

Lauren Bartlett, lbartlett@support.ucla.edu
(310) 206-1458

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Salvadoran Immigrants in California Are Longtime Residents, Have High Employment Levels Compared to Other Latinos, UCLA Study Says

Most Salvadorans living in California have been residents of the state for at least 15 years and are not recent immigrants, according to a UCLA study.

The significant influx of Salvadorans to California occurred in the 1980s when internal political turmoil in El Salvador led many to flee. The majority of the Salvadorans settled in Los Angeles. Immigration peaked during the 1980s and has leveled off.

Statistics from the 2000 Census show there were 272,999 Salvadorans in California, with 187,193 of them living in Los Angeles County, according to "Salvadoran Americans: A Profile," by the Center for the Study of Latino Health & Culture at the UCLA School of Medicine.

UCLA researchers decided to look at trends in the Salvadoran-American community in the state because very little information has been available, and the university wanted to fill the information gap, said David Hayes-Bautista, the center director. The center, which funded the study, worked with The Salvadoran-American Leadership and Educational Fund on the project.

"Salvadoran Americans have made great contributions to the region and the state, and we wanted to provide data to the public that correct some misperceptions about that population segment," Hayes-Bautista said.

"This study confirms what we have been saying for many years — Salvadorans are hard-working people, family-oriented, dedicated, and for many years have contributed to the growth of the California economy through their entrepreneurial skills," said Carlos Vaquerano, executive director of The Salvadoran-American Leadership and Educational Fund. "Although many Salvadorans are permanent residents and/or becoming U.S. citizens, and are voting in the political process, we still have several hundred thousand people who are in legal limbo and face economic hardship. We have a moral obligation to help them reach the ladder of success and become part of the American dream."

2-2-2 UCLA Study on Salvadoran Immigrants in California

Salvadorans in California are both immigrants and refugees, according to the study. By contrast, Mexican Americans who came to the United States in the 1970s and 1980s solely were immigrants. Unlike refugees from Cuba, Vietnam or other socialist countries, Salvadoran refugees were not given official recognition of their refugee status; consequently, they received no special benefits or programs. Many Salvadoran refugees were from urban areas and include educated professionals such as community organizers, labor leaders, journalists, teachers and professionals, the study found.

While many refugees typically want to return to their countries, with the passage of time, many Salvadorans established their lives in California — they married, had children and started businesses.

The profile finds that in general, Salvadoran men are more likely to be employed than Mexican immigrants and U.S.-born Latino men, with 81 percent of Salvadoran men holding jobs, compared to 80 percent of Mexican immigrant men and 61 percent of U.S.-born Latinos.

Salvadoran immigrant women are employed at higher rates than Mexican immigrant women, and at nearly the same rate as U.S.-born Latina women. Data from 1999 shows 52 percent of Salvadoran immigrant females were employed, compared to 53 percent of U.S.-born Latina women and 44 percent of Mexican immigrant women.

“While Latino men have historically been the most active element in the state’s labor force, Salvadoran Americans are the most active subgroup within the Latino population,” Hayes-Bautista said.

The study also examines the issue of education. Traditionally, U.S.-born Latinos have higher educational levels than immigrant Latinos; statistics from 1999 show that 42 percent of U.S.-born Latinos had attended college at some point in their lives. However, among immigrants, Salvadorans are comparatively better educated. Salvadoran immigrant adults — age 25 or older — were twice as likely as Mexican immigrant adults to have attended college, with 22 percent of Salvadoran immigrants attending college, compared to 11 percent of Mexican immigrants.

“A comparatively highly educated immigrant population with a strong work ethic is perhaps the best way to describe Salvadoran Americans today,” Hayes-Bautista said.

Data sources for the Salvadoran profile came from the 2000 U.S. Census, the 1999 Current Population Survey and the 2000 UCLA Social Attitudes Survey.

The mission of The Salvadoran-American Leadership and Educational Fund, a nonprofit organization, is to promote the civic participation and representation of the Salvadoran and other Latino communities in Los Angeles, as well as to advocate for its economic, educational and political advancement and growth.

**SALVADORAN-AMERICANS:
A PROFILE**

by

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Aíde Pérez

Center for the Study of Latino Health & Culture
Division of General Internal Medicine & Health Services Research
Department of Medicine
UCLA

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INTRODUCTION

Prior to 1970, there were very few Salvadoran-Americans in the state of California or in the county of Los Angeles. The infamous “soccer war” of 1970, which occurred in the aftermath of a World Cup playoff game between the neighboring countries of Honduras and El Salvador, was perhaps the first time that El Salvador was in U.S. news since World War II.

A country rich in people but limited in resources, El Salvador had been experiencing internal political turmoil since the 1930’s. In the late 1970’s, after the Sandinistas drove out the dictator Somoza in neighboring Nicaragua, U.S. foreign policy saw El Salvador as the next “domino” ready to fall into the socialist camp. Fearing a social revolution only “a day’s drive from Harlingen, Texas”, the United States chose to support and arm particular sides in a 40-year-old internal struggle.

An aftermath of that entry into the Salvadoran domestic dispute was a quantum jump in domestic instability, exacerbated by armed confrontations. Fearful for their lives, hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans fled the country, seeking peaceful lives in a new country, the United States. The greatest number of Salvadorans settled in California, and the greatest number in this state settled in Los Angeles County.

POPULATION ESTIMATE

The U.S. Census has had difficulty finding the right formula to count Latinos other than those of Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican origin in the United States. Because of the way the question of national origin was asked, there is suspicion that many Latinos did not identify themselves specifically as Salvadoran origin, but used the residual category of “Other Hispanic” instead. If this is the case, there is likely an undercount in the 2000 Census. Until this undercount is corrected, the 2000 Census data will be used, but always with this caution: Salvadoran population figures probably need to be increased by some percentage yet to be determined.

The 2000 Census enumerated:

- 272,999 Salvadorans in the state of California.
- 187,193 Salvadorans in Los Angeles County.

REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS

The population movement from Mexico to California in the 1970s and 1980s was solely comprised of immigrants, largely from the rural areas of Mexico.

By contrast, the population movement from El Salvador contained both **immigrants** and **refugees**. However, unlike refugees from Cuba, Viet Nam or other socialist countries, refugees from El Salvador were not given official recognition of their refugee status, and received no special benefits or programs to help them restart their lives.

Many Salvadoran refugees were from urban areas rather than rural, and their numbers included many comparatively highly-educated professionals: community organizers, labor leaders, journalists, teachers, and others.

The dream of many refugees is to return home and rebuild their country. Cuban refugees were provided with bilingual education for their children so that they could return to Cuba and rebuild. However, with the passage of time, many Salvadorans established their lives in California, married, had children, started businesses, and have started to see themselves as “Americans” rather than temporary refugees and immigrants from El Salvador.

The data in this profile give a portrait of the Salvadoran-American community. The data come from many sources: the 2000 Census, the 1999 Current Population Survey, and the 2000 UCLA Social Attitudes Survey (for Los Angeles County only).

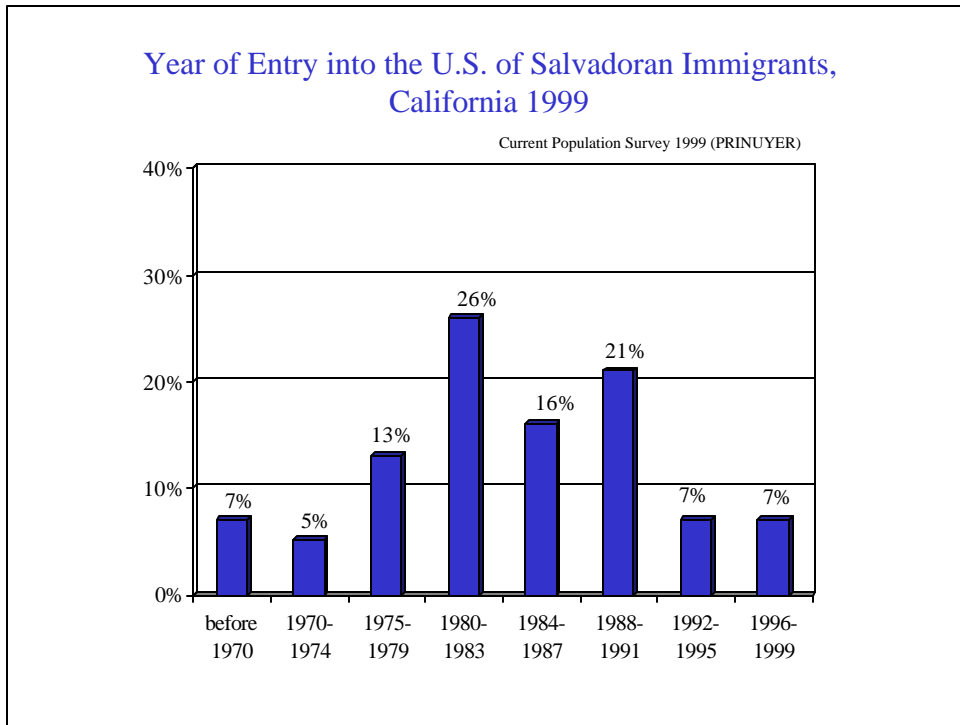
OVERVIEW OF THE SALVADORAN-AMERICAN POPULATION

In summary, an overview of the Salvadoran-American population shows that:

- **Maturing Immigrant Population.** In spite of the popular view that Salvadoran immigrants are still arriving in large numbers, the vast majority (67%) of Salvadoran immigrants arrived prior to 1988.
- **Predominantly Female.** While most populations are about equally divided between male and female, the Salvadoran immigrant community is 55.4% female.
- **High Employment Rates.** Immigrant Latino males (both Salvadoran and Mexican) are more likely to be employed than U.S.-born Latino males. However, Salvadoran females are just as active in the labor force as U.S.-born Latina females, and both groups are more active than Mexican immigrants.
- **Education.** Compared to Mexican immigrants, Salvadoran immigrants are much better educated. Salvadoran immigrants are more likely to have attended college than Mexican immigrants.
- **Income.** Salvadoran income is stratified into two groups. One group, the highly educated, does quite well. However, those who are not as highly educated, do quite poorly.

- **Computers and Internet.** The Internet revolution is not leaving Salvadoran-Americans behind.
- **Proud to be American.** Salvadoran-Americans are very proud of their American identity.

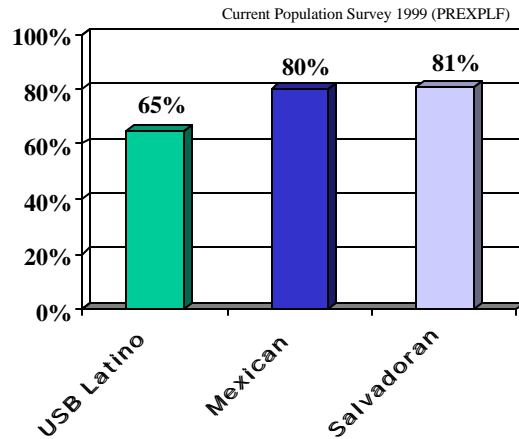
As it continues to mature, the Salvadoran-American community will continue to make great contributions to daily life in the state of California and in the county of Los Angeles.



While many have the perception that Salvadoran immigrants have only recently arrived in the United States, the fact is that most Salvadoran immigrants have been in this country for more than fifteen years: 67% of Salvadoran immigrants arrived prior to 1988.

- 7% arrived before 1970.
- 5% arrived between 1970 and 1974.
- 13% arrived between 1975 and 1979.
- 26% arrived between 1980 and 1983.
- 16% arrived between 1984 and 1987.

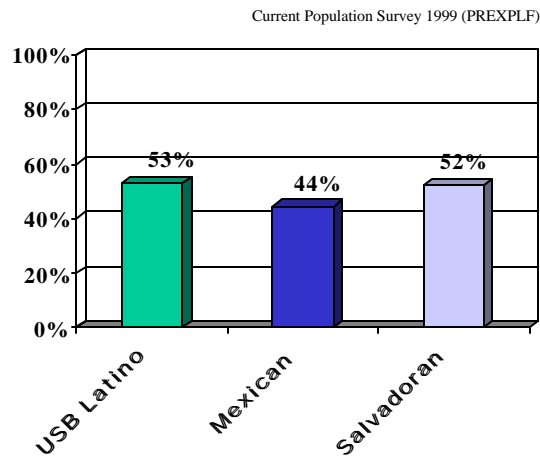
Employment Status: Employed, Male, (Age 15+) California, 1999



In general Latino males are more likely to be employed than males of any other ethnicity. Classically immigrant Latino males are more likely to be employed than U.S. born Latino males.

- 65% of U.S.-born Latino males were employed.
- 80% of Mexican immigrant males were employed.
- 81% of Salvadoran immigrant males were employed.

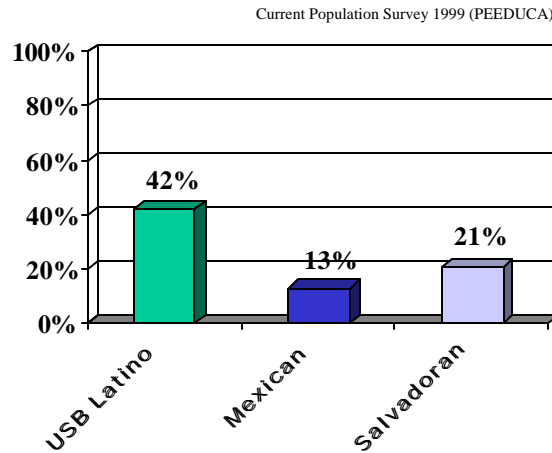
Employment Status: Employed, Female, (Age 15+) California, 1999



Classically females have lower employment rates than males. We see this amongst Latina females, but with some interesting exceptions. Mexican immigrant females have lower employment rates than both Salvadoran immigrants and U.S.-born Latina females.

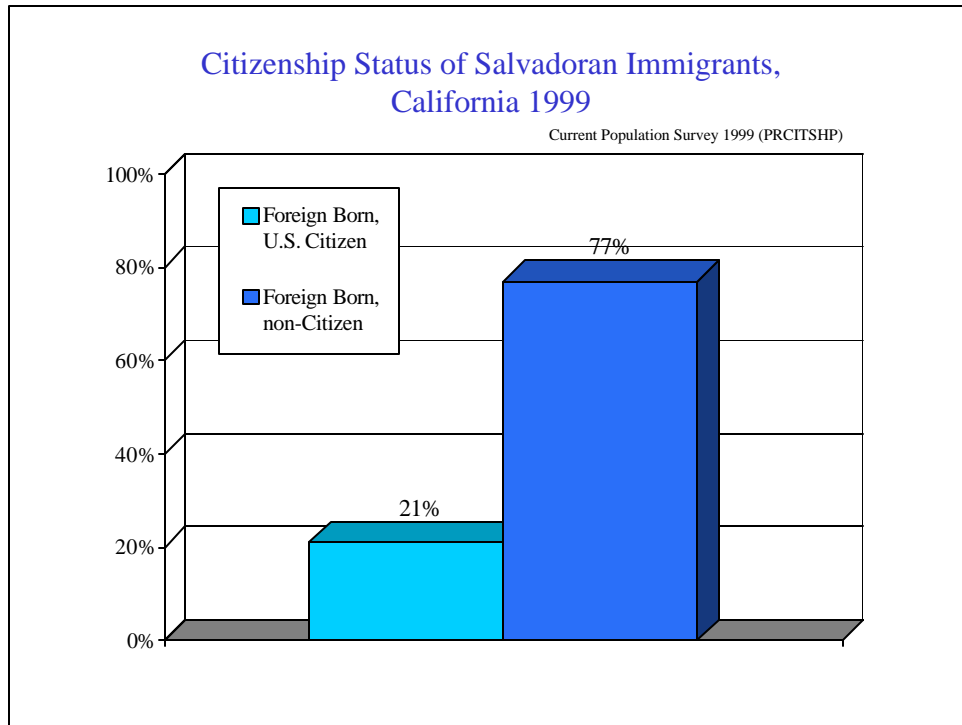
- 52% of Salvadoran immigrant females were employed.
- 53% of U.S.-born Latina females were employed.
- 44% of Mexican immigrant Latina females were employed.

Attended College, (Age 25+) California, 1999



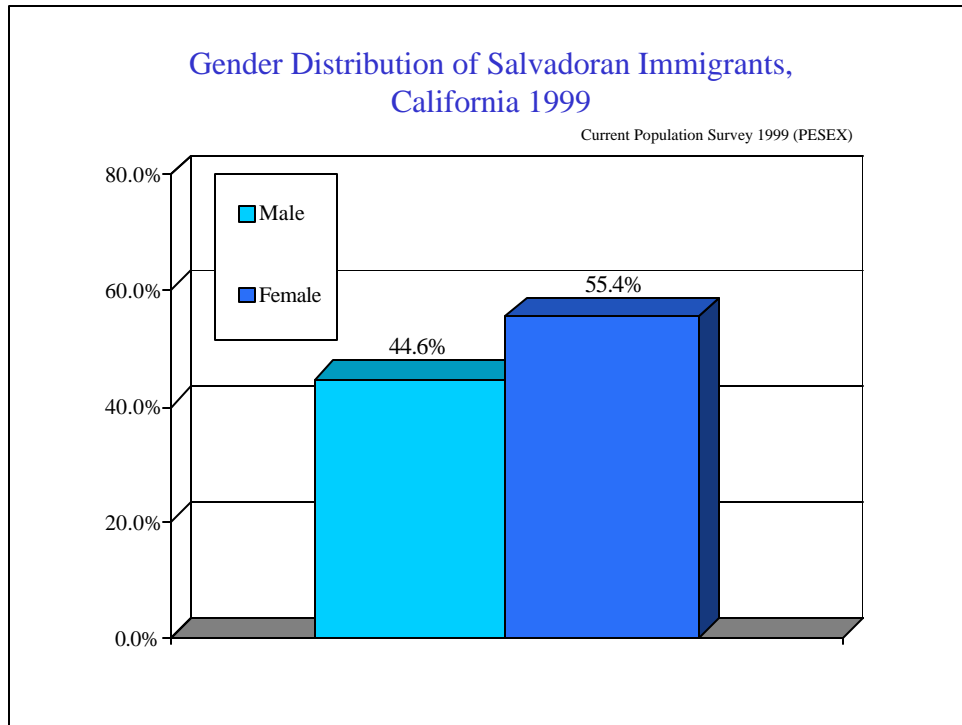
Classically, US-born Latinos have better educational levels than immigrant Latinos. Yet, not all immigrant Latinos have the same educational levels. Salvadoran immigrant adults (age 25+ years) are more likely than Mexican immigrant adults to have attended college.

- 42% of US-born Latinos had attended college at some point in their lives by 1999.
- 21% of Salvadoran immigrants had attended college.
- 13% of Mexican immigrants had attended college.



In spite of the fact that 67% of Salvadoran immigrants came to the United States prior to 1988, the vast majority have not become citizens. Many Salvadorans occupy a variety of temporary visas and immigration statuses. Resolution of these statuses will be very important for the stabilization of the community.

- 21% of Salvadoran immigrants have become naturalized citizens.
- 77% of Salvadoran immigrants are still not citizens and occupy a variety of immigration statuses.

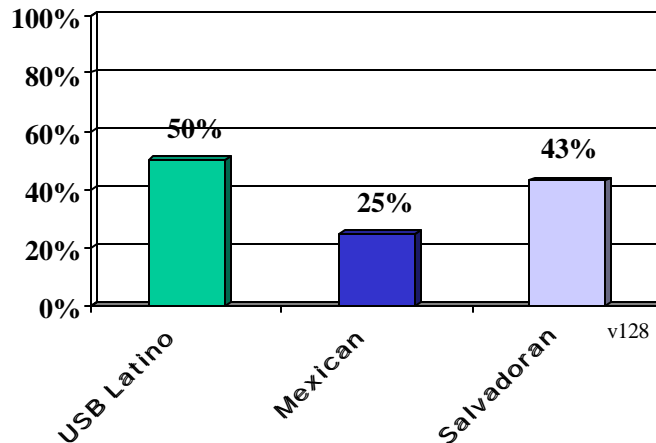


There is a pronounced gender imbalance in the Salvadoran immigrant population which is important to notice. Most populations have a relatively even split between males and females, roughly 50/50. However, Salvadoran immigrants have a distinct predominance of females and a lower representation of males.

- 55.4% of Salvadoran immigrants are female.
- 44.6% of Salvadoran immigrants are male.

Have a Computer at Home. Los Angeles County 2000

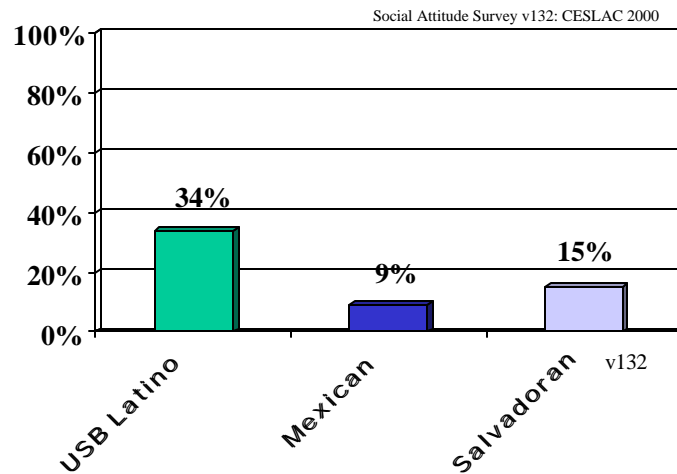
Social Attitude Survey v127-8: CESLAC 2000



Computer access is increasing among Latinos. Half of US-born Latinos have a computer in the home, and nearly half of Salvadoran immigrants have a computer.

- 50% of U.S. born Latinos have a computer at home.
- 43% of Salvadoran immigrants have a computer at home.
- 25% of Mexican immigrants have a computer at home.

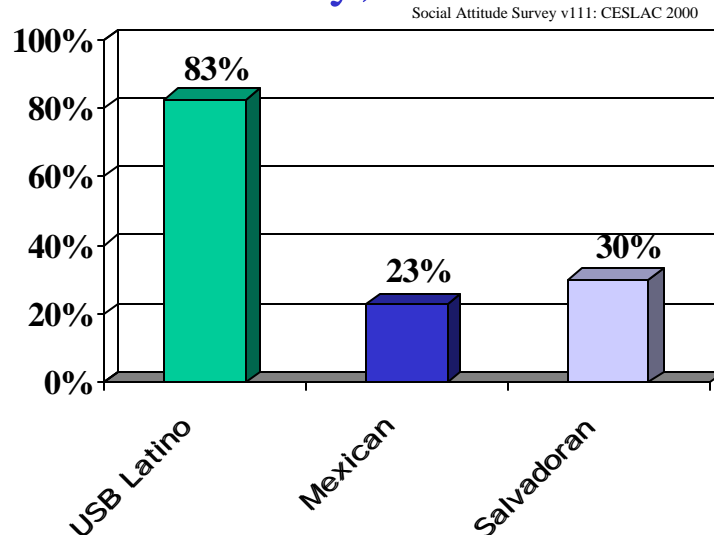
Those Who Have Computer Access: Use it for Internet. Los Angeles County 2000



US-born Latino households use computers for internet access more than immigrant households.

- 34% of US-born Latinos use the internet.
- 15% of Salvadoran immigrants use the internet.
- 9% of Mexican immigrants use the internet.

Registered to Vote, Los Angeles County, 2000

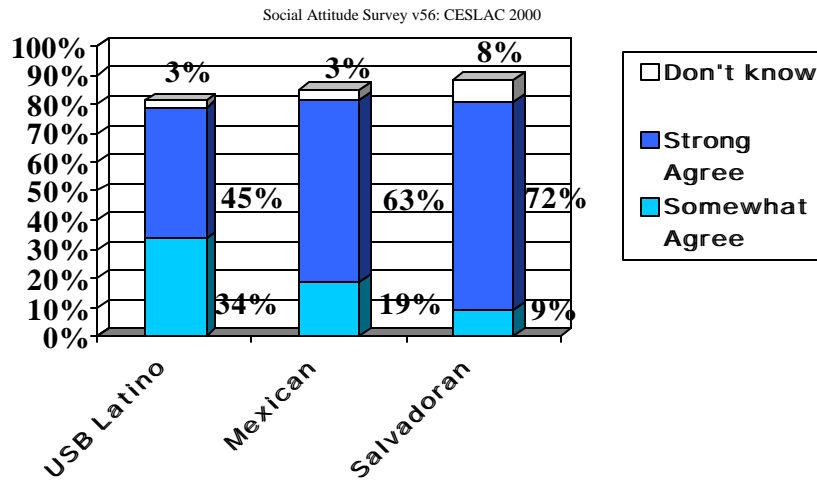


In the U.S.-born Latino population, the vast majority of adults are registered to vote, whereas immigrant populations have a lower percentage of registered voters. This is due, in large part, to the fact that immigrants must first become naturalized U.S. citizens before they can register to vote.

- 83% of U.S.-born Latinos are registered to vote.
- 23% of Mexican immigrants are registered to vote.
- 30% of Salvadoran immigrants are registered to vote.

Salvadoran immigrants are somewhat more likely to be registered to vote than Mexican immigrants.

Agree: “Proposition 187 woke up the Latino population politically”, Los Angeles County 2000

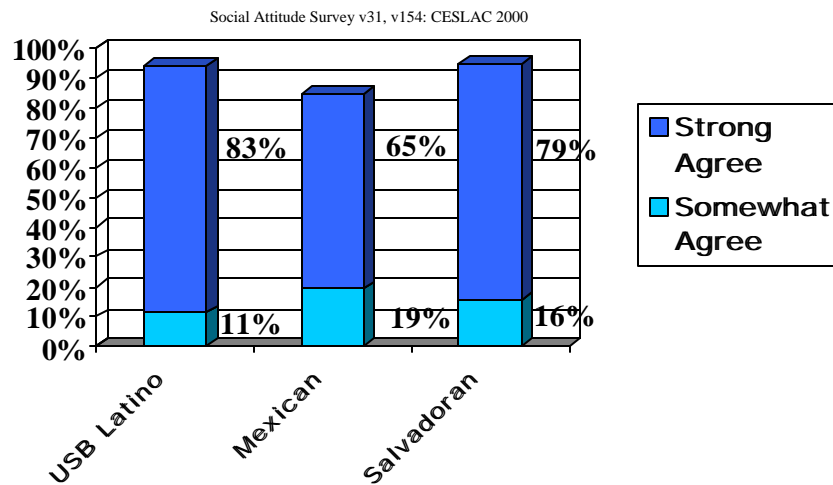


Proposition 187 was a watershed in Latino political participation in that it galvanized many U.S.-born Latinos to become politically active, and it motivated many immigrants to become U.S. citizens. The after effects of Proposition 187 were seen in the summer of 2000 when U.S. born Latinos, Mexican immigrants, and Salvadoran immigrants nearly equally saw that Proposition 187 woke up the Latino population politically.

- 79% of U.S.-born Latinos agreed.
- 82% of Mexican immigrants agreed.
- 81% of Salvadoran immigrants agreed.

Both Mexican and Salvadoran immigrants agreed more strongly than U.S.-born Latinos, but almost all Latinos felt the after effects of Proposition 187 to a greater or lesser extent.

Naturalized Agree: “I am proud to be American” Los Angeles County 2000

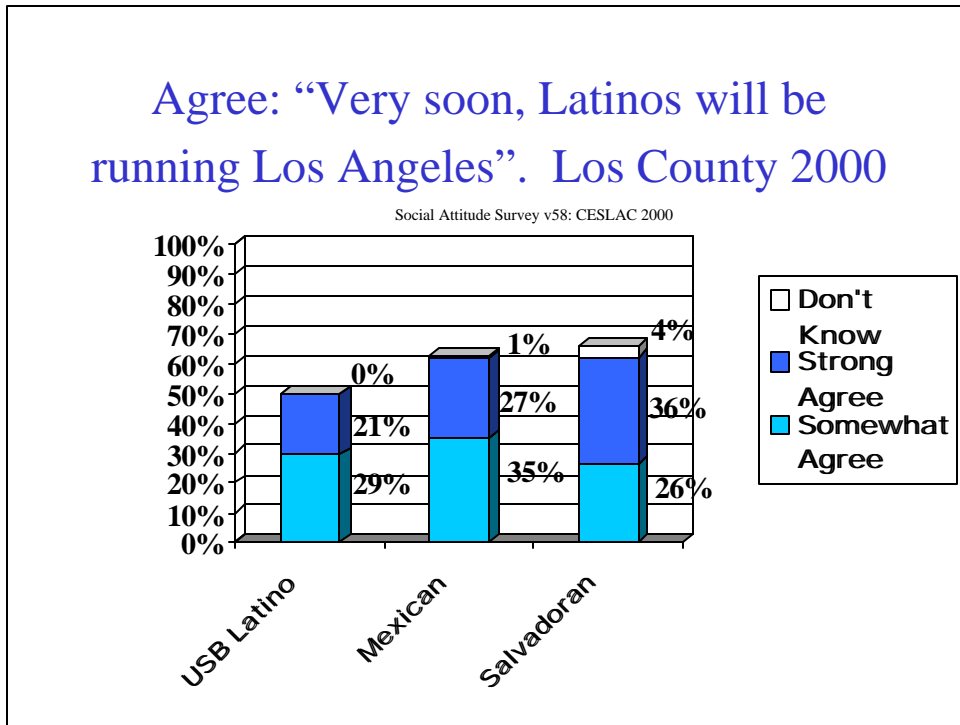


In general, U.S. citizen Latinos are extremely proud of being American. Salvadorans who have become naturalized U.S. citizens are just as proud to be American. Of both Salvadoran and Mexican immigrants who have become naturalized U.S. citizens, Salvadorans are slightly more likely to agree to the statement: “I am proud to be American”.

- 94% of U.S.-born Latinos are proud to feel American.
- 95% of naturalized Salvadoran immigrants are proud to be American.
- 84% of naturalized Mexican immigrants are proud to be American.

Salvadoran-Americans are very proud of their American identity.

Agree: “Very soon, Latinos will be running Los Angeles”. Los County 2000



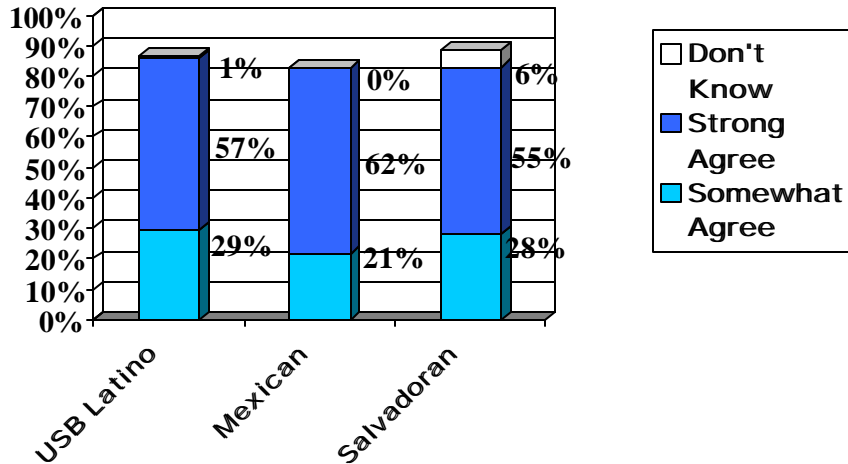
Latino political optimism is seen most strongly in the immigrant portion of the populations.

- 62% of Mexican immigrants feel that soon Latinos will be running Los Angeles.
- 63% of Salvadoran immigrants feel that soon Latinos will be running Los Angeles.
- 50% of U.S.-born Latino feel that soon Latinos will be running Los Angeles.

Immigrant Latinos (both Salvadoran and Mexican) felt most strongly about this issue and are more politically optimistic than U.S.-born Latinos.

Agree: “Businesses sell to the Latino market better when they learn about Latino culture”. Los Angeles County 2000

Social Attitude Survey v69: CESLAC 2000



While very proud to be Americans, Latinos also are very proud of their Latino Cultural Background. In general, Latinos feel very strongly that businesses will sell better to them if they understand the wants and needs of the Latino market.

- 83% of U.S.-born Latinos agreed.
- 82% of Mexican immigrants agreed.
- 84% of Salvadoran immigrants agreed.

Latinos whether U.S.-born or immigrant prefer that businesses learn about Latino culture.