details.

Undocumented Children and Public Benefits

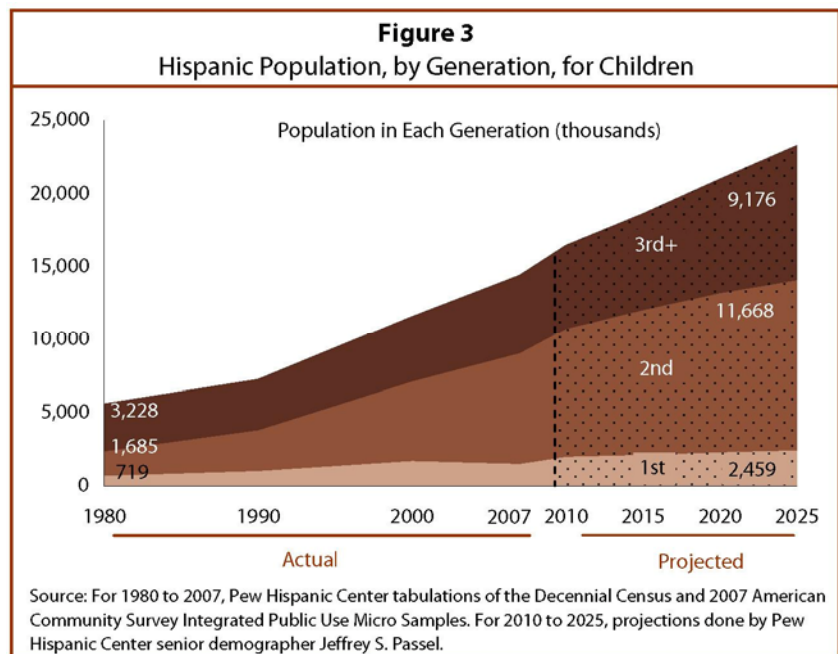
Undocumented children are eligible to receive some public benefits but not others. They are legally entitled to public education from kindergarten through high school; to some emergency medical care; and to child and school nutrition programs under the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) legislation. They are not eligible for many other federal programs that provide a safety net for children, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as the food stamp program), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), non-emergency Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). Also, undocumented students are not eligible for federal Pell grants for postsecondary education and in most states are not offered in-state tuition at public colleges and universities.

Nearly nine-in-ten Hispanic children under the age of 18 were born in the United States and are therefore U.S. citizens by birth. However, many are not far removed from their immigrant roots. About half (52%) of all Hispanic children are members of the “second generation,” that is, they are the U.S.-born children of at least one immigrant parent. A majority of this large Hispanic second-generation child population is living with a parent or parents who are legal immigrants. However, a sizable minority are in families whose legal status is mixed, as about two-in-ten Hispanic children are U.S.-born children of unauthorized immigrant parents. Finally, about four-in-ten Hispanic children (6 million) are the U.S.-born children of parents who were born in the U.S. By definition, these children are members of the “third generation” or higher, and their families have been in the United States for at least a generation. Some of these children’s families have been in the country for many generations. In fact, persons of Hispanic descent resided in the United States before the American Revolution. The Decennial Census did not consistently count Hispanics until 1970, but the 1930 Census counted 1.3 million “Mexicans” residing in the U.S. (Census Bureau, 1993).

2. The Past and Future Generational Status of Hispanic Children

In 1980, about 6 million Hispanic children were in the U.S. By 2008, there were about 16 million. As Figure 2 shows, the strong growth in the number of Hispanic children since 1980 has been accompanied by important compositional changes in their generational status. In 1980, a majority of Hispanic children were third generation or higher. As a result of the large immigrant inflows of young Hispanic adults in the 1980s and 1990s, the number of Hispanic children of immigrant parentage sharply increased. The number of second-generation Hispanic children in particular has markedly grown. The size of the Hispanic child second-generation population more than quadrupled from 1980 to 2007 (Figure 3), and the share of children who are second generation rose from 30% in 1980 to 52% by 2007.

Although the *number* of Hispanic children who are themselves immigrants has grown and is projected to continue to do so until at least 2025, the *share* of Hispanic children who are immigrants already appears to have peaked around 2000 at about 15% of Hispanic children.



Based on population projections of Pew Hispanic Center senior demographer Jeffrey S. Passel, the share of Hispanic children who are second generation—currently 52%—will soon peak at about 53%. This reflects the fact that the large Hispanic second generation born since 1990 is maturing. As they age into their 20s and 30s and form families, they will produce a growing third-generation

Hispanic child population. Indeed, the projections suggest that after reaching its nadir at 35% around 2015, the share of Hispanic children who are third generation or higher will begin increasing. From 2010 to 2025, the Hispanic child second-generation population is projected to grow by 33%. Meanwhile, the Hispanic child population in the third generation or higher is projected to grow by more than 60%.

This generational profile for Hispanic children differs from that of the entire Hispanic population. While the share of Hispanic children who are second generation may soon peak, the share of the entire Hispanic population that is born in the U.S. to at least one immigrant parent has not peaked. Demographic projections suggest that among the entire Hispanic population, the second-generation share will not peak until at least 2050 (Passel and Cohn, 2008).

3. A Profile of Hispanic Children

The socioeconomic background of Hispanic children is one important set of factors influencing their educational success and overall well-being. Table 2 presents a recent snapshot of the characteristics of Hispanic children by generation. The characteristics in the lower part of Table 2 refer to the nature of the child's household, not the child per se. First- and second-generation children can reside in the same household (that is, they may be siblings), and so some degree of similarity can be expected in the nature of the household characteristics of first- and second-generation children.

For several key characteristics, there are large differences among Hispanic children by their generational status. Foreign-born Hispanic children are twice as likely as their native-born counterparts to speak English less than "very well." About one-fifth of Hispanic second-generation children speak English less than "very well." U.S.-born Hispanic parents overwhelmingly use English at home and transmit English language skills to their children before the onset of kindergarten (Nord and Griffin, 1999). Accordingly, only 5% of Hispanic children in the third generation or higher speak English less than "very well." English ability matters in part because it is highly related to educational test score performance (Nation's Report Card, 2007) and high school completion (NCES, 2004).

Table 2
Characteristics of Children, by Race, Ethnicity and Generation Status, 2007
(percent, unless otherwise noted)

	ALL ¹	NON-HISPANICS			All ²	HISPANICS		
		Race				Generation		
		White	Black	Asian/PI		First	Second	Third +
Total (in thousands)	73,913	41,955	10,565	2,990	15,332	1,533	7,567	5,346
Gender								
Male	51	51	51	50	51	53	51	51
Female	49	49	49	50	49	47	49	49
Age Groups								
Younger than 5	28	27	27	28	32	8	35	34
5 to 14	54	55	54	55	53	62	53	53
15 to 17	18	19	19	17	15	30	12	14
Enrolled in School (ages 3 and older)								
Not enrolled	10	10	9	9	13	11	13	12
Enrolled	90	90	91	91	87	89	87	88
Language (ages 5 and older)								
Speaks only English at home	80	94	95	37	32	4	12	68
Speaks English very well	15	4	4	47	50	54	67	27
Speaks English less than very well	5	1	1	16	18	43	21	5
Hispanic Origin								
Mexican	---	---	---	---	69	71	75	61
Puerto Rican	---	---	---	---	9	0	1	21
Cuban	---	---	---	---	2	3	2	2
Dominican	---	---	---	---	2	4	3	1
Central American	---	---	---	---	6	10	9	2
South American	---	---	---	---	4	10	5	1
Other Hispanic	---	---	---	---	7	2	4	12
Poverty Status³								
Not in poverty	82	89	66	88	73	66	74	76
In poverty	18	11	34	12	27	34	26	24
Household Income								
Less than \$25,000	19	11	38	12	27	31	27	26
\$25,000 to \$49,999	23	19	27	18	32	38	35	26
\$50,000 to \$74,999	20	22	16	18	20	17	20	20
\$75,000 to \$99,999	14	17	9	15	10	7	9	13
\$100,000 or more	24	31	11	37	12	7	9	17
Parental Education Levels⁴								
Less than high school graduate	11	4	13	8	32	47	40	16
High school graduate	23	20	32	14	29	27	29	29
Some college	31	32	36	18	25	12	19	36
Bachelor's degree or higher	35	44	19	59	15	14	12	19
Household Type								
Married couple	68	77	36	83	64	69	73	52
Female householder	24	16	56	12	27	18	19	38
Male householder	7	6	7	5	9	11	8	9
Non-family household	1	1	1	0	1	2	0	1

¹Includes children not shown separately, such as Native Americans and people of mixed race. ²Includes native-born Hispanic children whose generation status can not be identified. ³For detailed information on how poverty status is determined, see <http://usa.ipums.org/usa-action/variableDescription.do?mnemonic=POVERTY>. Due to the way in which the IPUMS assigns poverty values, these data will differ from those that might be provided by the U.S. Census Bureau. ⁴Parental education levels are shown only for children living in a household with at least one parent. When a child resides with both parents, the highest level of education was used to assign parental education.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the 2007 American Community Survey IPUMS sample

Hispanic children who are third generation or higher have much better educated parents than their first- and second-generation peers. Almost 85% of children in the third generation or higher have parents who completed high school, and 55% have parents who have completed at least some college education. Hispanic children of foreign-born parents tend to have much less educated parents. For example, only 60% of second-generation children have parents who have completed high school and only 31% of these children have parents who have completed at least some college.

The household earnings and income levels of first- and second-generation Hispanic children are lower than those of children in the third generation or higher. About 30% of Hispanic children in the third generation or higher live in households whose incomes are at least \$75,000. The comparable figure for first- and second-generation Hispanic children is just 16%. More than one-third of foreign-born Hispanic children live in poverty, versus about one-quarter of second-generation children and those in the third generation or higher.

Although the basic socioeconomic factors suggest that Hispanic children in the third generation or higher may have a leg up on their peers, not all the advantages lie with the children of parents who were born and educated in the U.S. For example, Hispanic children in the third generation or higher are twice as likely as other Hispanic children to live in a female-headed household (Table 2). Single-mother families are more likely to live in poverty, and adolescents residing with both biological parents tend to display better educational outcomes and less risky behavior than do adolescents raised in other family arrangements (Ellwood and Jencks, 2002).

One of the most extensive investigations of the well-being and outcomes of the children of immigrants found that “Along a number of important dimensions, children and adolescents in immigrant families appear to experience better health and adjustment than do children and youth in native-born families” (Hernandez, 1999). With the exception of obesity, second-generation Hispanic adolescents seem to have fewer physical health problems than their counterparts in the third generation or higher.

In conclusion, many important aspects of the lives of Hispanic children vary by generational status. Projections suggest that the family context of Hispanic children is changing and that in future years a greater share will be born into families that have been in the United States for at least a generation and whose parents will have been born and educated in the U.S. This compositional change will likely affect the educational and social outcomes of Hispanic children—perhaps for the better, perhaps not.

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Appendix A: Generational Status of Historical Hispanic Children

Table 2, Figure 1, and the historical portions (1980 to 2007) portions of Figures 2 and 3 are based on new Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of Decennial Census data and the 2007 American Community Survey (ACS). These data provide the self-reported citizenship status of each child. Thus, whether a Hispanic child is or is not a U.S. citizen at birth (and thus “first generation”) can be ascertained for every child. However, among children who are citizens at birth (second generation or higher), there is some imprecision in determining their generation. The Decennial Census data do not ask respondents about their parents’ place of birth. To determine generational status for U.S. citizens at birth, this analysis followed the common methodology of examining the citizenship status of parents residing in the household (Landale, Oropesa and Llanes, 1998; Bleakley and Chin, 2004). The Integrated Public Use Micro Samples (IPUMS) version of these data provide convenient linkages of a mother’s and father’s characteristics (including nativity) to children in the household. Hence, we can establish the generational status for native-born children who reside with at least one parent. But some Hispanic children who are citizens at birth do not reside in households; and even if they do reside in a household, they may not reside with a parent. The generational status of these children in the second generation or higher is unknown. Appendix Table A1 reports the generational status of Hispanic children from 1980 to 2007 broken down into four generational categories: first generation, second generation, third generation or higher, and “generation unknown.” The number of Hispanic children who were citizens at birth and do not reside with any parent in a household (the “generation unknown” category) is not zero, but it also is not a large percentage.

The percentages reported in the text abstract from the fourth “generation unknown” category. That is, the figures report the generational percentages among Hispanic children who have a known generational status.

Table A1
Hispanic Children Less than 18 years of Age, 2007, 2000, 1990 and 1980

Generation	2007		2000		1990		1980	
	Population	%	Population	%	Population	%	Population	%
Total	15,332,000	100.0	12,248,000	100.0	7,632,000	100.0	5,848,000	100.0
Foreign Born	1,533,000	10.0	1,736,000	14.2	1,046,000	13.7	719,000	12.3
Native Born of at Least One Foreign-born Parent	7,567,000	49.4	5,417,000	44.2	2,791,000	36.6	1,685,000	28.8
Native Born of Native Parents	5,346,000	34.9	4,466,000	36.5	3,467,000	45.4	3,228,000	55.2
Generation Unknown ¹	886,000	5.8	629,000	5.1	328,000	4.3	216,000	3.7

Note: ¹Refers to native-born children who do not reside with either their mother or their father.
Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the Decennial Census and 2007 American Community Survey Integrated Public Use Micro Samples.