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Study: Hispanic Groups Assimilating Quickly, Becoming Force in Politics

Wednesday, March 20, 2013 10:56 AM

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A new report examining social and economic trends among Hispanics shows that while Mexicans are still the dominant Hispanic group in the United States, Puerto Ricans, South Americans, and Cubans are assimilating more rapidly.

According to The Wall Street Journal, experts say the growth in certain Hispanic populations could have broad political implications in the years to come.

The Journal reported Wednesday that Honduran, Guatemalan, and Venezuelan populations have been growing more rapidly than Mexicans since 1990, although Mexicans still account for 60 percent of Hispanics in the United States.

These faster-growing groups also have higher education levels and are less segregated than Mexicans, making them an important force in politics and the economy, the Journal noted.

John Logan, co-author of the new report, "Hispanics in the United States: Not Only Mexicans," found the boundaries separating these newer, faster-growing groups from the rest of the U.S. population are breaking down more quickly than those separating Mexicans from other groups.

Logan's report is part of Brown University's U.S. 2010 Project, which analyzed different Hispanic groups, including both immigrants and those born in the United States.

Hispanics have emerged as the fastest-growing voting bloc in the nation, eclipsing African Americans in 2000. The number of Hispanics in the United States has also doubled since 1990.

Experts say that while the long-term political implications of these shifts is unclear, the concept of what it means to be Latino will change as the Hispanic population itself changes and more immigrants give birth to children in the United States.

While Hispanics have often been grouped to mean anyone from Latin America and the Caribbean, political strategists and marketers are now realizing it's important to be aware of the major differences and diverse backgrounds that separate various groups.

Cubans and South Americans, for example, generally live in areas with median incomes and college graduation rates that are on par with white neighborhoods. Conversely, the share of Mexicans with a bachelor's degree is only 7.3 percent, lower than many Hispanic populations.

The groups are also coming to the United States for different reasons, with South Americans usually fleeing unrest or looking to further their education.

Mexican and Central-American immigrants, meanwhile, often come for economic reasons.

John Logan, the report's co-author, said the one characteristic shared by all Hispanic groups is a struggle to integrate into mainstream society.

But he said, "Only South Americans seem to be reaching what I would call modest integration."

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