

Report: Latinos divided by nation of origin

Josh Dulaney, Staff Writer San Bernardino County Sun

Posted:

DailyNews.com

An advertising executive says Spanish speakers with Venezuelan accents are best when selling to Latinos in the U.S. because their accents are the most neutral.

A political analyst says Latinos are not single-issue voters and those who court them should keep that in mind on the campaign trail.

Those insights come amid a new analysis of census data released today by the US2010 Project at Brown University which shows a growing diversity among Latino groups in the U.S. that is marked by class and regional differences.

The implications are wide-ranging as Latinos increase their political and economic power.

"How would a political party reach out to Hispanics?" said John R. Logan, professor of sociology at Brown University. "How will marketers? I think there's a little bit of a fallacy here to think that Hispanics are a single group. "

They aren't. Census reports in the past identified Latinos as Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban, or asked respondents to write in another category.

The Brown University report reallocated a share of "Other Hispanics" to specific national origin groups.

The finding provided striking socioeconomic differences among Latino groups.

Low education and poverty are more common among Guatemalans and Mexicans. Puerto Ricans and those who descend from South America enjoy distinct socioeconomic advantages.

Logan said the differences are in large part due to the circumstances in an immigrant's native country. Some are fleeing impoverished and war-torn nations with corrupt governments. Others may already be well-educated in their homeland and have jobs lined up in the U.S.

Robert Garcia is a 35-year-old city councilman in Long Beach who emigrated illegally as a child with his family from Peru and later became a citizen.

"When anyone emigrates to any country, there absolutely needs to be an understanding that you're in a new place, with new cultures and there's a way things work," said Garcia. "Learning the language and educating yourself are very important to success for any immigrant. "

The Brown University findings were part of an analysis of census data that looked mainly at residential separation among the various Latino groups in the U.S.

The report found that residential segregation remains unchanged among Mexicans in the U.S. as their counterparts from other countries are increasingly dispersed in neighborhoods across the nation.

"It represents to some extent that Mexicans are moving out of those neighborhoods but being replaced by new immigrants," Logan said. "The barrios are pretty entrenched and they're not breaking down. Other than that, I thought it somewhat remarkable the extent to which the residential segregation of other groups has been falling by wide margins. "

As marketers and campaign architects alike ratchet up their efforts to woo Latinos, the Brown University report underscores the notion that those reaching out to them would do well to understand where they live and who they are.

While Mexicans are highly concentrated in the Southwest, 1.3 million live in Chicago, making it the fourth-highest number in the country. More than 70 percent of Mexicans are spread across other parts of the nation, according to the report.

The New York metropolitan area has historically been home to the highest concentration of Puerto Ricans.

But their numbers have dropped from more than a million in 1990 to 900,000 in 2010, and they have seen much growth in places like Chicago and Philadelphia.

The increasing integration of non-Mexican Latinos with whites comes along with a decline in groups where they have been most historically segregated.

Some Latino groups are moving to parts of the country where segregation is relatively lower and declining more quickly.

A move to the suburbs is another reason for declining residential segregation.

Mexicans remain the largest Latino group, with nearly 32 million recorded in 2010. That's up from 13 million in 1990.

Cubans and Puerto Ricans are the next largest Latino groups.

The Brown University report found that groups they refer to as the New Latinos - Dominicans, Central and South Americans - are growing even faster than Mexicans.

They numbered under 3 million in 1990, 5 million in 2000 and now over 8 million.

Some groups are faring far better than Mexicans. Those include Puerto Ricans and Cubans, as well as Argentinians and Venezuelans, who earn much more than Mexicans.

South Americans are generally the highest educated among Latino groups and are less segregated from non-Hispanic whites than Mexicans. Central Americans and Dominicans are far more segregated.

"I'm very taken by the fact that these people are coming from very different origins in terms of country and social class and background, and so they're fitting into American society in different ways," Logan said.

Immigration reform has become the source of a deep fissure in the GOP as Congress fights over what to do with 11 million undocumented workers.

Republicans on one side say granting legal status to undocumented immigrants is an overture that may help a party reeling from President Barack Obama's two-term presidency. Others in the GOP believe legalizing 11 million undocumented workers will spell the end of Republican vitality on the national scene.

One political analyst says Republican hand-wringing over immigration and accompanying calls to gain traction among minority voters is simply a broken record.

"This has been going back to the 1970s," said Claremont McKenna College political scientist Jack Pitney. "The question is whether this effort is going to be different than any preceding one. The Hispanic community

is just as diverse as any other and it may be a stretch to even refer to the Hispanic community as a single community. "

The perception of the Republican Party among Latino voters will change only as its policies do, Pitney said.

"The obvious one is immigration, but apart from that, Republicans need to realize that Hispanic voters are not single-issue voters," Pitney said.

Diversifying the message to Latinos is something advertisers have wrestled with for years.

"It's a big, ongoing question from the marketing perspective," said Jose Villa, president of Sensis, an advertising agency based in downtown Los Angeles. "Typically, marketing to Hispanics is done in a pan-Hispanic way. When a national brand is marketing across the U.S., they don't typically go down to the granular level of nationality. "

That means using actors with supposedly neutral Spanish accents. In most cases, that's Venezuelan, Villa said.

"A Mexican immigrant speaks Spanish very differently than a Cuban living in Miami," Villa said. "And there's been some discussion around is there a prototypical Latino or Latina. Most of the advertising tends to show an image of an olive-skinned person with dark hair. There definitely is a prototype (in advertising). Not everybody will admit to it. "

Reach Josh via email, call him at 909-386-3894.

Copyright ©2010 Los Angeles Newspaper Group.