

## Hispanic Geographic Distribution Since 1980

Over 90 percent of U.S. Hispanics live in metro areas, and 8 of the 10 largest U.S. cities have populations that are over 25 percent Hispanic (Guzman, 2001). Domestic migration from the 1950s through the 1980s was dominated by large rural-to-urban flows, as thousands of Hispanics left farm jobs for better paying city jobs (Bean and Tienda, 1987). Census 2000 data indicate that half of all U.S. Hispanics live in just 16 cities, most notably the “gateway” cities of Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Miami, and Houston (Suro and Singer, 2002).

Regionally, both metro and nonmetro Hispanics are highly concentrated in the Southwest; in 1990, over 60 percent lived in just five States: Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas. Historically, Hispanics established agricultural communities in the Southwest while it was still part of Mexico and later provided critical labor inputs in the development of the region’s irrigated agriculture. Many moved to cities as part of the general farm exodus following World War II, yet Hispanics continue to dominate the Nation’s agricultural labor force to this day. A sizable proportion of Hispanic agricultural laborers, especially in California and Arizona, live in metro counties and thus are not included in this analysis of nonmetro population change (see Appendix, “Rural Hispanics in Metro Counties”).

Urban and regional concentration began to weaken in the 1980s as Hispanics dispersed in unprecedented numbers to new destinations. Large Hispanic populations emerged in smaller metro areas as growth rates exceeded those of gateway cities (Suro and Singer, 2002), and sizable Hispanic communities reached nonmetro areas as well (Rochin, 1995). Hispanics constituted less than 5 percent of the total nonmetro population in 1990 but accounted for over 25 percent of its growth from 1990 to 2000. The growth rate of the nonmetro Hispanic population in the 1990s (67.3 percent) more than doubled from the previous decade (26.7 percent) and far outpaced that of nonmetro non-Hispanics (8.1 percent) (fig. 1); it even exceeded that of metro Hispanics (Cromartie and Kandel, 2002). Urban concentrations of Hispanics in 2000 still exceeded 90 percent, but the percentage of U.S. Hispanics residing in nonmetro counties increased between 1990 and 2000 (table 1).

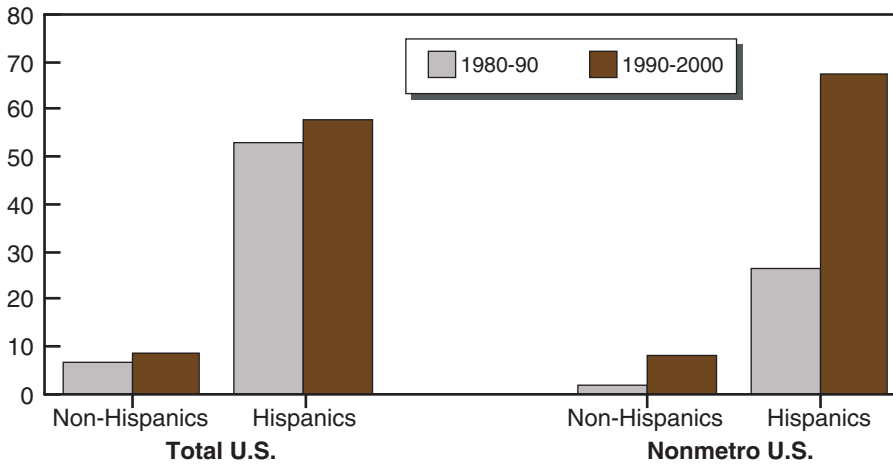
In the majority of southwestern counties, Hispanics make up over 10 percent of the total population and continue to grow through a combination of high natural increase and net immigration. Yet, by the 1980s, Hispanic populations in regions outside the Southwest were growing faster. By the end of the 1990s, the percentage of nonmetro Hispanics in the Southwest had declined from 62 to 51 percent of the U.S. total (fig. 2). In contrast, the proportion of all nonmetro Hispanics in the Midwest and South increased from 22 percent to 34 percent during the past decade.

Compared with non-Hispanics, nonmetro Hispanic population growth in the 1990s was both more widespread and more concentrated. On the one hand, 2,155 nonmetro counties (94 percent) had some Hispanic population growth in the 1990s, compared with only 1,390 counties (61 percent) in the 1980s (fig. 3). While much of this growth was moderate and sometimes consisted of relatively small numbers of Hispanics, it affected communities in every region of

Figure 1

**Rate of population change:  
Hispanics and non-Hispanics, 1980-2000**

Percent



Source: Calculated by ERS using Census 1980, 1990, and 2000 data, SF1 files.

**Table 1—Total and nonmetro Hispanic and non-Hispanic population, 1980-2000**

Ethnicity	Total	Nonmetro	
		---Number---	Percent of total
<b>Hispanic:</b>			
1980	14,603,683	1,492,552	10.2
1990	22,354,059	1,902,418	8.5
2000	35,305,896	3,175,953	9.0
<b>Non-Hispanic:</b>			
1980	211,942,121	48,043,231	22.7
1990	226,355,804	48,995,484	21.6
2000	246,116,081	52,983,373	21.5

Source: Calculated by ERS using 1980, 1990, and 2000 Census data, SF1 files.

the country. This dispersed Hispanic population growth contrasts sharply with the non-Hispanic population decline that occurred in over 700 nonmetro counties during the same period. Metro counties showed similar trends; only 9 lost Hispanic population in the 1990s, while 117 lost non-Hispanic population.

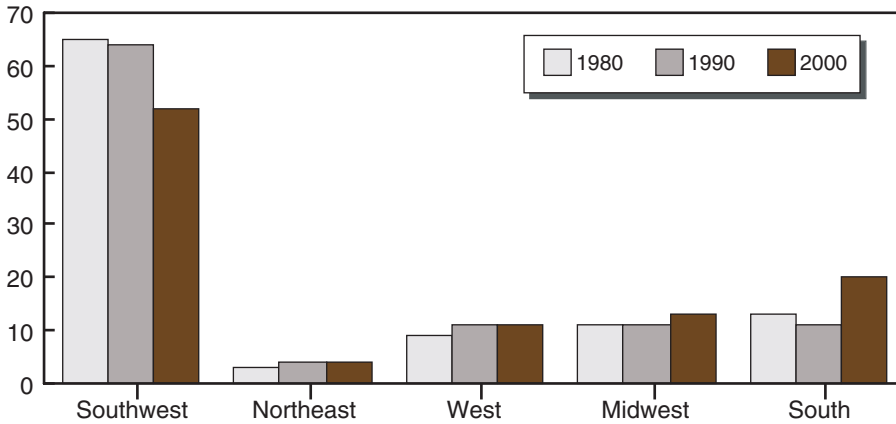
On the other hand, among nonmetro counties that grew during the 1990s, Hispanic population growth was more concentrated in a relatively small number of counties than non-Hispanic population growth. For example, half of all nonmetro Hispanic growth occurred in only 129, or just under 6 percent, of all nonmetro counties. In contrast, half of all non-Hispanic population growth was spread through 213 nonmetro counties.

At the national level, nonmetro Hispanic dispersion over the past decade can best be illustrated with two county maps showing the Hispanic population composition in 1990 and 2000 (figs. 4a-b). The change between the two maps is dramatic; large numbers of nonmetro counties in the South and Midwest increased their Hispanic population, from “less than 1 percent” to “between 1 and 10 percent.” All States with any nonmetro counties have at

Figure 2

**Regional distribution of nonmetro U.S. Hispanic population, 1980-2000**

Proportion of all U.S. Hispanics

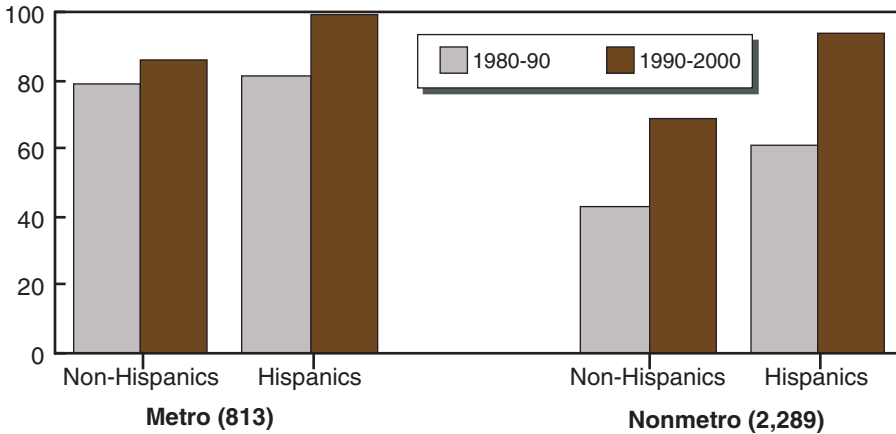


Source: Calculated by ERS using Census 1980, 1990, and 2000 data, SF1 files.

Figure 3

**Percent of metro and nonmetro counties gaining Hispanic and non-Hispanic population, 1980-2000**

Percentage of counties

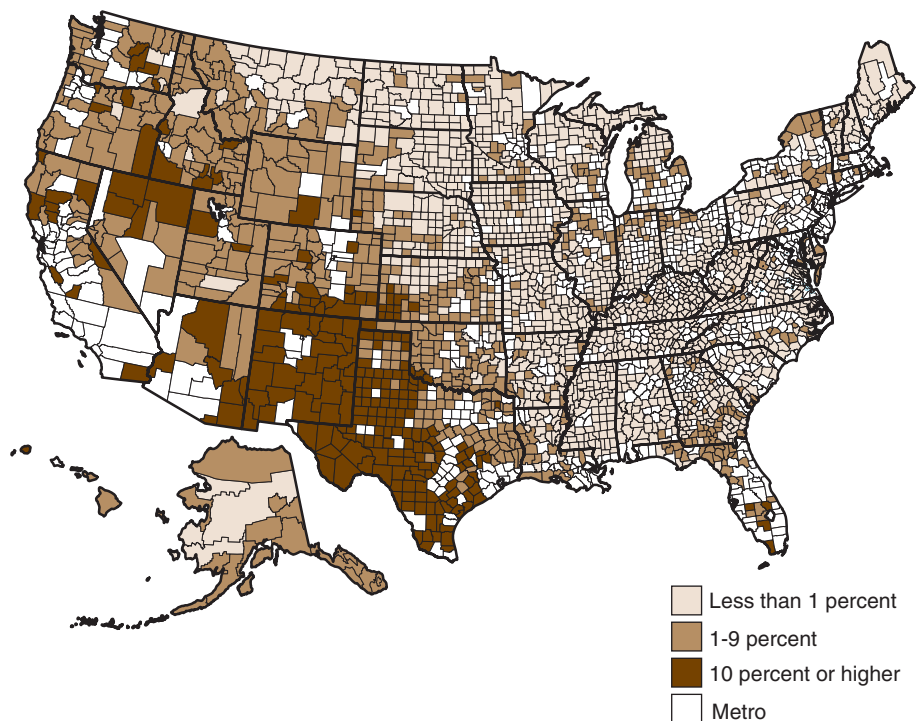


Source: Calculated by ERS using Census 1980, 1990, and 2000 data, SF1 files.

least one such county, and for most States in the South and Midwest, the majority of nonmetro counties saw the Hispanic proportion of their populations climb above 1 percent during the 1990s.

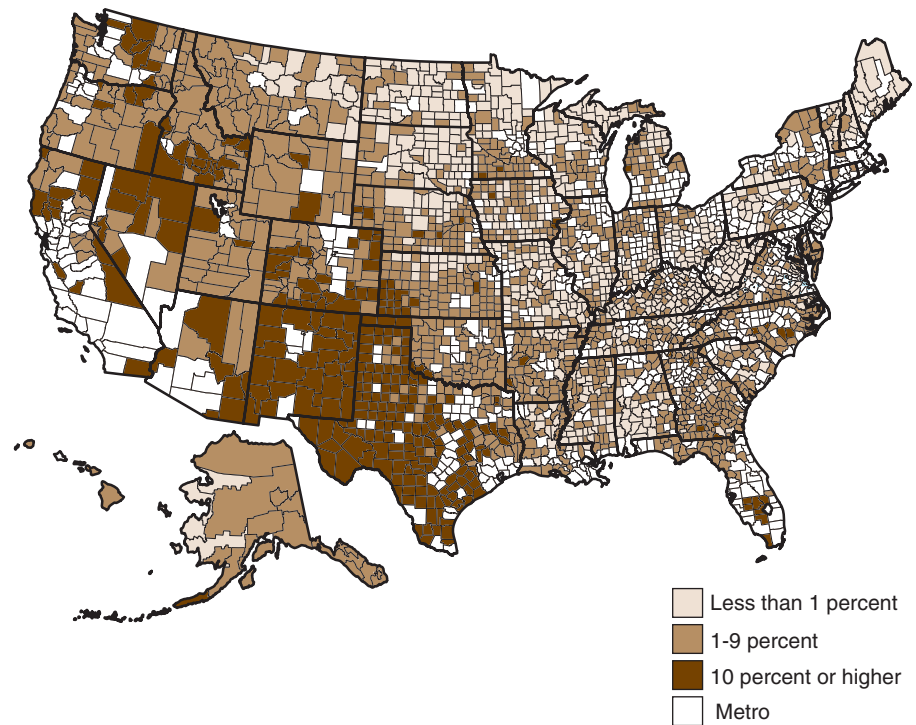
The pattern of moderate but widespread Hispanic population growth has helped stem the pattern of long-term population decline in many rural counties, especially in the Midwest and Great Plains, whose populations have been diminishing from natural decrease and economically motivated outmigration since the 1950s (Fuguitt et al., 1989; Rathge and Highman, 1998). Over 100 nonmetro counties would have lost population between 1990 and 2000 if not for Hispanic growth (fig. 5). Nearly 500 other nonmetro counties also had Hispanic population gains combined with non-Hispanic population declines, but these gains could not prevent population loss.

Figure 4a  
**Hispanic share of total county population, 1990**



Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

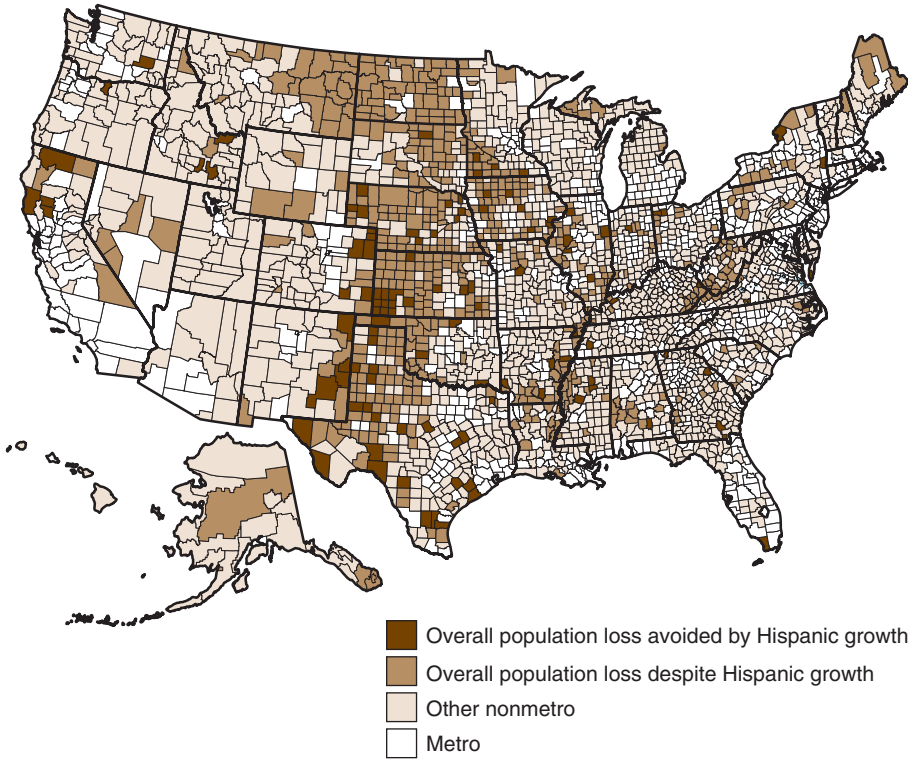
Figure 4b  
**Hispanic share of total county population, 2000**



Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Figure 5

**Nonmetro counties with Hispanic population gain and non-Hispanic population loss, 1990-2000**



Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

These patterns of Hispanic population growth—with simultaneous dispersion and concentration—lead to the identification of three types of nonmetro counties (fig. 6):

**High-growth Hispanic counties.** Between 1990 and 2000, Hispanic population growth in 149 nonmetro counties exceeded 150 percent and totaled at least 1,000 persons. These counties are in southeastern North Carolina, elsewhere in the South, the Midwest, and along the edges of traditional settlement areas, such as in Colorado, Oklahoma, and Utah, and in the Northwest.

**Established Hispanic counties.** In 230 nonmetro counties, 10 percent or more of the population was Hispanic in both 1990 and 2000.<sup>6</sup> Two-thirds of these counties are in Texas and New Mexico, near traditional settlement areas along the Rio Grande Valley and in regions of irrigated agriculture in the Texas panhandle. Traditional settlement areas extend into Colorado and spill over into southwestern Kansas counties dominated by meatpacking. Areas of fruit crops and irrigated agriculture also show up in the Northwest and southern Florida.

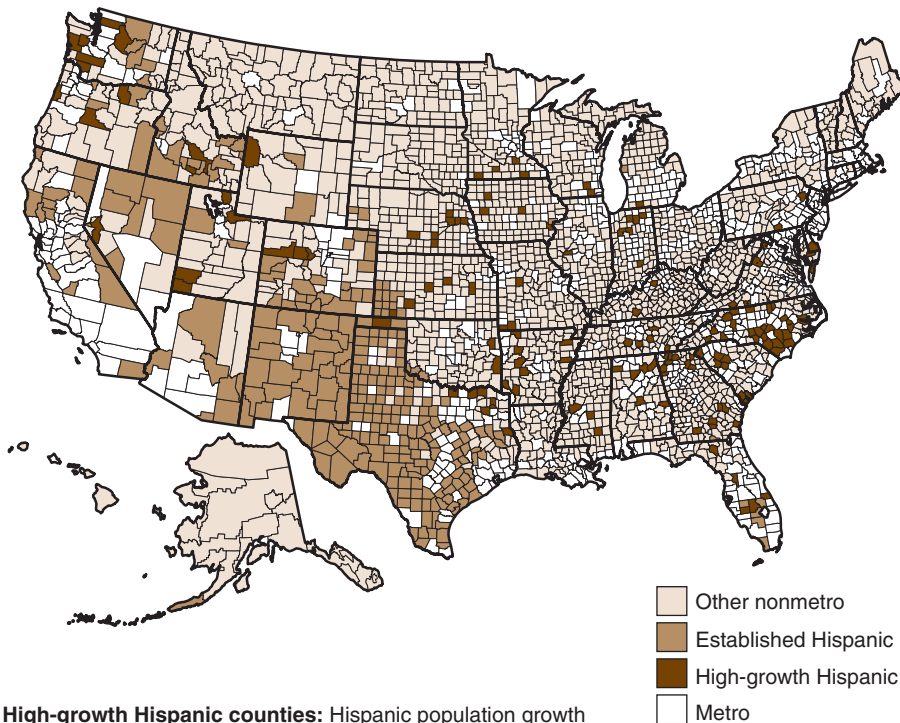
**Other nonmetro counties.** Almost all of the remaining 1,913 nonmetro counties had some Hispanic growth during 1990-2000. In many, the rates of growth matched those found in high-growth Hispanic counties, but the population base remained small, often far below 1,000.

<sup>6</sup> In 2000, all but four established Hispanic counties had Hispanic proportions of 10 percent or greater. Note also that five counties that qualified as both established and high-growth Hispanic—all outside traditional Hispanic areas—are classified as high-growth in figure 6 and in the analyses that follow in this paper.



Figure 6

**Nonmetro Hispanic high-growth and established counties, 1990-2000**



**High-growth Hispanic counties:** Hispanic population growth exceeded 150 percent and at least 1,000 persons, 1990-2000.

**Established Hispanic counties:** Had 10 percent or higher Hispanic population in 1990

Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

These three categories registered large differences in aggregate population growth rates, population sizes, and demographic characteristics (table 2). Half of all nonmetro Hispanics live in established Hispanic counties where they make up, on average, 35 percent of the total population, a figure that far exceeds the Hispanic composition of the other nonmetro counties. Nevertheless, the Hispanic population growth rate in established Hispanic counties is also the lowest of any of the three county types. High-growth Hispanic counties, in contrast, have smaller Hispanic population sizes that grew faster than the other county types over the past decade. Hispanic populations in high-growth Hispanic counties were larger than those in the other nonmetro county category, but, on average, they still made up less than 7 percent of the total population in these counties, partly because the non-Hispanic population grew faster as well.

These classifications help identify communities in rural America where rapid growth and differing characteristics are likely to have a large impact on residential separation because the emergence of high-growth Hispanic counties typically coincides with opportunities in regional industries employing large numbers of low-skilled workers. According to employment figures and informal surveys of county economies, a significant proportion of employment in high-growth Hispanic counties stems from poultry processing (40 counties), beef and pork processing (25 counties), other manufacturing such as furniture and textiles (23 counties), and high-amenity

**Table 2—Hispanic and non-Hispanic population by Hispanic county type, 1990-2000**

County type	Number of counties	Hispanic			Non-Hispanic		
		Total population, 2000	Average county population, 2000	Percent change, 1990-2000	Total population, 2000	Average county population, 2000	Percent change, 1990-2000
<b>Nonmetro</b>	<b>2,289</b>	3,175,953	1,387	<b>67.9</b>	52,983,373	23,147	<b>8.2</b>
High-growth Hispanic	149	526,942	3,537	<b>344.9</b>	7,254,164	48,686	<b>15.1</b>
Established Hispanic	230	1,602,630	6,968	<b>31.8</b>	2,931,071	12,744	<b>8.8</b>
Other nonmetro	1,913	1,046,381	547	<b>84.0</b>	42,798,138	22,372	<b>7.0</b>
<b>Metro</b>	<b>813</b>	32,129,864	39,520	<b>57.1</b>	193,132,712	237,556	<b>8.9</b>

Source: Calculated by ERS using 1990, and 2000 Census data, SF1 files.

resort areas that attract low-wage service workers (10 counties) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). These industries play a far smaller economic role in established Hispanic and other nonmetro counties, and they also foreshadow significant differences in demographic and earnings-related characteristics that influence socioeconomic integration.