



SEARCH

Home | Register | Home Delivery | Site Map | Archives | Print Edition | Advertisi

August 10, 2001

Talk about it E-mail story Print a d

MARKETPLACE classifieds and more

jobs • cars • homes • rentals

calendarlive

Arts and Entertainment Movies, Music, TV, Dining

Print Edition

- Front Page
- Inside "A"
- California
- Business
- Sports
- So Cal Living
- Calendar
- Editorials, Op-Ed

Weekly

- Health
- Food
- Science
- Tech Times
- Highway 1
- Workplace

Sunday

- Books
- Calendar
- Magazine
- Opinion
- Real Estate
- Travel
- TV Times

The World

- The Nation
- California
- Business
- Politics
- Sports
- Technology
- Travel

Editorials, Op-Ed

Sections

- Books
- Columnists
- Education
- Food
- Health
- Highway 1
- Obituaries
- Real Estate
- Religion
- Science
- So. Cal. Living
- Sunday Opinion
- Tech Times
- Times Poll
- Workplace/Jobs

Editions

- Print Edition
- National
- Wireless

Extras

- Discussion Boards
- Crossword
- Horoscope

# Decline of Latino Groups in Census Has Agencies Angry, Experts Puzzled

■ Population: Some blame the form for not listing all places of origin. Others cite evolving pan-Hispanic self-image.

By ROBIN FIELDS, TIMES STAFF WRITER

Newly released 2000 census data depict several of California's largest Latino groups as shrinking in the 1990s, an unexpected, improbable result that has community agencies complaining and demographers concerned.

Some experts attribute it to a simple change in the census form. Others believe it is a consequence of an evolving pan-Latino consciousness that discourages people from retaining strong national identities.

Community leaders had expected the census to reflect an increase, not a drop, in their numbers, considering that the state's overall Latino population grew by almost 43% in the last decade. Instead, they suspect their members may be hidden, tucked into the catchall category "Other Hispanic/Latino," which ballooned statewide by more than 1.1 million.

As a result, more than 100,000 fewer Guatemalans, Salvadorans and other Central and South Americans appear to live in California than did 10 years ago, with the sharpest drops coming in Los Angeles County.

The effects of this statistical reshuffling could be far-reaching, molding everything from the fortunes of nonprofit community agencies to immigration policy.

"The decisions about how to allocate and channel resources depend on what public officials see as the size and needs of these communities," said John Logan, director of the Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research at the State University of New York at Albany. "Undercounted can easily turn into underserved."

### Story Gallery

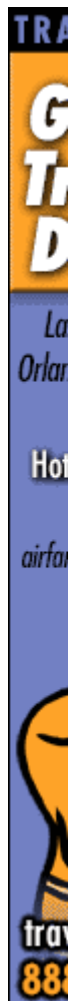
- Complete Coverage of the 2000 U.S. Census

### Times Headlines

- A New-View University
- Kind Crusader Honored
- Rising Murder Rate Dogs Oakland
- Ramshackle Camp Harbors Ghosts of Wartime Wrong
- Growing Private Schools Getting Lesson in Civics

more >

SUBSCRIBE to the Los Angeles Times. click here



[Lottery](#)  
[Traffic](#)  
[Weather](#)  
[Multimedia](#)  
**Special Reports**

**SITE MAP**

[Los Angeles Times](#)

**Subscription Services**

[Subscribe](#)  
[Change of Address](#)  
[Vacation Stops](#)  
[Suspend Delivery](#)  
[College Discount](#)  
[Gift Subscriptions](#)  
[Mail Subscriptions](#)  
[FAQ](#)

**Classifieds**

[jobs, homes,](#)  
[cars, rentals](#)

**Print Ads**

**Shopping**

**Marketplace Features**

**Recycler.com**

**LA Times Initiatives**

[Times in Education](#)  
[Reading by 9](#)  
[LA Times Books](#)  
[Times-Mirror Foundation](#)  
[Events](#)

In asking about Latinos' origins, the 2000 census form gave checkoff boxes for Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban and "other Hispanic," under which it provided a blank box for respondents to give specifics about their roots.

In 1990, the form gave examples, such as "Dominican," for how to fill in the box, but the examples were dropped from the 2000 form.

Census officials say tests showed the alteration made no difference in how Latinos responded and firmly resist theorizing about why so many Latinos wrote in "Hispanic," "Spanish," "Latino" or other general answers rather than a specific country of origin.

"We can only tell you what people told us," said Betsy Guzman, a statistician with the U.S. Census Bureau's population division.

More complete information about Latinos' ancestry may emerge next year when the bureau releases data from the long form, which is filled out by 1.9 million American households. But otherwise, the agency is stuck with what it's got, Guzman acknowledged.

Some Latino advocacy groups say the shifting numbers suggest that more Latinos are letting go of parochial or national self-definitions.

"There is a growing awareness among Latinos that they are part of a broader, pan-Hispanic category, particularly in terms of things like social status and political power," said Sonia Perez, deputy vice president of research at the National Council de la Raza.

But where Perez sees progress, demographers see confusion--and a painful void.

"You can't really tell anything about where their roots are from," said Harry Pachon, director of the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute in Claremont.

Nationally, about 6.1 million Latinos cast themselves into the inseparable sea of "other," 17% of their overall population.

A smaller census survey conducted in March 2000 through personal interviews, not mail-in forms, showed 1 million Latinos in that category, suggesting the form had a pivotal impact, Logan said.

In New York City, the census shows the Dominican population dwindling from 407,473 in 1990 to 332,977 in 2000, when analysts estimate it actually increased to almost 600,000. Similar patterns have emerged in breakdowns for other Latino hubs, including South Florida and Boston.

In California, the numbers are particularly striking in Los Angeles County, home to the state's most complex Latino community.



Local organizations say the county's Salvadoran population at least doubled in the last decade, but the census shows Salvadorans declining 26% from 253,086 in 1990 to 187,193 in 2000.

"I don't think that can be accurate," said Carlos Vaquerano, executive director of the Salvadoran-American Leadership and Educational Fund. "We've taken a lot of pride in being the second-largest Latino group here and the fastest-growing. We expected the census to prove that."

The effect of the paper reductions could be devastating, he added. Growing communities, with burgeoning economic and political clout, attract more corporate investment and marketing attention, as well as more government aid.

The census delivered similar statistical blows to a long list of local Latino subgroups. The county's large Guatemalan community appeared to decrease by 20%, while its smaller Colombian and Ecuadorean contingents purportedly dropped by 40% and 30%, respectively. Logan estimates the Guatemalan population actually increased 89% to more than 236,000.

In the Inland Empire and Orange and Ventura counties, where the vast majority of Central and South Americans have Mexican roots, few Latino communities shrank, but the "other" category grew an astonishing tenfold.

Vaquerano said the diminished figures for Salvadorans and other Central and South American groups might influence the ongoing national debate about whether and how to expand legal residency to undocumented immigrants. President Bush initially proposed changing the rules only for Mexicans; Democrats have pressed for a more expansive plan that includes illegal immigrants from other nations.

"Why did Bush target Mexicans first? Because they are the majority, " Vaquerano said. "Numbers make a difference."

For information about reprinting this article, go to <http://www.lats.com/rights/register.htm>



Copyright 2001 Los Angeles Times  
By visiting this site, you are agreeing to our [Terms of Service](#).

Powered by Genuity