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Lourdes Gouveia

*University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, NE*

Rogelio Saenz

*Texas A&M University College Station, TX*

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## **GLOBAL FORCES AND LATINO POPULATION GROWTH IN THE MIDWEST: A REGIONAL AND SUBREGIONAL ANALYSIS**

**Lourdes Gouveia**

*Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
and Chicano/a-Latino/a Studies  
University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, NE 68182-0291  
lourdes@unomaha.edu*

and

**Rogelio Saenz**

*Department of Sociology  
Texas A&M University  
College Station, TX 77843-4351  
rsaenz\_@unix.tamu.edu*

**ABSTRACT**—The last decade has seen a significant growth of the Latino population in the Midwest, particularly in rural communities. We discuss the forces that have stimulated the growth of the Latino population in the region. We use data from the Current Population Surveys (1988-1997) to assess the demographic and employment growth of the Latino population in the Midwest. Because of the limitations of secondary data, we also illustrate the growth of the Latino population with evidence from Nebraska and a selected area of the state. Data analysis suggests that population estimates of the Latino population generated by the US Bureau of the Census do not accurately reflect the magnitude of the Latino population growth in the region. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of Latino population growth to midwestern communities.

### **Global Forces and Latino Population Growth in the Midwest: A Regional and Subregional Analysis**

For much of the 20th century, Latinos have been concentrated in particular areas of the United States. Historically, for example, three major Latino subgroups have occupied different parts of the country. Mexicans have been clustered in the Southwest and Chicago, Puerto Ricans in the Northeast, and Cubans in Florida (Bean and Tienda 1987; Pollard and O'Hare 1999). Moreover, although Latinos represent historic pioneers of

the nation's agricultural and ranching systems (Gouveia et al. 2000b), the Latino population has been primarily concentrated in urban areas over the last four or five decades. However, the last decade has witnessed a dramatic shift in the distribution of Latinos across the national landscape. Increasingly, Latinos are making their way into areas of the United States that have traditionally lacked Latinos, particularly in rural segments of the country outside of the Southwest (Rural Migration News 1998).

Despite the widespread recognition of the growth of the Latino population beyond the traditional geographic Latino confines, there is little data available to document these demographic patterns. Indeed, the 1990 census missed the surge of Latinos into these new settlement areas, with the result being that US Bureau of the Census population estimates have not captured the full impact of the geographic shift in the Latino population (Gouveia et al. 2000b; Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights 2000; Rochín and Marroquín 1997). As a consequence, the documentation of the Latino presence in these locations has come in the form of in-depth community case studies, journalists' accounts, and periodically adjusted population estimates and projections. Put simply, there is little available quantitative and qualitative data necessary to provide a broad panorama of the emerging Latino enclaves.

While the growth of the Latino population is widespread, perhaps no other region of the nation better epitomizes the tremendous growth of the Latino population than the Midwest, especially because it is in this region that growth has taken place alongside slow growth in the general population. Ironically, although the Latino presence in the Midwest extends back to the early parts of the century, Latinos as a whole have been disproportionately underrepresented in the Midwest compared to other parts of the nation. Nevertheless, the combination of slow growth in the overall population and the increasing presence of Latinos in the region have resulted in the Latino population making an indelible demographic mark on the region's ethnic face. Yet, a recent study by Frey and DeVol (2000) appears to contradict this assertion. Based on their analysis of recent US Bureau of the Census population estimates, these researchers argue that a demographic divide will continue to characterize immigrant settlement patterns, with most immigrants concentrating in traditional "melting pot" states like California. Frey and DeVol claim that the "heartland" will continue to be a far less ethnically diverse region compared to other regions where Latinos have been concentrated. While it is true that regions such as the Midwest may not have yet achieved the status of "favorable destination for Latinos," a more detailed

analysis of the same data reveals dramatic demographic shifts. In addition, in-depth analyses of selected communities in the Midwest tell an even more compelling story. Localities in midwestern states such as Nebraska, which we will later treat as a case study, have seen their Latino populations increase by as much as 400% in less than 10 years (Gouveia 2000).

The current growth in the Latino population in the Midwest has dwarfed the impressive growth that took place in this population during the 1980s, when the Midwest's Latino population registered its largest gains since the period 1942-1964 associated with the Bracero Program. While census estimates do not reveal the entire story of the Latino growth in the Midwest, they are instructive. According to these estimates, for instance, in just five years, between 1992 and 1997, the number of Latinos in 10 midwestern states—Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska—climbed from 1.8 million to 2.3 million (the figure was 1.2 million in 1980).

We use a combination of regional and location-specific data to gain a broad understanding of the growth of the Latino population in the Midwest during the 1990s. In the first of four parts, we present a brief overview of the factors stimulating the growth of the Latino population in the Midwest and the concentration of Latinos within particular agroindustrial labor markets. Second, we use data from the 1988-1997 Current Population Surveys to present a broad portrait of the demographic and employment patterns of Latinos in the Midwest. Third, we discuss shortcomings associated with secondary data and illustrate the value of quantitative and qualitative location-specific data for obtaining a more in-depth understanding of the Latino growth in the region. Finally, we discuss the implications of the Latino population for the social and economic future of Nebraska and the Midwest as a whole.

### **Forces Shaping the New Latino Migration to the Midwest Region and Latino Concentration in Selected Labor Markets**

To explain the growth and movement of the Latino population to the country's heartland and the Latino concentration in particular labor markets, one must begin by discarding popular views centered solely, or even mainly, on individual immigrants' behavior. Instead, it is imperative that we examine the interaction between a complexity of factors situated at various structural levels, from the macro level associated with the global economy to the micro level associated with immigrant-household decision making

(Grasmuck and Grosfoguel 1997; Massey 1999). At the more macro level, the most relevant factors are those associated with agroindustrial restructuring and the reorganization of work within these labor markets where Latinos appear to be concentrating. At a more micro level, we must consider factors related to the Latino population's own employment and migration strategies, which exist within this macro context of enhanced economic globalization and immigration policy reforms. We elaborate briefly below on how this combination of factors have conditioned changes in the Midwest Latino population and labor markets.

### **Restructuring of US Agriculture and Agroindustry: Constructing the Demand for Latino Labor**

The US agricultural and agroindustrial sectors have experienced a significant shift toward niche and export-oriented production in response to a new environment of globalizing markets and economic competition. Concomitant with these new requirements for global competitiveness, changes in agricultural technologies and biotechnologies have increased yields and transformed seasonal into year-round production. These innovations have, in turn, translated into increased demand for agricultural labor. Latinos have been the most important suppliers of this labor. The changes are most evident in traditional agricultural states such as California (Palerm 1998). However, they are equally dramatic in agroindustrial sectors where massive scale and continuous production shifts have become the norm. This is the case in the meat and poultry processing industry whose operations are particularly prominent in Great Plain states such as Nebraska, Iowa, and Kansas.

Global competition, as cause and effect of the business profitability crisis that began in the 1970s, has impelled firms to search for ways to reduce labor costs. In many cases, this has been accomplished via the mobilization of new labor pools within and across borders, and the concomitant reorganization of the labor process to achieve higher levels of productivity while undermining labor organizations. For example, the industry has been associated with the deskilling of jobs, the production of faster line speeds, and the establishment of new ways to discipline labor. Emboldened by their enhanced capacity to move operations and outsource labor from remote locations, firms today are able to depress wages, readily hire and fire workers, and institute mechanisms of worker surveillance inside plants which fall outside public scrutiny with greater ease compared

to a mere three decades ago. One consequence of these trends is that year-round employment no longer translates into secure employment or a living wage for a growing number of workers (Bhalla and Lapeyre 1999; Fink 1998; Hoogvelt 1997; McMichael 2000).

To attract a sufficiently large pool of workers willing to work under dangerous and unstable employment conditions associated with downgraded manufacturing, firms rely on assistance from the state and from political allies. Today, national and local governments from both poor and rich countries have embraced a “neoliberal” discourse of fiscal conservatism, which emphasizes balanced budgets and the need to keep US businesses globally competitive. Measures accompanying this discourse have often had the effect of freeing up funds to subsidize corporate concerns while encouraging the retreat of the state from social programs for the poor, the unemployed, and, most emphatically, immigrant and minority workers (Bhalla and Lapeyre 1999). Local constituencies, often receptive to racialized and anti-poor sentiments, sign on to these agendas unaware of their long-term deleterious effects on their civic communities, social harmony, and democratic processes. The loss of a social safety net and deepening worker-community divides help create and maintain a supply of low-wage, largely immobile, and primarily minority and immigrant labor.

At the national level, US immigration policies continue to be intertwined with the mobilization and reorganization of labor supplies and manipulated to further limit immigrant workers’ job mobility and/or claims for improved working conditions. For instance, the Immigration Act of 1965, with its emphasis on family reunification, as well as the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, with its Seasonal Agricultural Workers (SAW) provisos, allowed a large number of new immigrants to remain in the United States. These policies also served to encourage newly legalized immigrants to venture outside their traditional areas of concentration and into the country’s heartland.

The US government’s historic role as a direct or indirect recruiter of foreign labor is also evident in the temporary agricultural work visa programs, such as today’s “H2s,” which have succeeded each other, virtually uninterrupted, since before the turn of the century. These programs have provided growers with a steady supply of seasonal and politically powerless workers. But more importantly, they have helped anchor existing US agricultural and agroindustrial employers’ reliance on Latin American labor supplies (Griffith 1995; Hahamovitch 1999). The increasingly restrictionist character of immigration laws, especially provisos to deny immigrant

workers the same social, political, and civil rights afforded to citizen workers, has inhibited immigrants' economic strategies of mobility and reinforced their concentration into a narrow set of industrial and service "niche" labor markets (Klusmeyer 1997).

As the power of labor has eroded, the leadership of US unions has often opted for defensive, and ultimately counterproductive, postures such as supporting anti-immigrant legislation and draconian enforcement practices by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) aimed at "getting rid of the undocumented." By all accounts, however, their real effect has been to polarize the labor force within and across firms, deepen the worker-community divide, and ultimately undermine workers' ability to organize (Fink 1998, Hackenberg et al. 1993). Employers have often utilized these racial-ethnic and labor-community divides, fostered in part by racism within US unions, to employ Latino immigrants and other poor minorities as "replacement" or "scab" labor at critical industrial restructuring phases (Kelley 1999).

Changes in the beef and pork meatpacking industry, a major force behind demographic shifts and ethnic diversification in the Great Plains, represent textbook illustrations of these trends. The organization of work in today's plants is a hybrid composed of the archaic practices represented in Sinclair's classic work *The Jungle* (1906), US agriculture's itinerant employment methods (supported by a constant supply of cheap labor), and the labor organizational "flexibility" strategies gaining prominence among high-tech firms today. Packers maintain "lean" inventories of cattle or hogs and organize production in response to rapidly shifting market orders in a "just-in-time" fashion. Inside plants, this translates into unpredictable schedules, demand for overtime or downtime, and an increasingly fast-paced and harsh work environment (Nunes 1999).

Contrary to conventional wisdom, firms can develop a high tolerance for employee turnover when its costs are outweighed by a unique combination of benefits. These benefits rest on the presence of an abundant supply of workers with few employment choices. Training costs, already minimized due to deskilling, are deflected toward workers on the line who supervise their newly arrived co-ethnics. These workers are also more "willing" to tolerate unpredictable schedules and unpleasant as well as dangerous working conditions (Kay 1997). Turnover rates for the larger packers range between 80% and 120% (Nunes 1999).

Not unlike the changes some have observed in the garment industry (Grasmuck and Grosfoguel 1997; Waldinger 1996), another Latino indus-

trial niche today, meatpacking has managed to overcome its periodic profitability crises by relying on a regular succession of newly arrived immigrants. Packers, like an increasing number of employers today, are no longer responsible for covering the majority of the costs associated with reproducing their labor force. In particular, Latino immigrant families, as sending and receiving communities, are increasingly responsible for these costs.

On the other hand, meatpacking restructuring strategies have successfully catapulted the industry into a multi-billion-dollar global industry concentrated in a handful of US-based transnational corporations (Mathews et al. 1998; *Meat & Poultry* 2000). During the 1980s, employment in meatpacking dropped by 12.9%. Wages that once were 15% higher than manufacturing wages fell below this comparative base after 1980 (Broadway 1995). After a wave of mergers, acquisitions, and work reorganization strategies, meatpacking jobs more than doubled between 1982 and 1996. Productivity began to increase even as wages hit bottom. For example, according to a recently released study by Drabenstott et al. (1999) based on Midwest meatpacking plants, value added per worker increased from \$60,000 to \$66,000 during the same 1982-96 period when wages dropped 44%.

As Broadway (1995) points out, productivity gains in meatpacking are a function of increased line speeds. Line speeds have increased by at least 300% in the last 30 years (Eisnitz 1997). As line speeds accelerate, it has become increasingly important to rely on highly coordinated teamwork on the processing floor to avoid disruptions in production schedules. By increasing their reliance on ethnic-network recruitment, packers have access to a labor force that not only may be willing to—at least initially—accept higher line speeds but can most effectively enlist the cooperation of friends and relatives on the shop floor. As Waldinger (1997) points out, network hiring is highly cost-effective for employers and ultimately tends to remove vacancies from the open market as information about jobs and job expectations become embedded in ethnic and immigrant networks. Today, Latinos typically comprise between 50% and 90% of any given plant's workforce (Gouveia 2000).

### **Global Forces, Communities of Origin, and Immigrants' Employment Strategies**

These same processes of global and agricultural restructuring are evident, and their socially disorganizing impacts particularly severe, in the



poor countries from which newly arrived Latinos originate. Decreasing trade barriers, US-supported austere debt-repayment regimes, and the disappearance of social safety nets, in both the United States and Latin America, are simultaneously displacing Latinos from certain regions and labor markets and recreating their demand in new communities of settlement (Chossudovsky 1997; Stalker 2000).

The combination of migration and employment strategies adopted by Latin American populations in response to these broader changes constitutes the second set of factors shaping the trajectory of new migrant streams. At the microstructural level, self-sustaining immigrant networks now effectively link Latino communities of labor from distant places in Mexico and Guatemala to areas in the country's heartland where their presence was virtually unknown a few years ago. Problems of labor saturation, low wages, and a declining quality of life in traditional receiving places such as California and Chicago are also "pushing" an increasing number of Latinos toward the more tranquil interior of the Midwest. The decision to move to places in Nebraska or Iowa is helped by the possibility of owning a home, sending kids to safer schools, and living in cleaner and safer communities (Gouveia and Stull 1997).

Put simply, popular explanations for why people come to the United States tend to stress "push" factors often summarized in clichés such as "They are desperate for jobs and for the better life this country can provide." However, when explaining the origin of labor migrant streams, the literature does not support such emphasis. Instead, it convincingly shows that it is the continuous and periodic spurs of demand for Latino labor that become the initial triggers for successive waves of migrant streams. A host of other mediating factors, including changes in individual motivations and immigrant family aspirations, do turn these into self-sustaining processes even if initial triggers such as direct recruitment have weakened (Massey 1999).

At the local level, the serious loss of population experienced by nonmetropolitan and semirural places in Nebraska and elsewhere became the major force behind community efforts to attract employers with "large payrolls" that they hoped would restore their town's economic base. Obviously, this initiative has simultaneously implied the need to attract workers. Less obvious but equally true is the critical role that workers' kin—particularly women—must play in supplementing workers' income via various informal activities as wages in meatpacking collapse and are no longer supplemented by a shrinking welfare state (Griffith 1995).

Having presented an overview of the forces that have stimulated the movement of Latinos to the Midwest, we now turn to an examination of empirical data to assess the magnitude of this movement as well as the employment patterns of Latinos in this region.

### **Demographic and Employment Trends of Latinos in the Midwest**

Sociologists and demographers rely heavily on census data to understand the demographic and socioeconomic patterns of ethnic groups. Unfortunately, the most commonly used decennial census data—Summary Tape Files (STFs) and the Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS)—do not capture the recent growth of the Latino population in the Midwest because most of this growth has taken place after 1990. Nevertheless, the US Bureau of the Census does collect annual survey data through the Current Population Survey (CPS) that can be used to gain a broad overview of demographic and socioeconomic trends.

We use data from the March sample of the CPS for the 1988-1997 period to obtain broad demographic and employment portraits of Latinos in the Midwest. We use the CPS weights (variable called *wgtfnl*) to obtain population estimates. Although the data are not ideal because the samples on which they are based are not large enough to uncover trends among subgroups and subareas, they are the best data available to obtain broad overviews of demographic and socioeconomic trends between decennial censuses. Latinos are defined in the CPS as those individuals classifying themselves as “Hispanic”—that is, Mexican or Mexican American or Chicano; Puerto Rican; Cuban, Central or South American; Other Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish-Origin group (for examination of the CPS questionnaire, see the CPS website at <http://www.bls.census.gov/cps/cpsmain.htm>). The Midwest region includes 12 states—Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

Table 1 presents annual data for the Latino population across the four regions of the country (Midwest, Northeast, South, and West). The data show that the Latino population increased at a rapid pace between 1988 and 1997. The Midwest, for example, experienced a general upward trend in its Latino population, rising from approximately 1.4 million in 1988 to nearly 2.3 million in 1997 (see Table 1 and Fig. 1). Among the four regions, the Midwest registered the second fastest growth in the Latino population with an increase of 57.8%, trailing only the South region where the Latino

TABLE 1  
LATINO POPULATION BY REGION FROM THE CURRENT POPULATION SURVEYS, 1988-1997

| Year  | Region    |           |           |            | US TOTAL   |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|
|   | Midwest   | Northeast | South     | West       |            |
| <b>Latino Population Size</b>                             |           |           |           |            |            |
| 1988  | 1,441,716 | 3,355,543 | 5,958,559 | 8,601,514  | 19,357,331 |
| 1989  | 1,597,780 | 3,403,213 | 6,360,588 | 8,641,505  | 20,003,086 |
| 1990  | 1,397,333 | 3,299,770 | 6,296,247 | 9,731,337  | 20,724,687 |
| 1991  | 1,488,518 | 3,587,242 | 6,269,473 | 10,036,513 | 21,381,747 |
| 1992  | 1,602,680 | 3,405,705 | 6,668,706 | 10,361,656 | 22,038,747 |
| 1993  | 1,650,521 | 3,551,109 | 6,878,185 | 10,628,200 | 22,708,015 |
| 1994  | 1,653,798 | 4,207,261 | 7,432,600 | 12,523,775 | 25,817,434 |
| 1995  | 1,789,547 | 3,910,442 | 8,581,166 | 13,181,800 | 27,462,956 |
| 1996  | 1,817,722 | 4,396,743 | 9,302,735 | 12,861,555 | 28,378,755 |
| 1997  | 2,274,940 | 4,724,219 | 9,433,798 | 13,200,720 | 29,633,678 |
| <b>Absolute Population Change</b>                         |           |           |           |            |            |
| 1988-1997   | 833,224   | 1,368,676 | 3,475,239 | 4,599,206  | 10,276,347 |
| <b>Percentage Population Change</b>                       |           |           |           |            |            |
| 1988-1997   | 57.8      | 40.8      | 58.3      | 53.5       | 53.1       |
| <b>Latino Population Percentage Regional Distribution</b> |           |           |           |            |            |
| 1988  | 7.4       | 17.3      | 30.8      | 44.4       | 100.0      |
| 1989  | 8.0       | 17.0      | 31.8      | 43.2       | 100.0      |
| 1990  | 6.7       | 15.9      | 30.4      | 47.0       | 100.0      |
| 1991  | 7.0       | 16.8      | 29.3      | 46.9       | 100.0      |
| 1992  | 7.3       | 15.5      | 30.3      | 47.0       | 100.0      |
| 1993  | 7.3       | 15.6      | 30.3      | 46.8       | 100.0      |
| 1994  | 6.4       | 16.3      | 28.8      | 48.5       | 100.0      |
| 1995  | 6.5       | 14.2      | 31.2      | 48.0       | 100.0      |
| 1996  | 6.4       | 15.5      | 32.8      | 45.3       | 100.0      |
| 1997  | 7.7       | 15.9      | 31.8      | 44.5       | 100.0      |

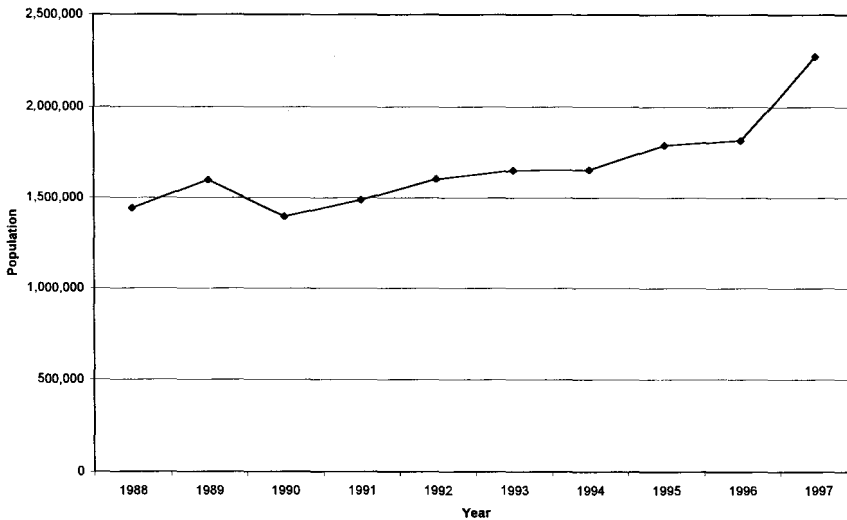


Figure 1. Latino population in the Midwest from current population surveys, 1988-1997.

population increased by 58.3% (Table 1 and Fig. 2). By way of contrast, the Latino population in the Northeast had the slowest growth rate, albeit at a healthy clip of nearly 41%, between 1988 and 1997. Nevertheless, despite the impressive growth rate of the Latino population in the Midwest, this region continues to be the area where Latinos are the least likely to reside. Less than 8% of Latinos in the nation made their home in the Midwest in 1997, although the proportion of Latinos in this region has increased since 1994 (Table 1).

Yet, seen from another angle, the growth of the Latino population in the Midwest has been quite impressive. While the Latino population in the Midwest increased by nearly 58% between 1988 and 1997, the non-Latino population of the region increased by less than 4%. Thus, during this period, the Latino population in the region grew more than 14 times faster than did the non-Latino population in the area. The discrepant growth rates of these groups resulted in the relative presence of the Latino population increasing from 2.4% in 1988 to 3.7% in 1997. However, what is truly astounding is that despite the very small relative presence of Latinos in the population of the Midwest, they accounted for about 28% of the region's absolute growth of nearly 3 million residents between 1988 and 1997.

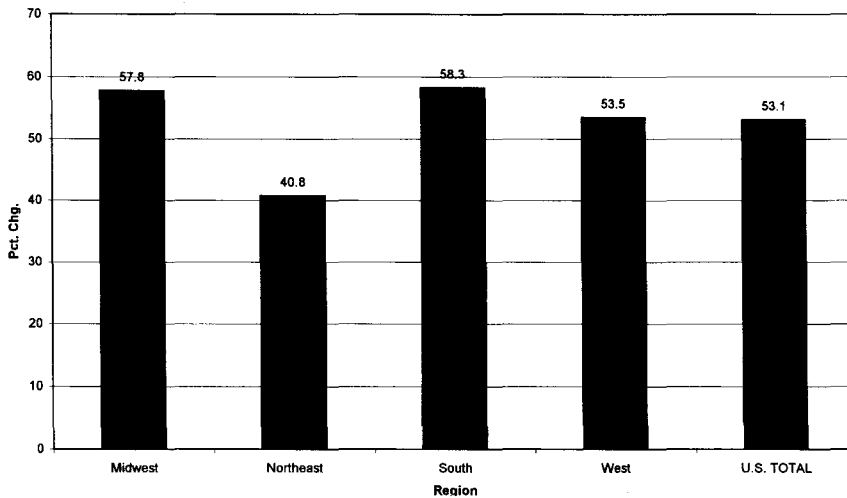


Figure 2. Percentage change in the Latino population by region from the current population surveys, 1988-1997.

Similar trends are observed in the Latino workforce in the Midwest. The number of Latino workers in the Midwest rose steadily from nearly 612,000 in 1988 to more than 1.1 million in 1997 (Fig. 3). During this 10-year period, Latino workers in the Midwest posted the fastest growth (82.2%), compared to slower growth levels of Latino workers in the South (55.6%), West (48.1%), and Northeast (47.4%). Furthermore, the rapid growth rate of Latino workers in the Midwest dwarfed the anemic 5.4% growth of the non-Latino workforce in the region, with the Latino workforce growing about 15 times more rapidly than the non-Latino workforce. Moreover, although Latino workers represented only 2.0% and 3.4% of the Midwest's workers in 1988 and 1997, respectively, they accounted for nearly 24% of the region's increase of 2.1 million workers during this time period.

It is unlikely that the presence of Latino workers is evenly distributed across industries. The sociological literature clearly shows that immigrant and minority workers often form ethnic industrial niches. Groups with limited human capital resources often rely on co-ethnics to gain access to labor markets. The research of Roger Waldinger, for example, clearly docu-

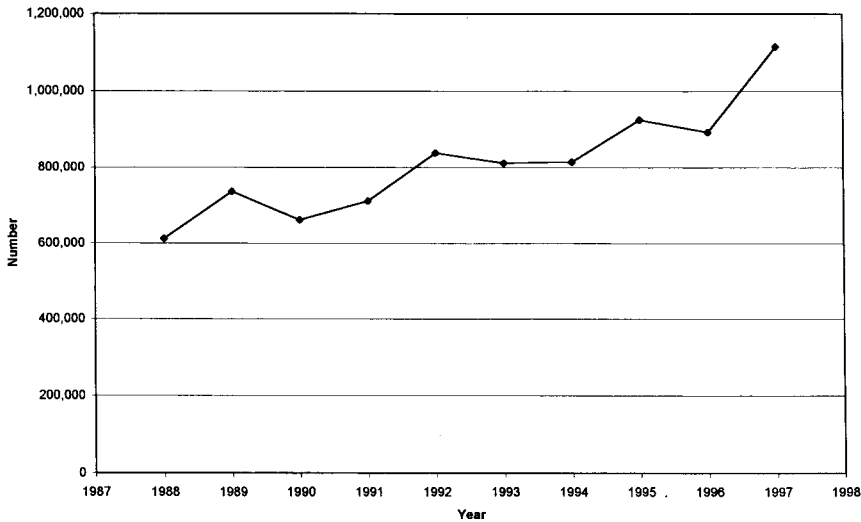


Figure 3. Latino workers in the Midwest from the current population surveys, 1988-1997.

ments the formation of ethnic industrial niches in New York City. Waldinger (1996), following the lead of Model (1993), defines ethnic industrial niches as industries that contain a critical mass of ethnic workers, and a disproportionate share of workers in the industry are members of the ethnic group.

Using data from the 1988-1997 CPS, we seek to determine the existence of Latino industrial niches in the Midwest. For each of the 10 years between 1988 and 1997, we seek to determine whether the 51 detailed industries identified in the CPS files (1) contain at least 10,000 Latino workers and (2) have a disproportionate share of Latino workers among their workers. Thus, for a given year, a Latino industrial niche is defined as an industry where at least 10,000 Latinos are employed and the ratio of the percentage of all workers in the industry that are Latino to the percentage of all workers in the region that are Latino is at least 1.5. This exercise reveals that 10 broad industries are defined as Latino industrial niches in at least five of the 10 years (see Table 2). The Food and Kindred Products industry, which contains meatpacking workers, is the only industry that constitutes a Latino industrial niche in each of the 10 years, with the industries of Primary Metals (nine years), Fabricated Metals (nine years), and Paper and Applied

TABLE 2  
TEN LATINO INDUSTRIAL NICHEs DURING AT LEAST FIVE  
YEARS IN THE 1988-1997 PERIOD

| Latino Industrial Niche                          | Years meeting criteria    | No. of years |
|--|---------------------------|--------------|
| Agriculture Service                              | 1991-93, 1995-97          | 6            |
| Primary Metals                                   | 1988-93, 1995-97          | 9            |
| Fabricated Metals                                | 1988, 1990-97             | 9            |
| Electrical Machinery, Equipment,<br>and Supplies | 1989-91, 1993-96          | 7            |
| Miscellaneous and Other Not Specified            | 1990, 1994-97             | 5            |
| Food and Kindred Products                        | 1988-97                   | 10           |
| Paper and Applied Products                       | 1989-92, 1994-97          | 8            |
| Chemical and Applied Products                    | 1989-90, 1992-94          | 5            |
| Rubber and Miscellaneous Plastic Products        | 1989-92, 1994, 1996-97    | 7            |
| Business Services                                | 1989-90, 1992, 1994, 1997 | 5            |

Note: For a given year, an industry meeting the criteria to be called a "Latino Industrial Niche" is one that contains at least 10,000 Latino workers in the region and Latino workers are 1.5 times more likely to be working in the industry compared to their relative representation in the overall region.

Products (eight years) falling close behind. For the sake of simplicity, we label these 10 industries as Latino industrial niches.

Further analysis (data not presented here) reveals that typically anywhere between one-fourth and one-fifth of Latino workers in the Midwest were employed in one of the 10 designated Latino industrial niches during the 1988-1997 period. However, it is clear that nativity plays a significant role in positioning workers in the Latino industrial niches. The CPS collected nativity data beginning in 1994. The data for the 1994-1997 period

show that foreign-born Latinos are more than twice as likely than native-born Latinos to be employed in one of the 10 Latino industrial niches. In fact, more than two-thirds of the workforce of Latino industrial niches are foreign-born Latinos, with the range being from a low of 64.5% in 1995 to a high of 73.4% in 1994.

### **Shortcomings of the CPS Data**

Despite the usefulness of the CPS data in providing a general overview of the demographic and employment patterns of Latinos in the Midwest, they have shortcomings. First, the CPS is based on a fairly small sample (a monthly survey consisting of 50,000 households). The accuracy of the trends observed from the CPS data is negatively associated with population size. Therefore, CPS data are most useful in obtaining portraits of the national population, with subnational and subgroup analyses being somewhat less accurate. Given the relatively small presence of Latinos in the Midwest, we need to use caution in interpreting data for Latinos in the region. Indeed, the 1997 CPS data set contains only 771 Latino workers in the sample. As such, these data do not lend themselves to the development of population estimates for smaller geographic units. Moreover, the data do not lend themselves well to the analyses of multivariate models due to the relatively small sample size.

Second, CPS data, and census data in general, tend to significantly underestimate minorities and immigrants. Latino immigrants, especially those who are in the United States without proper documentation, may be reluctant to participate in surveys due to distrust. It is likely that Latinos who were not counted in the 1990 decennial census were not located or enumerated in the post-1990 CPS.

Finally, the information collected in the CPS is based on highly structured questions that maximize comparability and generalizability but minimize the gaining of more in-depth knowledge about the more essential aspects of the lives of workers. As such, the CPS data are not likely to have information about the “underground” economic activities of Latino workers nor about those taking place on the fringe of traditional labor markets.

Given these shortcomings of census data, we need to obtain supplementary data to gain an understanding of location-specific conditions. We now turn our attention to one state—Nebraska—to provide an illustration of the magnitude of the population and employment growth among Latinos as well as to highlight the underenumeration of Latinos in existing estimates of this population.



### **Insights from Other Data Sources for One Midwestern State: The Nebraska Case**

Now we shift our attention to the case of Nebraska, a state that epitomizes the rapid increase and settlement of Latinos in the Midwest. Nebraska's Latino population recently displaced the African American population as the largest minority group in the state. According to the latest (1999) population estimates produced by the US Bureau of the Census, Nebraska's Hispanic population more than doubled (108.3% change) between 1990 and 1999 (see US Bureau of the Census 2000). The number of Latinos climbed from about 36,969 in 1990 to 76,998 in 1999, with the relative group size of the Latino population doubling from 2.3% of the state population in 1990 to 4.6% in 1999. During this period, only three other states outpaced Nebraska in terms of the percentage change in the Latino population—Arkansas, 170.3%; North Carolina, 128.9%; and Georgia, 119.9%. Unfortunately, data do not exist to track the sources of population change in the Latino population in the state between 1990 and 1999. Yet, we suspect that a significant portion of the growth is due to immigration. Of the total of 77,756 people (regardless of race and ethnicity) added to the Nebraska population between 1990 and 1999, 17.3% of the change was due to a net international migration of 15,138 (US Bureau of the Census 2000).

We further suspect that a significant portion of the net flow of international movers to Nebraska between 1990 and 1999 are Latinos, and that many of these made their way into rural areas of the state where most meatpacking plants are located today. The entrance of Latinos into these areas has helped revitalize rural communities. Indeed, the state, particularly its rural communities, suffered major population losses during the 1980s. Only three counties (all metropolitan) experienced in-migration during this decade and 83 out of 93 counties lost population. In contrast, throughout the "farm crisis decade" of the 1980s, the Latino population continued to grow, largely because of natural increase (births minus deaths), but in-migration was already perceptible. Yet, that growth would be dwarfed by what was to occur in the 1990s. INS data have revealed this trend. In 1988, for example, 837 immigrants admitted to the United States indicated that Nebraska was their intended state of residence. In 1991, the number had climbed to 3,020 and it has oscillated between 1,500 and more than 2,000 since then. Latinos make up at least half of those intended arrivals (US Immigration and Naturalization Service 1996). Nebraska census specialists have also noted that between 1990 and 1998, "net international migration" was a key factor

accounting for the state's population increase and offsetting domestic outmigration in urban and rural Nebraska (Scheideler 1999).

Furthermore, it appears that the Latino population is contributing to growth in the population of Nebraska in another way. Mirroring the rapid growth of the Latino population, the number of births to Hispanic women increased by 173.7% between 1990 and 1998, with 801 births in 1990 and 2,192 births in 1998 (see National Center for Health Statistics 1999). Even though Latinos accounted for about one out of every 25 people in Nebraska in 1998, at this time Hispanic mothers gave birth to one of every 11 babies born in Nebraska. Given the youthfulness of the Latino population and the older age structure of the Anglo population, the proportional share of Hispanics among newborns could increase in the near future.

We now turn our attention to a specific location—Dawson County—in Nebraska to obtain an even closer perspective of the growth of the Latino population in the state and the extent to which its magnitude is underestimated by existing population estimates. Dawson County is well known for its IBP plant and the rapid growth in its Latino population. In 1997 the US Bureau of the Census estimated Dawson County's Latino population at 1,315. We present here a brief description of the methodology that the census bureau uses to obtain population estimates. It uses the cohort-component method to generate population estimates, with the estimates broken down by age, sex, race, and Hispanic origin. The method is based on the "balancing equation," also known as the "demographic accounting system" (see Shryock and Siegel 1980). The following equation illustrates the method used to obtain the population estimate for a given geographic unit and age-sex-race-Hispanic origin category:

$$P_1 = P_0 + B - D + NDM + NMA,$$

where  $P_1$  represents the population at the end of the period of interest (say 1999);  $P_0$  refers to the population at the beginning of the period of interest (say 1990),  $B$  signifies the number of births during the period,  $D$  represents the number of deaths during the period,  $NDM$  refers to the net domestic migration during the period, and  $NMA$  represents the net migration from abroad during the period. The data sources used to obtain the five components on the right-hand side of the equation are as follows:  $P_0$  (modified age, sex, race, and Hispanic origin, MARS census data; for a detailed description, see US Bureau of the Census 1991);  $B$  and  $D$  (Vital Statistics data; see US Bureau of the Census 2000);  $NDM$  (administrative records from Internal

Revenue Service tax returns and sample data from the Social Security Administration Application File); and NMA (various data sources to obtain estimates of the following four movement categories—immigration, including refugees and undocumented immigrants; legal emigration; net Puerto Rican migration; and net federal citizen migration). For a detailed description of the procedure that the census bureau uses to generate its population estimates, see US Bureau of the Census (2000). Our point is that because the brunt of the movement of Latinos to the Midwest occurred after the 1990 decennial census, the population estimates are likely to underestimate the actual size of the Latino population in the region. (For an excellent overview of the problems associated with existing population estimates for the Latino population in the Midwest, see Burke and Goudy, 1999). As a result, it is useful to explore alternate data sources to supplement existing population estimates in order to attain a portrait that is closer to reality.

Data collected in the course of an in-depth case study in Lexington, the county seat, suggests that the population estimate of 1,315 falls short of the likely actual count of Latinos in Dawson County. First, in terms of employment data, if we use only IBP's figures, we know that the Lexington local plant's labor force of 1,450 is made up of between 65% and 80% Latinos (the percentages fluctuate widely due to high turnover) (Gouveia and Stull 1997). Therefore, the number of Latino workers employed in one plant (IBP) in one community (Lexington) in Dawson County could range from 943 (assuming 65% of the IBP workers in Lexington are Latino) to 1,160 (assuming 80% of workers are Latino). Data from Lexington schools provide information to bolster the charge of a severe underestimation in the official estimates of the Latino population. The Lexington school district alone reported 1,079 Latino students at the K-12 level, or 49% of the total student population for the 1997-98 school year (Nebraska Department of Education 1998). Hence, if we simply use these two totals—IBP Latino employment and Lexington school district Latino enrollment—without accounting for other Latino children and adults not represented in these categories or living in other parts of the county, the conclusion is obvious: existing population estimates do not adequately reflect the presence of Latinos in Dawson County, as is likely to be the case in Nebraska.

### **Conclusions**

Our analysis illustrates the tremendous growth that the Latino population and Latino workforce has experienced in the Midwest. The increasing presence of Latinos in the region's workforce is especially apparent in

selected Latino industrial niches, with the meatpacking industry leading the way. Yet, as the case of Nebraska illustrates, the presence of Latinos in the region is likely to be much greater than what US Bureaus of the Census population estimates suggest.

The rapid expansion of the Latino population after the 1990 census count is not unique to the Midwest. Indeed, all regions of the nation are experiencing significant growth in their Latino populations. However, what sets the Midwest apart is that the Latino newcomers are likely to have an especially significant impact on the population of this region due to demographic forces. Among the different regions in the country, the Midwest in particular has generally experienced slow growth in the overall population, with selected states in the region even occasionally experiencing population losses. Such slow growth, particularly apparent in rural areas, has been due to the aging of the population and a net outmigration, primarily among the working-age population. The Latino population, in contrast, is a youthful population with relatively high fertility rates. The long-range implications of these divergent patterns—aging white population and an expanding youthful Latino population—can be quite significant. Indeed, the settlement of Latinos in the region is likely to result in a greater portion of the midwestern workforce being Latino in the coming decades. In particular, the presence of Latinos is likely to be most critical for rural communities. Despite its economic recovery in the 1990s, rural Nebraska continues to lose population. In the last year or two, most rural counties experienced renewed outmigration and a new phase of agricultural crisis (Scheideler 2000).

The areas where Latinos have settled appear to be characterized by economic prosperity. For example, business analysts constantly tag as “winners” rural Nebraska counties that have experienced Latino population growth (Gouveia 2000). In the small community of Lexington, Nebraska, alone, the spending of Latinos has generated an estimated \$1 million in economic activity in 1997 (Gouveia 1999). Furthermore, downtown stores in communities like Lexington or South Omaha are no longer boarded up and Latinos have bought homes at record levels. Latinos have also brought increased prosperity to the meatpacking industry. Nebraska-based plants generate one of the highest percentages of value added per dollar of wages in the country (Nebraska Public Power District et al. 1996). Given the significant presence of Latino workers in meatpacking, it is safe to argue that this segment of the population is responsible for generating the largest portion of this value added.

While meat industry employment as a whole is projected to slow down some in the coming years, the same is not true for production jobs. The

demand for meat cutters is expected to increase as more of the value-added processing is displaced from skilled supermarket butchers and cooks to meatpacking plants (US Department of Labor 1998-99).

The extent to which this potential benefit afforded by Latino population growth is turned into an effective tool for economic vitality and social integration will depend on a variety of factors. Critical among these will be employment stability and equal access to ladders of mobility. Similarly important will be the kinds of investments oldtimers are willing to make in order to establish the "social infrastructure" necessary to harness the energy and social capital Latinos bring with them and to facilitate their positive incorporation into their new communities of settlement.

Cognizant of an increasingly tight labor market, meatpacking companies have increased starting wages and have offered bonuses to workers who stay past the 90-day probation period. Although at a much slower pace and in still rather insignificant ways, some of these companies have finally begun to heed the warnings issued by researchers and others about the long-range deleterious impact of work environments characterized by relentless abuses of workers' rights and humiliating treatment. As one human resource manager at a major packer's corporate headquarter recently put it, "We are now facing a situation very different than the one we had five years ago when you did not care if you lost 30 workers a week because you knew you had 60 more knocking at your door" (Gouveia 1999 fieldnotes).

Immigrants who arrived in the Midwest during the meatpacking and agroindustrial employment boom of the 1990s have already begun to exit these jobs as they seek out opportunities for mobility. Although exact data are not yet available, personal observations by a number of people currently conducting research in meatpacking communities coincide with the notion that these opportunities tend to fall into two basic categories. One consists of jobs in alternate local labor markets currently reorganizing to take advantage of this population growth. This is especially the case in home services. The second category involves the increasing number of Latinos engaged in small-business ventures (Gouveia et al. 2000a; Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights 2000).

However, the road to the stabilization of Latino communities in the Midwest is riddled with obstacles and contradictions. One of the most recent threats to such stability has come from "Operation Vanguard," an INS interior enforcement strategy targeting meatpacking workers. The impetus for these programs has come largely from a loose coalition of law enforcement agents, congressional representatives from Iowa and Nebraska, and

the Dallas regional INS office in charge of implementing this new policy. These groups appear to be responding to pressure from oldtimers who fear the ethnic transformation of their communities with the influx of Latino newcomers. The operation has been largely unsuccessful in its goal of ridding the state or the industry of undocumented meatpacking workers. However, it has reinforced the fear and distrust that conspire against positive processes of incorporation of Latino newcomers and harmonious relations with oldtimers.

The presence of Latinos in the Midwest is not a new phenomenon. Latinos have been an important segment of the workforce of the region throughout the 20th century. Indeed, the path to the Midwest for Latinos was paved by workers recruited many decades ago from Mexico as well as places such as Texas to build the nation's railway system and to work in agriculture and stockyards. The Midwest has numerous well-established Latino communities that have existed for generations. Put in a historical context, then, the latest influx of Latinos to the region represents yet another link of Latinos to the Midwest.

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