



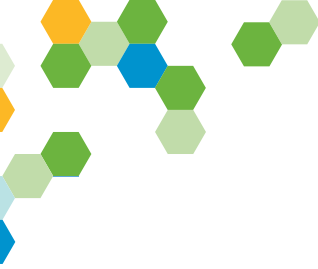
SPECIAL REPORT

The Latin American population in the United States: a “sleeping giant?”

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I. INTRODUCTION

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This report aims at describing the Latin American community and analyzing its weight and its level of economic, political and social influence, as well as its contribution to the American society.

The last census in the United States, published in 2010, considers the "Hispanic or Latino" origin as the cultural heritage, nationality, lineage or country of birth of a person or of his/her parents or ancestors prior to his/her arrival to the United States. The people who consider themselves as Hispanic, Latino or Spanish can be of any race. The term "Hispanic or Latino" refers to a Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Central American or South American person or a person of other origin or Spanish culture, regardless of race¹.

Since 1970, its remarkable growth has transformed the "face" of the United States, given that its presence as a strong minority has changed at least the country's ethnic and cultural identity, which has traditionally been considered as white-European. However, the future predictions about Latinos point to these changes going beyond those of physical appearance, since they are expected to reach considerable levels of economic and political power in just a few years. Nevertheless, in order to understand the present and future Latino potential, it is necessary to dispel some stereotypes which reflect a simplified image that does not correspond to the reality of the prejudiced Latino community. Defining it will highlight the diversity concerning its demographic, social and political configuration. This will shed light about their current contribution to the American society and their extraordinary potential.

One of the most common generalizations is to assume that the Latino community is homogeneous. The American society does not know the differences between the various nationalities, their traditions and cultures. These differences are emphasized not only by the newly arrived immigrants but also second and third generation immigrants living in the US. Yet, this diversity is not limited to the various nationalities and their respective traditions; it also includes a whole social universe which covers great fortunes, wealthy and middle class and poor sectors. In most cases, social gaps are linked to the academic background, which also explains to a great extent this diversification of the economic and social stratification. Nonetheless, in the eyes of the Americans, this diversity boils down to the Latino category, identified as a Spanish-speaking and catholic population. At most, a Latino can be identified as a Mexican person occupying the least qualified posts in the service sector.

¹ <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-04sp.pdf>.

**“Far from being asleep,
this population is well
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In line with these stereotypes, special attention should be paid to the terms repeatedly used to describe this community, which is often considered as a “sleeping giant”, both in the media and in academic articles. In terms of size, this community can rightly be defined as a giant, but this word should also be used to describe its potential. Since 2002, the Latinos are the largest minority in the United States. According to the 2010 census, their number increased to 54 million people. This spectacular growth has occurred at an extraordinary pace, since a significant emigration flow started in 1970 and it has been growing exponentially ever since.

However, the adjective “sleeping”, is more questionable. It is used to express the low political participation of the members of this community, both as voters and electors, in relation to their electoral universe. The exercise of their voting right would undoubtedly provide them with more pressure and power opportunities. Yet, even if this is true, everything suggests that it is a matter of time which will be solved as the integration process (in terms of training and social promotion of its members) progresses. This does not mean though that there is not a robust network of organizations and social and political activism representing the main demands of the newly-arrived legal or illegal emigrants and the US-born

Latinos. It should also be taken into account the fact that these dimensions give the Latinos a specific importance as voters, although not all the electorate votes, as well as clients and consumers. This occurs to the extent that, for some time now, it has become the “object of desire” of not only political parties but also of many companies. Thus, far from being asleep, this population is well awake and very active.

The power obtained by their status of consumers and voters creates a dynamic of interest which leads to the Latino community and the Spanish language constantly being in the spotlight. The efforts made by entrepreneurs and politicians to attract this enormous social group make this community visible as well as its singularity and language, whether the members of this group wish this visibility or not. This is an undesired effect for some sectors that are in favor of the integration of the immigrant population. This possibility appears more and more distant, although bilingualism state policies leave much to be desired.

Therefore, the initiatives of the Latino community and the interests of the American society, far from blurring the Latino features, empower and perpetuate them, thereby increasing their projection.

“The transformation of the foreign population structure was radical”

2. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE LATINO “GIANT”

The 2010 census reported an increase in the Hispanic population of 15.2 million people between 2000 and 2010, which represents more than 50% of the 27.3 million-growth of the total population of the US. This implies an increase of the Hispanic population of 43%, four times the country’s growth rate (9.7%)². This demographic growth is unprecedented in US history and it also seems that its future prospects are also notable, since, according to the figures, in 2010 they represented 16% of the total population and the percentage is expected to rise to 21% by 2020.

This phenomenal growth can mainly be explained by the decisive change in the migration policy in 1970, when immigrants did not represent more than 5%³. Since then, the new and less restrictive measures adopted led to a real demographic revolution from a quantitative point of view and a change in the origin of immigrants, as there is an important migration flow from Latin America and Asia, to such an extent that the country’s ethnic structure has been modified.

The aforementioned transformation of the foreign population structure was radical and rapid. Europeans’ rate fell from 75% in 1960 to 15% in 2000, accounting for 4.4 million compared to the previous 7.3 million. And although the Asian sector has also undergone a significant development and represents a quarter of the total with 7.2 million people, Latinos remain as the largest force. China, the largest source of that region and the second as regards nationalities, provides 1.4 million, six times less than Mexico, which is the main source. In order to find such a high rate of a single nationality, we must look back at the 1890 census, when 30% of the immigrants came from Germany.

Nonetheless, the official sources that count the Latino population do not take into account those people living and working illegally in each state. The Pew Research Center estimated that, in 2011, there were 11.2 million undocumented people in the country, which represents 3.5% of the country’s population. The majority of people without documents are Mexican, who constitute about half of the illegal immigrants in the country. The main characteristic of this population is that, even though

² <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-04.pdf>.

³ In this sense, the repeal of the laws of National Origins, in force since the beginning of the 20th century, was crucial. These laws established a system of nationality-based quotas, which favored the Western countries and limited immigration.

“The non-Hispanic white population has become the new minority in the country’s 100 largest cities”

they represent 3.5% of the US population, they account for 5.1% of its work force.

However, a trend announced many years ago has been confirmed in 2012: illegal immigration has dropped after more than a decade. This trend can be explained by various factors occurring at the same time. In order to understand this, the American economic crisis, since 2009, must be taken into consideration, in contrast with the economic prosperity of the region, and the increase of security measures in the US border and the ageing of the Mexican population.

All this notwithstanding, and despite this drop, the US has become after Mexico , the second most important community in the world as regards the Hispanic community.

This population evidences the importance of this group in the following years and, given their youth and their high birth rate, there is no doubt that, beyond the migration flows, their growth will be sustainable for many years. Hence, in California, since the 90s, it is the birth rate that ensures the growth of the Latino population and not migration flows. Of equal significance is the fact that, in certain areas, they no longer are a minority and have exceeded the non-Hispanic white population. In fact, according to a study

conducted by the Brookings Institution (2001), the non-Hispanic white population has become the new minority in the country’s 100 largest cities. They fell from 52% in 1990 to 44% in 2000.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

In 2010, 37.6 million (75%) Hispanics lived in the eight states with over a million Hispanic inhabitants (California, Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois, Arizona, New Jersey and Colorado). As regards the main states, percentages were significant. In California, they amount to 14.0 million (28% of the total Hispanic population), 9.5 million (19%) in Texas and, 4.2 million in Florida (8% of the Hispanic population of the US). Their presence in some metropolitan regions such as New York and Chicago is also noteworthy.

However, during the last decade, they have expanded throughout the country, beyond the areas where they traditionally settled. Hispanic population has increased in all 50 states.

Illegal population should also be counted, even though the difficulties this process entails. They are concentrated in certain areas, mainly six states—California, Texas, Florida, New York, New Jersey and Illinois— where 60% live.

“Mexicans represented around 75% of the growth of the total Hispanic population”

GROWTH OF THE DIFFERENT LATIN AMERICAN NATIONALITIES

The national diversity is a characteristic of this group, although it has been overshadowed by the “Hispanic” category. However, Latin American people prefer to be identified by their nationality rather than being included in the Latino category. Mexicans have always been the traditional and majority group, well ahead of the Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Salvadorians and Dominicans. It should be noted, however, that a diversification process regarding this issue is taking place, whereby other nationalities have been incorporated into this migration flow. These “new Latinos” have also undergone significant growth and thus the diversity of the Latino community has also grown, and that makes their homogenization in the Latino or Hispanic group even more questionable.

As regards majority groups, the Mexican group has been and still is the largest one, accounting for 63% of the total Hispanic population in the United States. This group increased by 54% and recorded the greatest growth, going from 20.6 million in 2000 to 31.8 million in 2010. Mexicans represented around 75% of the 15.2 million growth of the total Hispanic population between 2000 and 2010.

By states, they represent the biggest Hispanic group in 40 states, more than half of which are located in the South and Western regions of the country, two of them in the North East and in the 12 states of the country’s central region.

Puerto Ricans, who constitute the second largest group, represented 9% of the Hispanic population in 2010, below the 10% registered in the year 2000. The Puerto Rican population increased by 36%, from 3.4 million to 4.6 million. Puerto Ricans were the largest Hispanic group in six out of nine northwestern states and in one western state (Hawaii), with 44,000 people.

The Cuban-born population increased by 44%, from 1.2 million in 2000 to 1.8 million in 2010. Cubans represented around 4% of the total Hispanic population, both in 2000 and in 2010, and they were the biggest Hispanic group in Florida, reaching 1.2 million.

As regards other nationalities, they have been gradually diversified, as noted, although Central Americans have acquired a growing presence for reasons of geographical proximity. Since the year 2000, three groups of Hispanic origin surpassed the 1-million mark: Salvadorans (1.6 million), Dominicans (1.4 million) and Guatemalans (1.0 million).

The community of Salvadoran origin (3% of the total Hispanic

“The Latino population has a national presence and is a structural element of the American demography”

population) increased significantly between 2000 and 2010, with a growth rate of 152%. As regards Guatemalans, they notably increased between 2000 and 2010, with a growth rate of 180%, representing 2% of the total Hispanic population in 2010.

As for Hispanics of South American origin, they experienced a growth of 105%, from 1.4 million in 2000 to 2.8 million in 2010. This population accounted for 5% of the Hispanic population in 2010⁴.

On the basis of the demographic information provided, many different conclusions can be drawn:

- Since 2000, the census highlights the spectacular growth experienced by the Latino population, both for grounds of immigration and birth, becoming the largest minority of the country.
- Since 1970, there are new flows that increase the pre-existing volume and diversity and explain this exponential growth experienced in recent years.
- Likewise, new trends are emerging concerning the distribution of this

population, since they have gradually spread across the United States although, at the same time, their traditional settlements have been consolidated. Thus, the Latino population has a national presence and is a structural element of the American demography⁵.

SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS AND LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Generally speaking, a large part of the immigrant community usually belongs to the more vulnerable sectors of the population and fill poorly paid, unskilled jobs that the nationals do not want. This is the case of the Latino population, since they traditionally represented a lower level of education, compared to other immigrant groups, which has resulted in a higher rate of unemployment, lower income and significant poverty rates.

Nevertheless, this situation does not apply to the entire Latino population and this is less and less the case as second generations enter the education system. The Latino social world has a diverse spectrum of education level, income and employment status.

⁴ All demographic data provided have been obtained from the 2010 census, <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-04sp.pdf>.

⁵ As regards these characteristic features, see, M^a Jesús Criado, “Inmigración y población latina en los Estados Unidos: un perfil sociodemográfico”, (Immigration and Latin population in the USA: a socio-demographic profile) Instituto Complutense de Estudios Internacionales-Fundación Telefónica. (2007).

“Cubans are the group with the best level of education and income”

It is therefore not surprising that long-term immigrants or US-born Latinos are in a different situation than newcomers. The progressive improvement of the second generation and previous ones, also born in the US, makes it possible for them to have better training opportunities, which translates into better wages and salaries. Yet, Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants, in addition to Mexicans, as noted above, are the ones with the lowest level of education of all minorities and thus, the groups of the lowest social classes, followed by Dominicans, Peruvians and Ecuadorians.

At the other end of the spectrum, Cubans are the group with the best level of education and income. A greater proportion of them have secondary and university education. In addition, other South American groups, such as the Colombian community, have a similar level of education. The difference is that, while Cubans acquire their education in the US, other South Americans were provided a good education in their countries of origin, except for Caribbeans or Central Americans.

However, it should also be noted that, in spite of all the improvements made, school failure and early dropout (before graduating from secondary education) rates among the Latino population widely surpasses those of other minorities. This issue

jeopardizes the image that one US sector has in relation to Latinos, whose members, according to these figures, are presumed to have a lack of interest and even lack of capabilities for self-improvement. And due to this image, the difficulties and obstacles inherent to marginality and poverty are not taken into account. In fact, early school dropout is often due to the need to work in order to earn a salary. Yet, we should again stress the difference in relation to second generations, in which both the school performance and the level of education are higher. It is no coincidence that newcomers have the worst school performance, thereby proving the precarious living conditions of the immigrant population and the limitations of the education system to integrate them.

However, within the group of newcomers, we should distinguish the *dreamers*, who, despite being a group of illegal young people, have a high level of education, even university education. In many cases, they have even studied in the US and then stayed illegally in the country after their visas expired, being permanently at risk of deportation. President Obama is well aware of the contribution these young people, trained in the US, can make and that, due to their irregular situation, they will not be able to launch their business initiatives despite

“Special attention should also be paid to an increasingly strong thriving middle class”

the potential benefits for the American economy and competitiveness that can be derived from them. This group is included in President Obama's reform agenda.

Beyond this particular group, the level of education is reflected in the social status and the salaries. In fact, the aforementioned educational profile explains to a great extent why Latino immigrants have low-skilled jobs but are not the only ones. Besides the Hispanic elite that has managed to settle in the US and whose names are published in the ranking list of the most influential Hispanic people in the US⁶, special attention should also be paid to an increasingly strong thriving middle class, represented by second generations with a higher level of education.

All the above-mentioned factors suggest a general change in the Latino population though which more training and social promotion opportunities can be expected, as we have seen in the last decade. This assumption is based on the decline of the immigrant population since 2007 and the natural growth of the Latino population already settled in the United States. This social group has more resources and opportunities to provide the necessary education to their children and thus, to improve their economic

and social status. Therefore, many of the stereotypes about the Hispanic population in the US have been refuted by reality, since it is formed not only by newly arrived, destitute and low-skilled people but also by a whole social and economic world that, depending on the case, has been settled in the country for a long time.

3. THE POWER OF THE LATINO COMMUNITY AS CONSUMERS AND VOTERS

This population's spectacular quantitative growth and the progressive improvement of its social status and purchasing power make it a priority area for entrepreneurs and parties. For some years now, the demands of this community have reshaped the national market, which is a real market with an extraordinary potential, but, at the same time, they have also forced a change in the political agendas of both the Republican and Democratic Party.

Latinos are now more present in the American society thanks to this interest in the Latino population. In other words, the advertising and electoral campaigns seeking clients or voters, far from hiding it, make both Latinos and the Spanish language more visible. However, this is not always promoted by the state administration, which, in many states, encourages the *only English* policy instead of bilingualism.

⁶ See Time magazine 2005.

“Most of the Hispanic companies are small and small businesses are creating two out of three jobs in the US”

LATINO BUSINESSPEOPLE AND ENTREPRENEURS

The dimensions of the Latino community have not gone unnoticed neither for Latino nor for American entrepreneurs, who have noted the existence of a market that tends to consolidate with the growth of a young middle class.

The evolution undergone by the Latino society's business sector, which has experienced a strong growth since the nineties, proves its dynamism. Most Hispanic companies are small companies and their success is evidenced not only by their constant employment creation but also by the development of an entire Hispanic business culture that boosts the economy of the country. According to Javier Palomarez, President of the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (USHCC), “most of the Hispanic companies are small and small businesses are creating two out of three jobs in the US”. He also pointed out that while small businesses went into decline and stopped creating new jobs during the crisis, between 2008 and 2010, Hispanics created 581,000 new businesses during the same period. Last January, small businesses created 46,000 of the 257,000 new jobs in the country. Thus, the general unemployment rate was 5.7%, while the Latino rate was 6.7%. Hispanics “are probably one of the most important communities for job creation in the country”.

The Hispanic community not only contributes to the national economy and generates employment but it also offers new alternatives to traditional businesses. On the other hand, Palomarez stated that, to the sectors that were traditionally promoted by Latinos, such as construction, services, agriculture and transport, we can now add the IT industry. The main cause of this situation is related to the average age of the Latino entrepreneur (26) compared to the overall average (43). According to Palomarez, “since we are younger, we have a better grasp of technology”.

This statement is confirmed by the official data and by different representatives of the Latino entrepreneurship. María Contreras-Sweet, Director of the Small Business Administration (SBA), who also corroborates the “growth and strengthening of Latino-owned companies”, recalled that more than 3 million Latinos own small businesses in the country which represents an injection of “500,000 million dollars per year” into the economy.

One aspect of special interest should also be noted: these initiatives promote the development of a special business culture, since the Latino community is creating its own companies, the number of which is three times higher than the national average. Again, the reality contradicts the stereotype

“Hispanic society has become a key engine for consumption”

of the Latino community existing in the American society. This community is not only composed of low-income people and it does not lack initiative and ambition. The image shown by these figures is very different from the generalization of the Hispanic immigrants that supposedly have no ambition and are not eager to surpass themselves⁷.

This diversity is evidenced by the example of the Mexican population, which has serious education issues and a worse economic situation than other groups. However, according to a study published by the Fiscal Policy Institute in 2012⁸, Mexican entrepreneurs own many more small businesses in the United States than any other group of immigrants. As reported by this study, “this should not be surprising given the fact that Mexicans are the largest immigrant community in the country, although the image of immigrants as business owners is not always the prevailing perception.”

CONSUMERS

This capacity to progress and to improve the welfare

of the community is clearly demonstrated through its purchasing power. Hispanic society has become a key engine for consumption. Its purchasing power was set at one trillion dollars in 2010 and it is expected to reach 1.5 trillion dollars by 2015. If the Latinos who live here were considered as an independent economy, it would be the ninth largest economy in the world. This potential is seriously taken into account by American companies and entrepreneurs, who are now aware of the importance of penetrating the Hispanic market. In addition to the middle class, there is also a large group of people between the middle class and the low-income population, who also have a considerable purchasing power and are the focus of interest for many entrepreneurs⁹.

Due to these market opportunities, entrepreneurs are forced to enhance their means to attract customers and satisfy their specific demands. That is why the specificities and particular demands of the Latino market are currently analyzed in the initial advertisements, mainly those

⁷ The aforementioned data can be found at: <http://www.univisionsandiego.com/2015/02/13/la-cultura-empresarial-latina-impulsa-la-creacion-de-empleos-en-ee-uu/>, 13/2/15.

⁸ Report "Dueños inmigrantes de pequeños negocios. Una importante y creciente parte de la economía" ("Immigrant owners of small businesses. A significant and growing part of the economy".)

⁹ In order to characterize the Latino market, please see Nielsen Report: State of the Hispanic Consumer: The Hispanic Market Imperative, <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/reports/2012/state-of-the-hispanic-consumer-the-hispanic-market-imperative.html>, 17/04/12.

“Since the mid-twentieth century, there is a higher concern for Latino voters”

of money transfer companies, translated into Spanish.

The search for their favorite products of consumption shows the interest existing in this market and its development. Not only that, the willingness to attract these new clients is also making the companies look for the most appropriate locations and environments. This explains the proliferation of Latinos malls, where their favorite clothing brands and sizes are carefully selected according to their tastes¹⁰.

VOTERS

Since the mid-twentieth century, there is a higher concern for Latino voters, yet Bill Clinton's 1996 campaign was a significant turning point for the Democrats' strategies and messages addressed to the Latino community¹¹. Ever since, no candidate, either Democrat or Republican, has been able to totally disregard the Latino population and their concerns.

Quite on the contrary, they want to attract their attention and, for this purpose, they directly speak to them in Spanish.

This growing interest is not surprising considering the extraordinary dimensions of the Latino voters and their progressive growth. Of the 55 million Hispanics, who represent 17% of the US population, 25.2 million have the right to vote. This electorate is constantly growing at the same pace as the Latino youth population. Thus, according to Arturo Vargas, Director of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, “every month, around 50,000 young Latin American citizens reach the age of 18 and become part of the potential electorate”. The experts emphasize that this growth is not related to the newly arrived immigrants but to second and third generation Latinos, US citizens by birth, who grew up in the US and whose parents or grandparents are Latin American.

¹⁰ In this sense, the existence of companies which advise American companies in order to attract the Latino consumer is very interesting. This is the case of the effort made by the entrepreneur José de Jesús Legaspi, founder of The Legaspi Company, who has worked in these initiatives since 1977 and teaches American suppliers how to adapt to Hispanic consumer's tastes and sizes. “Hispanics have smaller feet. American manufacturers think that they do not like their shoes because they do not buy them, yet the problem is that they never have small sizes and that is why Hispanic consumers never buy their shoes”. Legaspi tries to make Macy's, Marshall's or Forever 21's shopkeepers understand that Latinos wear smaller sizes and, unlike the American clients, “they like to buy when someone assists them and tells them the characteristics of the product they are interested in”. He also states that “we work with suppliers to help them intellectually recognize how the Latino consumer is, for them to be able to develop their marketing sense and to better reach the Hispanic market”.

¹¹ The drafting of the document Latino Communications Strategy, 1994-1996, produced by Andy Hernández, and the creation of an office where all the material addressed to the Hispanic audience is prepared (elaboration of press kits, briefings, notes and translation of documents) for the Democrat Committee, shows the importance that the Hispanic vote is slowly acquiring.

“The power given to the Latino community, could be even stronger if the participation rate of the Latino electorate was higher”

Considering the dimensions of this electorate, nowadays it does not seem unreasonable to imagine the next US President being Hispanic. In fact, he might already have been born and would become president in 20 years' time¹².

This electorate has become more significant than ever before, given the importance it has acquired in the electoral campaigns. Each party has a group or office responsible for this community; they develop websites, organize weekly auditions in Spanish and have a great interest in appointing Latino representatives to run for elective offices, since this is the only way to attract these voters.

Furthermore, the concerns of the Latino community are included in their speeches; both groups consider themselves to be logical option for Hispanic voters (one, because of their traditional protection of the rights of minority groups and the other, because they represent the traditional family values normally attributed to Hispanics) and criticize and dismiss the efforts made by their opponent, who they accuse of devoting all their energy and resources in a mere marketing campaign.

This competition stems from the willingness to win votes throughout the country, since the Latino population is spread

across the whole territory and even has a significant importance in certain states. Of the 50 states, only 9 are in dispute, since the others are already decided given their historical political inclination towards one party or the other. And among these 9 states, 15% to 20% of the voters are Latin Americans, which translates into 3 million votes, as notes Antonio González, President of the William Velázquez Institute. The weight of the largest minority will mainly be felt in Nevada, Colorado, New Mexico and Florida, as was seen in 2004 when President George W. Bush and, later, President Obama won the elections.

All these figures show the power given by the number of voters to the Latino community, which could be even stronger if the participation rate of the Latino electorate was higher. Despite its rising trend, the rate of electoral participation and the number of eligible persons are low. Even though 11.2 million Latinos voted in the 2012 elections, they only accounted for 48% of the total electorate. Yet this participation rate was even lower than that of 2008 (49%). As regards the candidates, the number of representatives of the Latino community is still not significant and although the elections held on November 4,

¹² El País, 19/10/14, http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2014/10/19/actualidad/1413733870_041970.html, La República, 29/01/09, <http://www.larepublica.pe/26-01-2009/aseguran-que-el-primer-presidente-hispano-de-eeuu-ya-ha-nacido>.

“The affirmation of the Latino identity cannot be reversed”

2014 had a higher percentage of Hispanics (29 seats in the Congress and 3 seats in the Senate, which represents 8% of the US Congress), it is still far from the percentage they represent among the American population.

Nevertheless, in addition to the growing number of citizens of Hispanic origin entitled to vote, the number of candidates for posts at any level, (local, state or even federal), is also increasing. “This scenario strengthens the idea that, election after election and year after year, the Hispanic influence is ever growing both in the society and, of course, in politics”¹³.

The overview of the topics addressed highlights the power of the Latino community stemming from its size and its capacity:

- Its growing purchasing power facilitates the creation of a permanently growing specific market, in which Latino entrepreneurs are very active. Consequently, the middle and professional class are active as well.
- Its political presence is still growing, but at a slower pace, which does not mean

that this community is decisive for the electoral results and thus an “object of desire” for the Democrat and Republican parties.

4. CONCLUSION: THE LATINAMERICANIZATION OF THE UNITED STATES

Despite the figures recorded not so many years ago, in the early 2000s, it was doubted whether the Latino community itself was going to survive, together with the Spanish language as its identifying trait. The data presented in these pages as well as this society’s initiatives and progresses may probably have revealed that this possibility is apparently no longer possible. The affirmation of the Latino identity cannot be reversed and it has definitely become a structural element of the American society, with all the changes it implies.

The dynamic triggered within the Latino community is especially interesting, since it constantly recreates and feeds its existence and its importance. The Latinos themselves are not the only ones taking part of this dynamic, a large part of the rest of the society is also involved. Their ambition to attract consumers and voters gives more and more importance

¹³ D. Ureña e I. Royo, “El papel del voto hispano en las elecciones de noviembre en EEUU”, (The role of the Hispanic vote in the USA´s Election in November) ARI, 51/4014, Real Instituto Elcano, http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/riecano_es/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/eeuu-dialogo+trasatlantico/ari51-2014-urena-royo-papel-del-voto-hispano-elecciones-de-noviembre-eeuu-2014#VQAk9PmG9E4.

“The use of the Spanish language is now compulsory for governmental institutions”

to Latinos and the Spanish language. Hence, in addition to the more or less firm willingness of this community to maintain its traditions and language, there is a spontaneous social dynamic resulting from the relevance acquired by Latinos that has also been instrumental in promoting the latinamericanization of the United States.

This process is contrary to the idea of the Anglo-Saxon nation united under the cultural assimilation. Although some people still support it, it does not seem realistic to maintain the cultural assimilation processes carried out with the previous waves of immigrants, since the language diversity has traditionally been considered as a threat for the unity of the nation. This is the reason why the previous waves of immigrants (Germans, Italians or Polish) lost their linguistic heritage. Since the nineties, the effort made to establish the only English system, has resulted in the prohibition of the use of languages other than English in public administration in half of the

states. Within this tendency, bilingualism is not considered as a solution either and thus, in some states, bilingual education has even been banned. This position completely contradicts the candidates to popularly-elected posts, who promote the Spanish language and the standardization of its use by speaking Spanish with their potential voters.

Indeed, the use of the Spanish language is now compulsory for governmental institutions, despite the resistance, given the demand for services of the Latino taxpayers. Therefore, hospitals, firefighters and public security forces promote and encourage, in one way or another, the linguistic skills of their members¹⁴.

In short, considering the evidence of the reality and the generalization of a multicultural view, there seems to be no future for assimilationist approaches. However, this does not mean that, since Latinos are voters, taxpayers and consumers, segregation and discrimination have disappeared from society.

¹⁴ The doctors of the New York-Presbyterian Hospital, for instance, linked to Columbia University and located at the heart of Washington Heights, where a large Dominican community is concentrated, take an intensive course on basic terms and knowledge related to this area. They continue their training with other courses during the year. In Texas, police officers must pass a Spanish language course, paid by the institution, in order to obtain the rank of senior-officer. In Phoenix (Arizona), in July 2002, the first immersion programme was launched in a fire station with the objective of increasing the bilingual staff. This process also concerns the field of education. In Dallas (Texas), where Hispanics represent 57% of the school district, 30% of whom had limited English proficiency, a Spanish language training (worth one million dollars) was approved in October 2002 for teachers who had prior knowledge of Spanish.

“Bridges for dialogue and reciprocal knowledge should be built”

The existence of the Latino community will surely depend on the willingness of its members to be identified as such and to preserve its distinctiveness. In any case, they clearly have the power to project themselves as a community and hold an important position in the American society. According to many observers, “the future of the United States is Hispanic”¹⁵, and this is evidenced by the current reality. Nonetheless, not everything depends on the Latino population; it must also be considered whether the society is prepared to welcome this population from an economic, political and cultural point of view.

A reform of the migration policy is pending to be carried out since 2013. At the time, the Congress approved, with the support of both parties, a revision of the migration system. However, due to different reasons, the process has not progressed. Since January this year, in an attempt to change this situation and to fulfill an electoral promise, President Obama decided to introduce a partial reform through presidential decrees. However, this is still only an attempt, since the judicial power has blocked it again.

All these difficulties make even more necessary to find a solution. This reform is undoubtedly important, since it aims at regularizing the status of 11 million people unlawfully present in the country. Nonetheless, this reform would not be enough, although it now seems to be the solution to all problems. Even if it was entirely approved, the integration of 50 million Latinos who live in the US must still be carried out. For this purpose, bridges for dialogue and reciprocal knowledge should be built, leaving any simplistic prejudices behind. In order to achieve this integration, a dialogue between compatriots must be developed, as they must know each other and recognize each other as such. Latinos and their children should therefore continue learning English as well as the history of the United States. But, at the same time, the white majority will have to learn to live in a diverse world, such as their own national reality, where they will have to take into consideration the perspectives of their Spanish-speaking¹⁶ fellow-citizens. Therefore, the challenge exists both for the Latino community and for the whole American society.

¹⁵ Daniel Ureña, “El futuro de Estados Unidos será Hispano”, (The future of the USA is Hispanic) 20/03/2014, <http://www.elmundo.es/opinion/2014/03/20/532b5084268e3eb20a8b458d.html>.

¹⁶ As regards this integration proposal, W. Carrigan y C. Webb, “La reforma de la inmigración y la historia hispana en estados Unidos”, (The immigration reform and the Hispanic history in the USA) 1/03/15, http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2015/03/01/actualidad/1425166727_525835.htm. 1

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