

## Introduction

In the past two decades, the Hispanic population in rural and small-town America has doubled from 1.5 to 3.2 million and now makes up the most rapidly growing segment of nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) county residents.<sup>1</sup> Despite accounting for just 3 percent of the nonmetro county population in 1980, Hispanics contributed over 25 percent of the total nonmetro population increase and over 50 percent of the nonmetro minority population increase during the past two decades. Patterns of Hispanic growth have varied by decade. During the 1980s, when total nonmetro population growth was barely discernible, the nonmetro Hispanic population grew by 27 percent. During the “rural rebound” of the 1990s, when the total nonmetro population grew by 10 percent, Hispanic growth more than doubled to 67 percent (appendix table 2). Emerging residential patterns from this accelerated Hispanic population growth affect hundreds of small towns and rural areas across America.

This report examines Hispanic population growth and changing settlement patterns in rural areas and the consequences and implications of such changes for rural communities. Such patterns are reflected in the following trends from 1990 to 2000:

1. The nonmetro Hispanic population more than doubled in 20 mostly Southern and Midwestern States, with growth rates ranging from 120 to 416 percent (appendix table 2).
2. Of 2,289 nonmetro counties, the number in which Hispanics make up at least 1 percent of the population grew by 636 from 882 to 1,518; the number in which Hispanics make up at least 10 percent grew by 86, from 230 to 316.
3. Since 1990, Hispanic population growth has prevented overall population decline in over 100 nonmetro counties, many of which lost population during the 1980s.
4. Half of nonmetro Hispanics now reside outside the Southwest, the traditional settlement area.

A significant proportion of Hispanics in new nonmetro destinations outside the Southwest are recent U.S. arrivals with relatively low education levels, weak English proficiency, and undocumented status who are employed in low-wage jobs with limited economic mobility. Consequently, they are more likely to reside in isolated low-income areas (Atilas and Bohon, 2002, forthcoming; Chavez, 1998; Dale et al., 2001; General Accounting Office, 1998; Gouveia and Stull, 1995; Griffith, 1995).

Traditional models of U.S. immigrant incorporation meld cultural assimilation with economic and spatial mobility. Immigrants and their children who initially cluster for mutual support gradually adopt the host country’s culture, improve their economic circumstances, and leave such ethnic concentrations for housing among English-speaking native residents (Burstein, 1981; Gordon, 1964; Massey, 1985; Nelli, 1970; Thernstrom, 1973; Ward, 1971).

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<sup>1</sup> We use the terms “rural” and “non-metro” interchangeably throughout this report as an editorial convention. Technically, rural areas are defined by the Census, while nonmetro counties are defined by the Office of Management and Budget. The two geographic spheres overlap somewhat but remain quite distinct.

For some, residential location is subject to financial constraints. Others choose to live in particular areas to be among people of similar ethnic or racial backgrounds while possessing the economic means to live in more affluent and better-served areas (Massey and Denton, 1993). Nevertheless, literature on racial and ethnic segregation documents historical institutional arrangements, public policies, and discriminatory practices that isolated specific native and foreign-born groups and continue to be felt by subsequent generations throughout the United States (see Myrdal, 1944; Spear, 1967; Zunz, 1982; Montejano, 1987; Massey and Denton, 1988, 1993).

Residential separation in rural America warrants attention by policymakers because of its impact on the well-being of minority groups and rural communities themselves.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of how such residential patterns occur, they strongly influence socioeconomic well-being. Many characteristics of daily life depend on location, including the quality of public services and schools, personal safety, and home values. These resources often accrue to people according to their socioeconomic achievement or status, and, in turn, influence economic mobility prospects for themselves and their children.

While much evidence suggests socioeconomic improvement with second- and third-generation Hispanics, rural communities face the current and critical issue of social, economic, and civic incorporation for recent Hispanic arrivals. Such integration is particularly important as Hispanics become the Nation's largest and fastest growing minority group, with new arrivals increasingly populating nonmetro counties. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, foreign-born workers constituted nearly half of the net increase in the U.S. labor force in the last half of the 1990s (Mosisa, 2002).

Policymakers and local officials have increasingly been assisting these new residents to become integrated and effective citizens (Jones, 2003). If these issues are ignored, rural areas may face the prospect of harboring growing pockets of disadvantaged residents whose children already make up a significant portion of future employees, taxpayers, and citizens. Second-generation children of immigrants constitute a group whose numbers in the past decade have grown roughly seven times faster than children of native-born parents (Hernandez and Charney, 1998). The majority of Hispanic children are citizens because they were born in the United States. Yet, like their parents, they face significant challenges in attaining economic well-being, social integration, and health care (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Hernandez, 1999; Hernandez and Charney, 1998).

This report uses data from the 1980, 1990, and 2000 Censuses of Population to explain recent Hispanic residential patterns during a decade of rapid population growth and dispersion in nonmetro counties. Our study considers three broad research questions:

*What factors have affected Hispanic population growth and dispersion in rural areas?*

We examine nonmetro population distribution and change to identify both established and new, rapidly growing Hispanic destinations.

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this report, we refer to spatial distance between non-Hispanic Whites and Hispanics using the term "separation" rather than "segregation." However, much of the literature we reference in this report uses the term "segregation," which refers to institutionalized arrangements which through a variety of social, legal, or political means result in a group's spatial isolation from others. Although such arrangements historically characterized the urban and rural experience of U.S. Blacks and Hispanics, it remains unclear the extent to which they describe recent residential settlement patterns of Hispanics in rural communities (Alba and Logan, 1993; Allen and Turner, 1996).

Nonmetro counties with rapidly growing Hispanic populations are scattered throughout most of the Nation, and we expect their residential patterns to differ from those of established Hispanic counties, mostly in the Southwest.

*Are socioeconomic characteristics of Hispanics associated with recent settlement patterns?*

Because relative socioeconomic position influences residential separation, we compare characteristics of Hispanics with the dominant nonmetro group—non-Hispanic Whites—across a range of county types.

*Was residential separation affected by recent patterns of nonmetro Hispanic population growth?*

We analyze residential separation at the county, place, and neighborhood levels. We compare changing levels of separation in established and newly emerging Hispanic counties because such a comparison provides useful insights on the prospects for social and economic integration of rural Hispanics. We also contrast findings for nonmetro and metro counties to provide a relative basis for understanding the scale of residential settlement patterns in rural areas compared with more familiar urban patterns.

At the end of this report, we discuss some implications of our findings for the incorporation of recent Hispanic arrivals and steps that rural communities are taking to facilitate this process. These implications are not addressed in our analysis but are based upon a large existing body of research.