

## About the Researchers

**Gia Elise Barboza** is a senior research analyst at the Institute for Latino Studies. A native of Los Angeles, California, she received her PhD in American politics and political methodology from Michigan State University. She also has a JD and a master's degree in family studies from MSU. In addition to holding several teaching positions at MSU, she was adjunct faculty at the Law College where she taught Analytical Method for Lawyers: Statistics. Her interests include immigrant political incorporation, political behavior, racial politics, and quantitative methods for public policy and analysis. She has written extensively on issues such as Latino national identity, political socialization in the family, and the relationship between ties to one's country of origin and political assimilation in the United States.



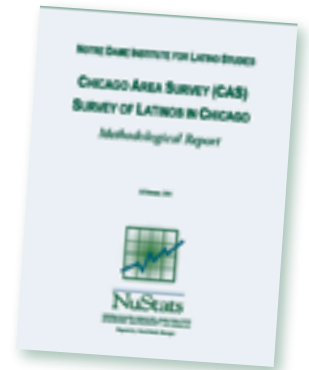
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## What Do Black And White Residents of Metropolitan Chicago Think about Latin American and Mexican Immigrants? Findings from the Chicago-Area Survey



### Introduction

In a recent research brief we reported that white and black residents of Chicago have generally positive views of immigrants, regardless of their national origin.<sup>1</sup> In this issue we turn our attention to perceptions of Latin American immigrants, the largest immigrant group in Chicago. According to the 2000 Census, half of all foreign-born persons in the six-county metro area come from Latin America. Of these Latin American immigrants, nearly 9 in 10 (85 percent) are of Mexican origin. Given the size and composition of the Latin American immigrant population in the metropolitan Chicago area, any discussion of attitudes towards and perceptions of immigration would be lacking without specific reference to Latin American and Mexican immigrants in particular. Accordingly, this report utilizes data from the Chicago-Area Survey (CAS)<sup>2</sup> to examine how non-Latino respondents<sup>3</sup> perceived the impact that Latin American immigrants are having on the economic, social, political, and cultural life of the region and seeks to explore the extent to which public opinion matches the available evidence.

1 Roger Knight, Timothy Ready, and Gia Elise Barboza, "Attitudes toward Immigration: Findings from the Chicago-Area Survey," *Latino Research @ ND*, Volume 4, Number 5, June 2007, Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame.

2 The 2003 Chicago-Area Survey was a randomized sample of 1,512 Latino, 411 white and 403 black households in metropolitan Chicago (Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will counties). The lines of inquiry and questionnaire were designed by a group of scholars working with the Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame. Field work was conducted by NuStats Corporation of Austin, Texas. Nearly 21,750 households were eligible for interviewing. A total of 2,326 interviews were completed among Latinos, whites, and blacks in the Chicago region. Respondents were 18 years and older; interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish. Survey data in this report are from the complete datasets of non-Latino black and white respondents.

3 The survey included a total of 814 respondents, of whom approximately half self-identified as white and half as black. The sample is not representative of all non-Latinos residing in the metropolitan Chicago area.

## Blacks' and Whites' Perceptions of the Effects of Latin American Immigration on Illinois

Non-Latino respondents were asked to indicate their beliefs regarding the specific ways in which immigrants contribute to or detract from Illinois society. Table 1 presents the distribution of responses to the following statement: “For each of the following, are immigrants from Latin America making [the situation] in Illinois better, worse, or not having much effect?” The results suggest that respondents’ opinions regarding the effects that immigrants from Latin America have on Illinois vary noticeably by race.

As can be seen from Table 1, Latin American immigrants receive very high marks with respect to their cultural contribution to Illinois. The majority of white (66 percent)

and black (57 percent) respondents believe that Latin American immigrants have made the situation better in terms of food, music and the arts.

There are some interesting racial differences, however, with respect to Latin American immigrants’ contributions to the Illinois economy. Approximately a third of whites believe that immigrants from Latin America positively impact the economy while 40 percent believe that immigrants worsen the economy and 29 percent believe they do not affect the economy much. On the other hand, only 19 percent of blacks believe that Latin American immigrants make the economy better, while 35 percent suspect that they make it worse and 47 percent do not see

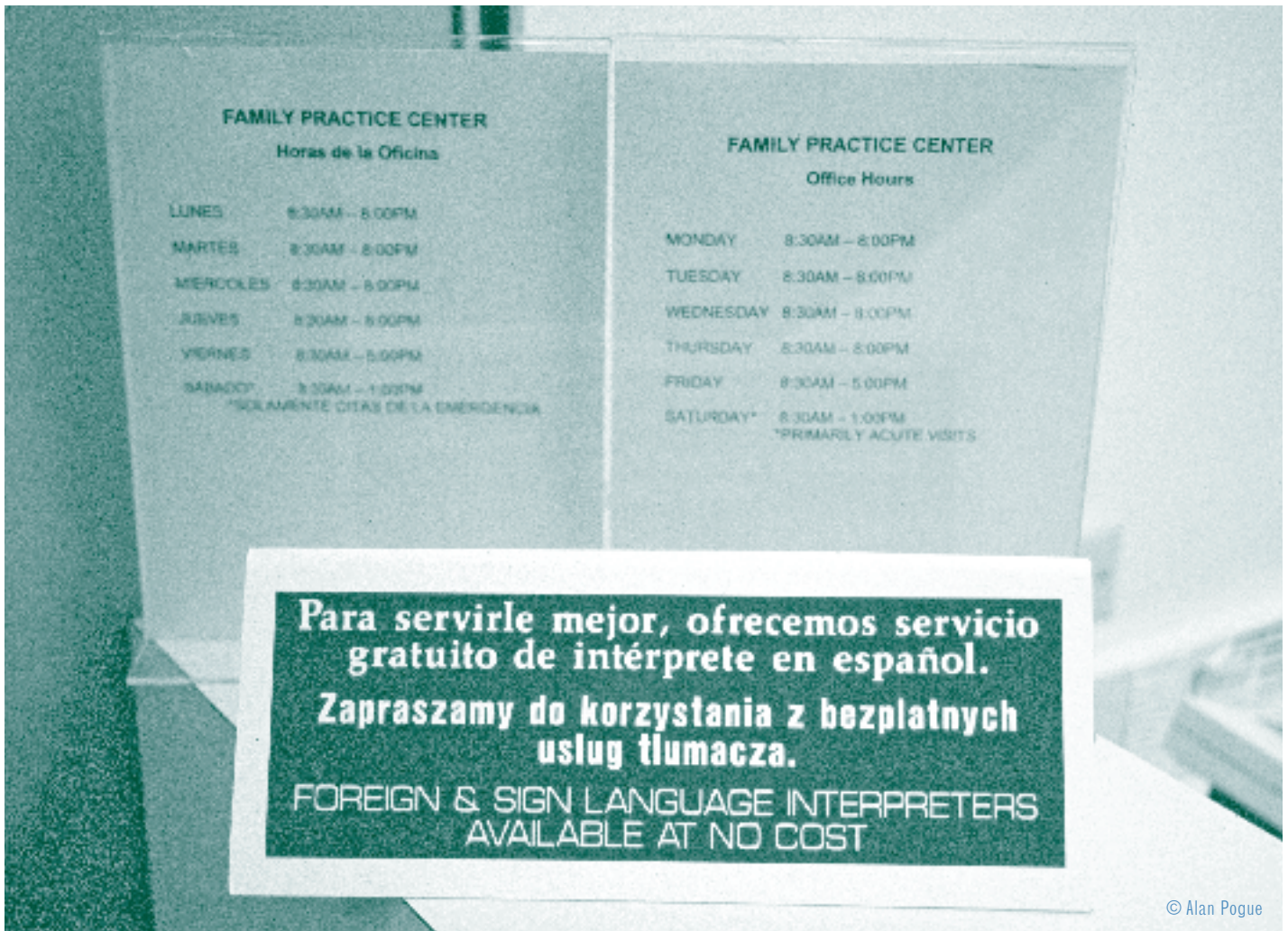
much economic impact due to immigrants. Forty-three percent of African Americans believe that opportunities for both themselves and their families are limited by Latin American immigrants, with only 8 percent claiming that opportunities are better. Smaller but comparable percentages of whites believe that their own opportunities are limited (32 percent) or expanded (7 percent). The majority of whites (62 percent) and the plurality of blacks (49 percent) claim that Latin American immigrants do not have much effect on their own opportunities or those of their family.

There are also notable differences regarding the perceived consequences of Latin American immigration on the quality of

**Table 1**  
**Responses to “For each of the following, are immigrants from Latin America making [the situation] in Illinois better, worse, or not having much effect?” by Race**

Group	White			Black		
	Better	Not Much Effect	Worse	Better	Not Much Effect	Worse
Food, music and the arts	66%	29%	5%	57%	37%	6%
Economy	32	29	40	19	47	35
Quality of life	32	43	25	19	65	16
Social and moral values	35	42	22	13	71	16
Politics and government	26	41	33	19	63	18
Quality of public schools	16	33	52	19	64	17
Opportunities for you and your family	7	62	32	8	49	43
Taxes	12	42	47	5	43	52
Crime	6	28	67	4	28	68

Source: Data in Tables 1 and 2 are from the 2003 Chicago-Area Survey. Discrepancies are due to rounding.



the public schools. The majority of whites (52 percent) believe that Latin American immigrants negatively influence the quality public education whereas only 17 percent of blacks feel likewise. Both blacks and whites are significantly likely to hold that immigrants from Latin America negatively impact taxes (52 percent and 47 percent, respectively) and that they increase crime in Illinois (68 percent and 67 percent, respectively). Additionally, only one-third of whites believe that Latin American immigrants

enhance either quality of life or the social and moral values in Illinois with even fewer blacks agreeing (19 percent and 13 percent respectively). It is worth mentioning that with the exception of limiting opportunities, taxes, and crime (where blacks were more likely to respond negatively than whites), blacks' responses tended to be more neutral (i.e., they answered "not much effect") than whites' when they were asked about the impact of Latin American immigration on Illinois.



The three wavy lines shown throughout this publication are a symbol from ancient times representing the human intellect in action. From *The Book of Signs*, collected, drawn, and explained by Rudolf Koch (London: The First Edition Club, 1930, page 8).

## Attitudes towards Mexican Immigrants among Blacks and Whites

Beyond their general perceptions of the impact of Latin American immigration in Illinois, survey respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree with a number of positive and negative statements specifically about Mexican immigrants. A quick look at Table 2 reveals that racial differences about attitudes towards Latin American immigrants become even more pronounced in the case of attitudes towards Mexican immigrants. For example, whereas whites mostly agree with positive statements about Mexican immigrants, blacks are more divided. Similarly, whereas whites disagree or are evenly divided about

negative images about Mexican immigrants, blacks mostly agree.

In terms of positive characteristics, both whites and blacks agree that Mexican immigrants fill jobs otherwise hard to fill, have strong family values, and engage in entrepreneurial activities. On the other hand, while whites mostly agree that Mexican immigrants are hardworking, talented, and productive citizens, over half of blacks disagree. Both black and white respondents seem divided on the issue whether Mexican immigrants help the economy by providing low-cost labor.

While outside the scope of our discussion, these findings beg the

question of how blacks and whites can and do have such dramatic differences of opinion regarding the impact that Latin American immigrants in general, and Mexicans in particular, are having on local communities.

Black and white responses to the negative traits listed in Table 2 tend to differ: Blacks are consistently more likely to strongly agree/agree with the negative statements listed while whites are consistently more likely to strongly disagree/disagree. At least 70 percent of blacks agree that Mexican immigrants are the source of increasing unemployment, take jobs from American workers, drive

**Table 2**  
**Responses to “Please tell me whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with each of these statements: Immigrants from Mexico [...],” by Race**

Group	White		Black	
	Strongly Agree; Agree	Strongly Disagree; Disagree	Strongly Agree; Agree	Strongly Disagree; Disagree
Positive Statements				
Fill jobs otherwise hard to fill	74%	26%	76%	24%
Are hard working and talented	70	30	45	55
Have strong family values	90	10	86	14
Are productive citizens	68	32	42	58
Start new businesses	80	20	85	15
Help the economy by providing low-cost labor	55	45	35	65
Negative Statements				
Drain government services	57	43	70%	30
Are too demanding in their push for equal rights	30	70	70	30
Drive American wages down	42	58	75	25
Take jobs from American workers	48	52	77	24
Threaten national security	12	88	20	80
Cause higher unemployment	45	55	78	22
Divide the country	30	70	30	70



down wages, drain government services, and are too demanding in their push for equal rights. This confirms our previous finding on Table 1, that one of the main concerns for blacks is the impact of immigrants on both taxes and the economy.

By contrast, half or more of whites disagree with all those statements with the exception of government services, where three in five white respondents agree that Mexican immigrants constitute a burden. On the other

hand, both blacks and whites disagree that Mexican immigrants represent a threat to national security or that they are dividing the country. Interestingly, whites consistently appear to agree with the positive statements about Mexican immigrants and are prone to disagree with the unfavorable depictions. Blacks, on the other hand, are more divided on the positive assertions and overwhelmingly agree with the unfavorable attitudes towards Mexican immigrants in Chicago.

## Discussion

As indicated, CAS survey responses reveal that attitudes towards Latin American and Mexican immigrants depend on the specific issue under consideration. Several studies explain the very different perceptions of the influences of Latin American and Mexican immigrants in terms of the level of contact (the frequency, intensity, or kind of interaction in their daily lives) between Latinos and non-Latinos.<sup>4</sup> This interaction, in turn, is believed to affect non-Latinos' perceptions of Latin American immigrants' impact on the sociopolitical and economic environment. Below we briefly review some of the types of interdependencies that currently exist between non-Latinos and Latinos in the context of these environments. Our intent is merely to cast doubt on some widely held assumptions among non-Latinos about their Latino neighbors.

First, a key issue for economists is the impact of immigration on American wages.<sup>5</sup> Recently, an open letter to President Bush and the Congress signed by 500 economists from across the ideological spectrum tackled this contested economic matter. Both American and foreign signatories agree that while some native-born Americans may experience

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, J. H. Johnson and M. L. Oliver, "Interethnic Minority Conflict in Urban America: The Effects of Economic and Social Dislocations," in Fred L. Pincus and Howard J. Ehrlich, eds., *Race and Ethnic Conflict: Contending Views on Prejudice, Discrimination, and Ethnviolence* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994); and C. J. Tolbert and R. Hero, "Race/Ethnicity and Direct Democracy: An Analysis of California's Illegal Immigration Initiative," *Journal of Politics* 58 (3): 806–18 (1996).

<sup>5</sup> David Card, an economics professor at UC-Berkeley, has studied patterns in different US cities and concludes that immigration has not lowered wages for American workers. David Card and Ethan G. Lewis, "The Diffusion of Mexican Immigrants during the 1990s: Explanations and Impacts," NBER Working Paper No. 11552, Cambridge, Mass., National Bureau of Economic Research, 2005. George Borjas, an economist at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, argues that immigration reduced the wages of high school dropouts by 7.4 percent between 1980 and 2000. George J. Borjas and Lawrence F. Katz, "Evolution of the Mexican-Born Workforce in the United States," NBER Working Paper No. 11281, Cambridge, Mass., National Bureau of Economic Research, 2006.



In support of the mission of the Institute for Latino Studies and the Inter-University Program for Latino Research (IUPLR), the Research team provides policy-relevant information and analysis about Latino communities and issues affecting their well-being. The team both contributes to studies originating from the Institute's other programs and centers and from IUPLR member institutions and carries out its own independent projects.



economic losses due to immigration, vastly more Americans benefit from the contributions that immigrants make to the United States economy.<sup>6</sup> Given that the blacks in our sample seem more concerned than the whites about the impact of immigration on the economy, we can infer that they may be more negatively affected by it. Nonetheless, a majority of blacks as well as whites recognize at least some of the positive economic contributions of immigrants, including taking jobs otherwise hard to fill and starting new businesses. A recent report by the Center for an Urban Future describes how immigrant entrepreneurs are driving the economic growth in many cities around the country.<sup>7</sup> Despite certain reservations, on balance a majority

of both blacks and whites recognize the economic contributions to the local economy being made by Mexicans and other Latin American immigrants.

Criminologists, public policy analysts, and other social scientists have also explored the possible connection between immigration and crime. Two major studies suggest that immigration does not increase crime: The incarceration rate of native-born Americans is more than five times that of the foreign-born population (3.51 percent vs. 0.68 percent).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Mexican immigrants have the lowest incarceration rates among Latin American immigrants (0.70 percent). A report produced by the Federal Reserve Bank in Chicago found substantially lower institutionalization

6 Independent Institute, "Open Letter on Immigration," [www.independent.org/newsroom/article.asp?id=1727](http://www.independent.org/newsroom/article.asp?id=1727).

7 Jonathan Bowles and Tara Colton, "A World of Opportunity," Center for an Urban Future, February 2007, [www.nycfuture.org/images\\_pdfs/pdfs/IE-final.pdf](http://www.nycfuture.org/images_pdfs/pdfs/IE-final.pdf).

8 Rubén G. Rumbaut, Roberto G. Gonzales, Golnaz Komaie, and Charlie V. Morgan, "Debunking the Myth of Immigrant Criminality: Imprisonment among First- and Second-Generation Young Men," Migration Policy Institute, June 2006, [www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/print.cfm?ID=403](http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/print.cfm?ID=403).



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rates among immigrant populations across all racial and ethnic groups, including Latinos.<sup>9</sup> According to a Chicago-based study, first-generation immigrants are less likely to commit violence than are third-generation Americans.<sup>10</sup> Despite respondents' beliefs about the impact of immigration on crime, they are more likely to agree that immigrants have strong family values and have at least some positive impact on the quality of life in Illinois. This disparity reinforces the possibility that survey respondents have a misperception of the actual amount of crime perpetrated by immigrants in the region.

In addition to the impact of immigration on the economy and the safety and security of our communities, pundits, scholars and the public alike have expressed increasing concern about the effect of immigration on taxes and government services. States and cities around the country have taken this issue seriously, and some have found surprising results. For instance, in North Carolina in 2006 Latinos

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9 Kristin Butcher and Ann M. Piehl, "Why Are Immigrants' Incarceration Rates So Low? Evidence on Selective Immigration, Deterrence, and Deportation," Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, November, 2005, [papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=871071](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=871071).

10 Robert J. Sampson, Jeffrey D. Morenoff, and Stephen Raudenbush, "Social Anatomy of Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Violence," *Am J Public Health* 95: 224–32 (2005).

contributed \$756 million in state taxes, while they represented about \$817 million in state costs. However, Kasarda and Johnson claim that the net cost to the state budget is mitigated by the aggregate economic benefits the Latino population brings to that state.<sup>11</sup> Beyond the Latino population in general, government agencies have also considered the economic impact of the undocumented Latino population specifically. A controversial study undertaken by the Texas Comptroller estimated that despite a \$425 million net cost to the state, the absence of the estimated 1.4 million undocumented immigrants in Texas would have represented a loss of \$17.7 billion dollars in Gross State Product in 2005.<sup>12</sup> These are just a couple of examples of studies designed to assess the fiscal contribution of immigrants (at the state level). The fact that two-thirds of white respondents deem Mexican immigrants to be productive citizens (Table 2) seems positive, since one component of being a productive citizen in this country is contributing to the local economy.

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11 John D. Kasarda and James H. Johnson Jr., "The Economic Impact of the Hispanic Population on the State of North Carolina," Frank Hawkins Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise, January 2006.

12 Carole K. Strayhorn, "Special Report: Undocumented Immigrants in Texas," Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, 96–1224, December 2006.

## Conclusion

Overall, these results indicate that individual policy preferences regarding immigration are complex, must be understood on an issue by issue basis, and seem to reflect the perceived level of threat or benefit posed by immigrants to natives in different life domains. We should also bear in mind that, like their pre-1965 counterparts, newcomers from Latin America will ultimately both adopt and transform many of the ideals, preferences, and behaviors of their host communities.<sup>13</sup>

We believe that our analyses facilitate insight into respondents' perspectives as well as generate issues for further research. One of those issues is the idea

that the level and type of contact with immigrants influences public policy preferences about immigrants and immigration. In addition, special attention should be paid to those areas of concern we have identified for each racial group. For instance, the question of the impact of immigration on local economies seems to be a pertinent avenue of research given our current political climate, one that needs to be explored comprehensively and systematically at both the state and local levels. In the end, our hope is that this report provides insight for scholars and policymakers into the issues surrounding immigration and encourages them to think more deeply about these issues and consider them important areas of future research.

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13 Roberto Suro, "Beguiling Mysteries and Known Unknowns: The Research Challenges Posed by the Latino Experience," *Latino Research @ ND*, Volume 3, Number 3, December 2006, Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame.

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## About the Researchers *continued from cover*

**Roger Knight** holds a Bachelor's degree in sociology from the University of Notre Dame, and he has quantitative research experience in a variety of topics regarding the Hispanic population in the United States. In 2006 he became a regular contributor to the National Society for Hispanic Professionals' website. In addition, he has professional experience in qualitative evaluation and research at a large educational institution. Knight has previously held positions in database management and data analysis. His interests lie in research methodologies, particularly in human services evaluation and educational research and, more recently, labor market outcomes and other issues related to Hispanic professionals.



**Timothy Ready** is senior researcher at the Institute for Latino Studies. Before coming to Notre Dame, he was senior program officer in the Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education at the National Research Council of The National Academies. During the 1990s he directed the campaign of the Association of American Medical Colleges to increase racial and ethnic diversity in US medical schools and created a national network of community partnerships to increase the number of students both interested in and academically prepared to pursue careers in the health professions. He was a faculty member in the Department of Anthropology at the Catholic University of America and has researched and written on Latino health and education issues in South Texas, Washington DC, and Chicago.



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