

# The Herald News

REALITY. DELIVERED DAILY. NOW!

## Census: Latinos are 12 percent of RI population

By DAVID KLEPPER

[Associated Press](#)

Posted Mar 23, 2011 @ 07:15 PM

PROVIDENCE — Rhode Island's Latino community surged over the past decade, according to new census numbers, even as the state ranked second-to-last in the U.S. for overall population growth.

The number of Rhode Islanders of Latino origin shot up 43.9 percent since 2000. Latinos now make up 12.4 percent of the state's population.

Overall, Rhode Island's population rose by 4,200 people to 1,052,567 in 2010, an increase of only 0.4 percent since 2000. That makes the state 49th for population growth in the U.S., ahead of last-place Michigan, the only state to lose population over the decade.

The percentage of Rhode Islanders of non-Hispanic white background dropped 3.9 percent. Whites now compose 81 percent of the state.

The Census Bureau released the figures Wednesday.

"The white population is graying," said John Logan, a sociology professor at Brown University. "The Hispanic population is younger, they're having more children and they're moving into the state in large numbers. The future of the state's population — and the labor force — is now clearly dependent on our attractiveness to Hispanics."

Of the state's larger cities, Providence saw the biggest gains with a population increase of 2.5 percent. Newport's population declined 6.8 percent.

Providence's growth can be attributed to Latinos, who follow much earlier waves of Irish and Italian immigrants. Residents of Latino origin now make up more than one third of the city's residents. Last fall, Providence elected Angel Taveras as its first Latino mayor.

"We need these people," said Juan Garcia, a member of the group Immigrants in Action. "These are hardworking people who run small businesses. They spend money, pay their taxes. They help our economy."

The shifting demographics bring other changes as well. State lawmakers are debating proposals

designed to crack down on illegal immigration. One would direct local and state police to enforce federal immigration law. Another would require businesses to check the immigration status of any new hire against a federal citizenship database.

Supporters say they welcome the state's new residents — so long as they're here legally.

"I don't care if we have 100 or 100,000 illegal immigrants," said state Sen. Beth Moura, R-Cumberland. "They're taking jobs. They're breaking the law. It's unfair to those who came here legally."

Rhode Island's New England neighbors saw higher population growth, though still less than the national average. Connecticut's population increased 4.9 percent since 2000 and Massachusetts posted a 3.1 percent growth rate. Both of those states also saw large increases in their Latino population.

Overall, the nation's population grew 9.7 percent between 2000 and 2010 to 308.7 million.

Copyright 2011 The Herald News. Some rights reserved.