

Migration & Identity in the U.S.

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Introduction

Imagine being part of a community of more than 65 million people, being the largest and fastest-growing ethnic minority group in the U.S. today, and still face discrimination. This is the reality for Latin Americans, according to the 2024 data U.S. Census Bureau. This discrimination can be seen in the workplace, where several significant issues persist: brain drain, cultural and professional disparities, stereotypes, language barriers, and U.S. politics.

Research Question

How are Latin American immigrants affected in the U.S. workplace?

Thesis Statement

Latin American immigrants moving to the U.S. face employment discrimination due to political and language barriers that lead to unequal opportunities, lower wages, and limited career advancement.

Methodology

A bibliographic review was carried out by examining qualitative and quantitative peer-reviewed secondary sources. The Google Scholar database was also used with the key words: Immigrants, United States, Latin Americans, brain drain and disparities, limited to review articles between the years 2020-2024. References from Duke University Library - Latin Journey (Portes, 1985) - were also used for supporting this investigation.

Background

The massive migratory movements of the population from Latin America to the United States result in an important transformation in the economic, political and social structures of this country. Immigrants bring with them a historical-cultural, mythical, religious, political and linguistic identity tradition that makes its way to the dominant culture of Anglo-American nationalism with the aim of inserting themselves, but at the same time preserving their own identity.

One of the most prominent examples of this problem is found in the labor market. Many Latin American immigrants face limitations in opportunities for employment, career advancement, and fair treatment, affecting their livelihoods and undermining their diversity and inclusion options, which are essential for a healthy and equitable society (Casasa, 2008).

The "brain drain"—a term describing the migration of highly skilled scientists and technology professionals from third countries to the United States—is a clear manifestation of discriminatory immigration policies, according to the World Bank Group (2024).

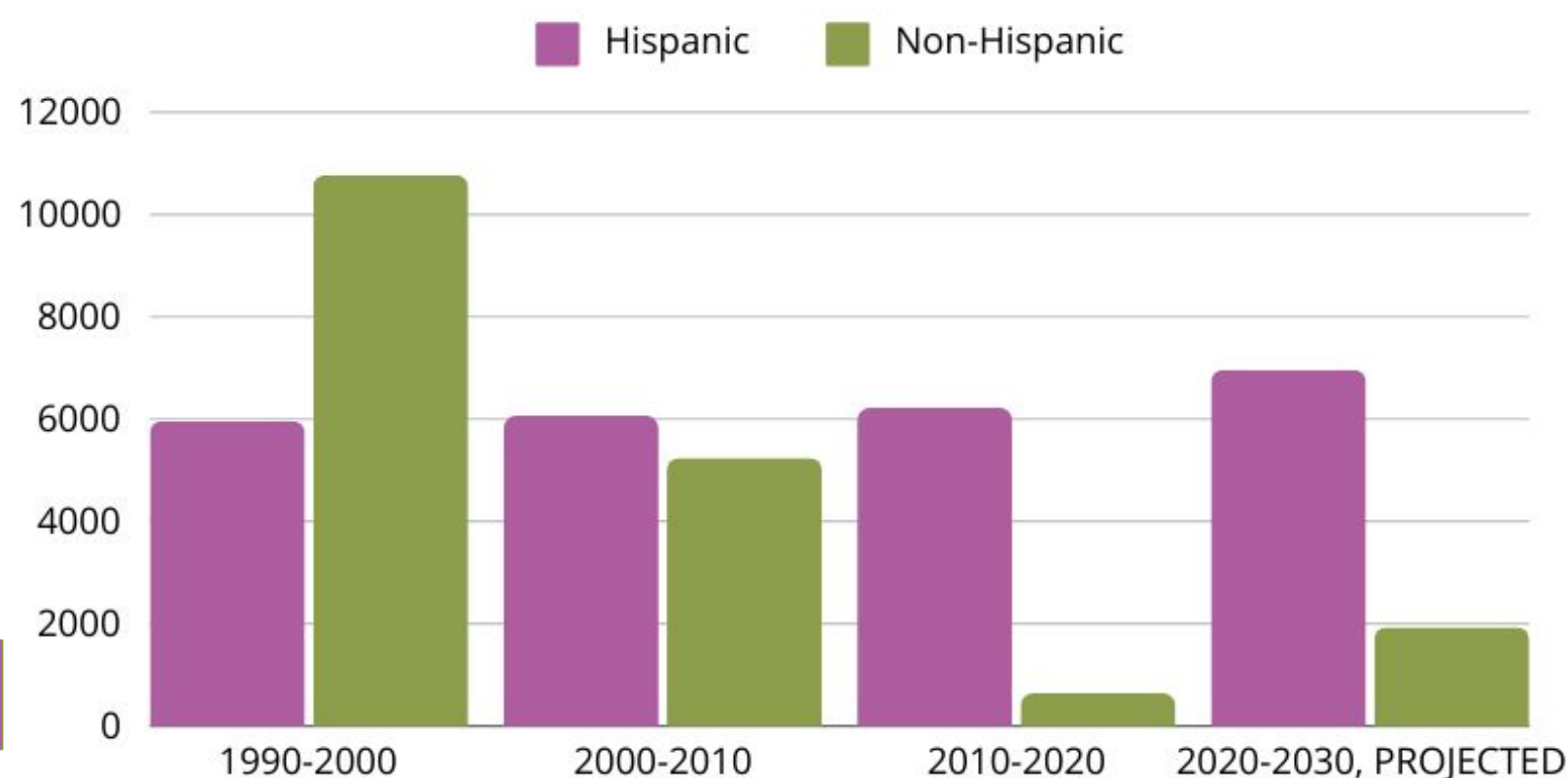
Another example of workplace limitations faced by Latin American immigrants is evident among professionals with bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, doctorates and many years of experience in fields such as medicine, engineering, law, teaching, etc. (Aponte, 2009).

A third example of discrimination towards work opportunities is due to culture, stereotypes and language barriers. Because of their immigration status and their inability to communicate, many immigrants are forced to perform high-risk jobs without prior training or safety measures, with lower wages, more dangerous activities, and without backup health insurance (Casasa, 2008). Various studies and statistics show that latinos are injured and killed in workplace accidents more frequently than other ethnic groups, due to the conditions in which they are forced to work (Tovar, 2009).

Data Analysis

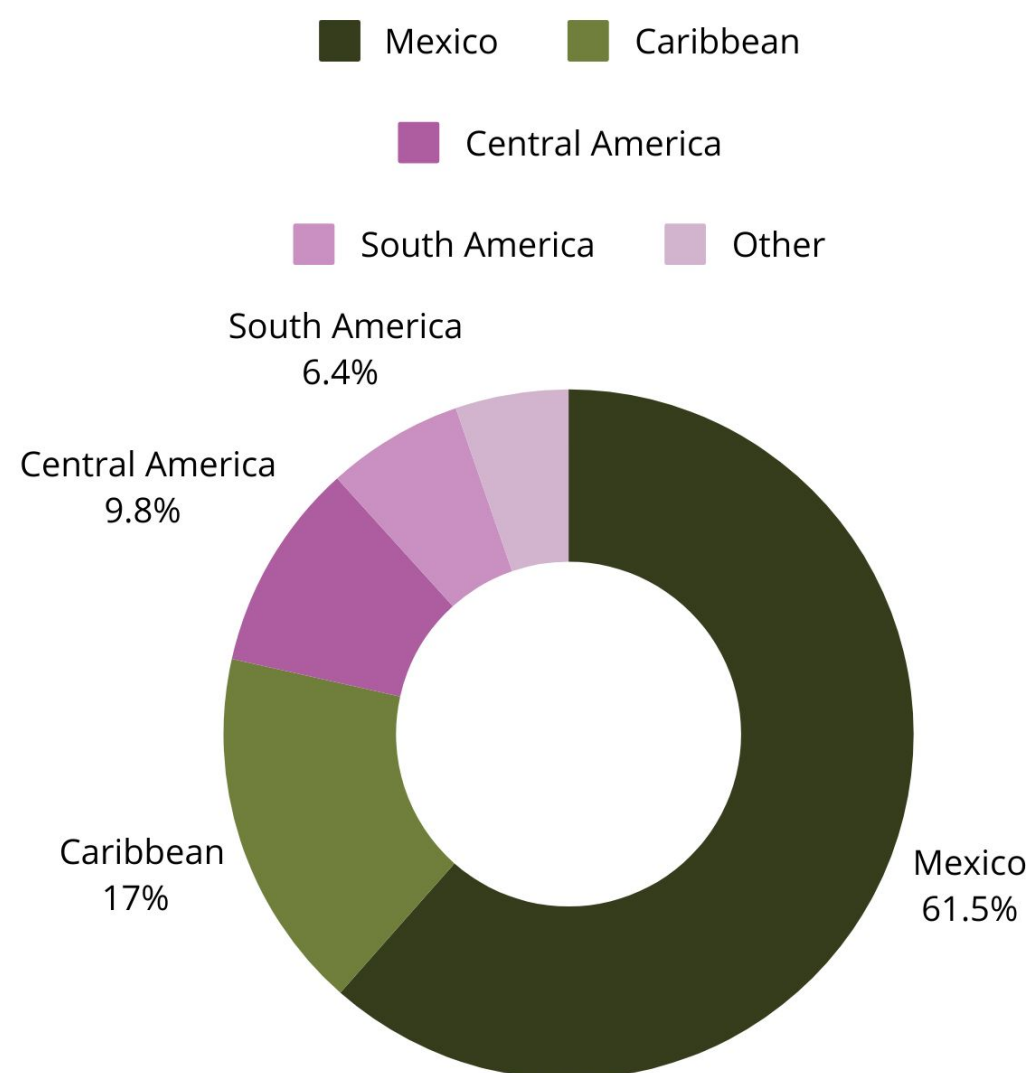
Hispanics are Driving Labor Force Growth

According to BLS.gov: "Hispanic in the Labor Force" by Kevin Dubina published on September 15, 2021.



Hispanics in the US

According to Statista: "Seis de cada diez hispanos en U.S.A. son de origen Mexicano" by Marina Pasquali published on September 23, 2021.



Results

According to studies from the Census Bureau, the migration of Latinos to the United States has increased drastically in the last 20 years, surpassing African Americans in number and making Latinos the largest minority group in the country.

Brain Drain: Brain drain is a significant issue in Latin American countries, as many individuals migrate in search of safer environments and better opportunities. According to the International Monetary Fund, "In 2016, about 30 developing countries, including El Salvador and Haiti lost more than 20 percent of their college graduates to job opportunities abroad". The immigration of these professionals is changing Latin American countries creating critical gaps in skills and increased in unemployment. Another example of this is when the U.S. launched a program in 2006 called the "Cuban Medical Professional Permit Program" (CMPP) that allowed Cuban medical personnel in third countries to request permission or legal entry to the U.S. at an embassy or consulate, as reported by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (2017). Lasting until 2017, this program urged Cuban professionals to migrate to the U.S. with their families and promised them jobs positions and remuneration related to their medical studies.

Cultural, Politics & Professional Disparities: Cultural, political and professional disparities are due, on one hand, because their studies are not accredited in this country or that their approval is very expensive. On the other hand, these individuals often need to work immediately to survive, leaving them with no time to study and take the necessary exams. These professionals often end up working in jobs (construction, cleaning, agriculture, meat industries etc) which are unrelated to their previous professional lives, which negatively affects their economic and emotional well-being, as stated in Latin Journey (Portes, 1985).

Stereotypes & Language Barriers: In the report of USA.gov (2024), Spanish has become the second most spoken language in the U.S., highlighting the significant presence of Latino immigrants. Balancing their Latino heritage and cultural identity with the expectations of the dominant North American culture presents major challenges. One example of this problem is found in the labor market, because usually immigrants cannot communicate correctly due to language barriers, ending up in labor force jobs.

Conclusion

This research emphasizes that Latin American immigrants are being discriminated against in the United States workplace, and this disparity not only affects them economically but also mentally and physically. This problem has many solutions, such as changing federal, state and local laws, but mostly policies, such as promoting a more inclusive and diverse work environment where all people have the opportunity to prosper based on their skills and merits.

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