

**The Aging of the Latino Community in the United States:  
Lessons and Implications for Mexico**

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It gives me great pleasure to be with you and to discuss the aging of the Latino community in the United States. I believe that our experiences have relevance to the aging of the Mexico population. As Director of the UCLA Center for Policy Research on Aging, we are engaged in policy analysis that helps us understand the social, policy and political issues facing the Latino population in the United States. I will provide to you three reports: Reforma del Seguro Social: Implicaciones para Los Jubilados Latinos; Latinos y el Futuro del Seguro Social y El Impacto del Seguro Social en La Comunidad Latina. These three reports reflect a major political controversy In the United States: How to Insure adequate retirement security for all Americans in particular, our country's soon-to-be largest minority group.

The United States like much of the world is enjoying increased life expectancy and an expanding senior citizen population. Currently about 15 percent of the U.S. population is 65 years of age and over amounting to about 35 million elderly. But by 2050, one in five Americans will be over 65 years old and this will represent the aging of our baby boom population, those born between 1945 and 1946. They will give us up to 80 million senior citizens. At the same time, the Latino population is growing. We have approximately 47 million Hispanics in the United States with 6.03% (US Census, 2008) of that population being 65 years of age or older. In this context, the Hispanic population includes people whose family of origin are from Mexico, Central and South America, Puerto Rico and Cuba. By 2050 they will surpass the black population and become our largest minority group, Latinos are also enjoying increased life expectancy and next to Whites and certain Asian groups, enjoy the highest life spans. Thus, by 2030 we will see an increase in the proportion of Latinos that will be 65 years of age and over.

Our Research Center has examined the policy implications of this aging and we began to do so several years ago when President Bush attempted to privatize the Social Security system. Our Social Security system is a guaranteed pension system for older persons and the disabled. President Bush attempted to eliminate the benefits and safeguards of this important social program but fortunately, advocates and liberal members of Congress defeated this attempt. The reports I share with you were our attempt to influence this policy debate. We highlighted the importance of Social Security to Latinos and their families. Latino elders receive a large portion of their retirement funds from Social Security and their families and survivors rely heavily on these benefits. In addition, the growing Hispanic population subsidizes this federal program through the taxes they pay but do not receive. As you know, a large portion of our Latino population is undocumented but work in the US and pay social security taxes. Yet, they are unable to receive these benefits, which then accrue to the non-Hispanic elderly population.

We are now focusing on the next generation of Latino elderly; those now in middle aged. Latino baby boomers have not been seen as an area of research and policy analysis. Our research center is the first to document that 10 percent of the overall baby boomer group is composed of Hispanics making for approximately 8 million Latinos born between 1946 and 1964. Understanding the needs of Latino baby boomers is important for several reasons. First, they will be the next

generation of Hispanic elders and we need to understand their social, cultural, financial and retirement needs. Perhaps more important, this leading edge of Latino baby boomers will give us important clues about the future aging of the overall Latino population which will be, in about 30 years, a large portion of the elderly group. And with the growing political influence of Hispanics in the United States, the future Latino elderly may become an important political force.

The United States is characterized by organized advocacy groups. Senior Citizens are some of the most influential political groups in the US and AARP, in particular, is a powerful political lobby. AARP, for example, is having an importance influence in the ongoing health care reform debates. We believe that someday Latino elders can also be an influential lobby and advocacy group. Much will depend on the aging of Latino baby boomers and the extent to which they choose to be active in their old age. Already, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus is playing a crucial role in the pending immigration reform debates and is one of the best-organized political lobbies. With the increase in the Latino population and the Latino elderly cohort, we can expect that Latino baby boomers will exert important influence in public policy.

Therefore, we suggest to you that you take note of the aging of the Hispanic population in the United States and take special note of the Baby boomers in that group. They could be important allies for Mexico and for US/Bilateral relationships. Certainly, as both our countries address aging and the needs of their elderly, we in the United States want to be supportive of your efforts and as a baby boomer, I will want to work closely with the gerontologists from Mexico and with any future Mexican senior citizen advocacy group.