

Ethnic Concentration and Chicano Poverty: A Comparative Approach

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Chicanos represent one of the few racial and ethnic groups in this country that have experienced consistent increases in poverty since 1980. Unfortunately, little empirical and policy attention has focused on Chicano poverty and its areal variation across the nation. This research uses data from the 1990 Summary Tape File 4C (STF4C) to examine Chicano poverty in U.S. counties containing at least 500 Chicanos. Two hypotheses are examined: (1) there is a positive relationship between the relative size of the Chicano population and the group's poverty rate, and (2) this association is stronger in the Southwest. The results from multivariate analyses provide support for both hypotheses. For comparative purposes, the analysis is also conducted for Anglos and African Americans. © 1997 Academic Press

A significant body of research studying poverty has accumulated over the past several decades. Unfortunately, because this literature is based primarily on African Americans and, to some extent, Anglos (e.g., Massey and Denton, 1993; Wilson, 1987), our understanding of poverty among other racial and ethnic groups continues to be limited. Chicanos, the nation's second largest minority group, represent one group which has been left out of empirical research on poverty and ongoing debates regarding impoverishment (Massey 1993). This neglect is disturbing because the Chicano population is one of the few ethnic groups that experienced increases in poverty during the tumultuous 1980s, with the poverty rate of its families rising from 20.6% in 1979 to 23.4% in 1989 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1983, 1993a). Post-1990 census analyses indicate that the poverty rate of Latino families—roughly three-fifths of whom are Chicano—has surpassed that of African American families in 1994 and 1995, an unprecedented trend since

This research was supported by a research grant from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA Grant 94-37401-1266) ("Demographic and Economic Transformations of Rural Communities of the Southwest: Implications for Public Policies and Community Development"). The author appreciates the comments of Cynthia Cready, Sean-Shong Hwang, Steve Murdock, and anonymous reviewers.

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statistics on Latino poverty have been compiled (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1996). While the level of Chicano impoverishment varies greatly across geographic space, only limited research has examined areal variation in Chicano, or more generally Latino, poverty across the national landscape (see Cuciti and James, 1990; Eggers and Massey, 1991; Jensen and Tienda, 1989; Santiago and Wilder, 1991).

Over the past decade, sociologists and demographers have paid an increasing amount of attention to the contextual role that geography plays in promoting or inhibiting poverty. A substantial literature has emerged indicating that favorable economic outcomes are not evenly distributed across space (Cobb, 1982; Colclough, 1988; Falk and Lyson, 1988; Lobao, 1990; Lyson, 1989; Lyson and Falk, 1993; Rural Sociological Society Task Force on Persistent Rural Poverty, 1993; Tickamyer and Duncan, 1990). Contemporary uneven development reflects historical patterns. Indeed, communities that have traditionally "lagged" behind economically find it extremely difficult to reach the levels of development that their more fortunate counterparts enjoy. Although various attributes mark historically underdeveloped areas, racial and ethnic features emerge as prominent characteristics of these places. Thus, counties with high concentrations of minorities are disproportionately represented among the country's "persistently poor" counties (see Lyson and Falk, 1993; Morrill and Wohlenberg, 1971; Weinberg, 1987). Furthermore, Massey and his associates (Massey and Denton, 1987, 1993; Massey and Eggers, 1990; Massey et al., 1991) document the apartheid-like conditions of the African American poor, with this group becoming increasingly clustered in urban ghettos.

Sociologists have also noted that the relationship between minority concentration and impoverishment is especially strong in the regions where minorities have historically been located. These regions, the South in the case of African Americans and the Southwest in the case of Chicanos, contain historical legacies of tense racial and ethnic relations which continue to pattern the social and economic conditions of minorities (Snipp, 1996; Swanson et al., 1994). An elementary glance of the latest decennial census data demonstrates that while Chicanos are concentrated in high-poverty areas (defined here as counties in which one-fifth or more of Chicanos are in poverty), the concentration varies by region. For instance, approximately 54% of Chicanos in the Southwest were located in Chicano high-poverty counties in 1990, compared to approximately one-third of their counterparts living outside of this region. These simple descriptive patterns provide a glimpse of the association between ethnic concentration and poverty among Chicanos.

The research presented here has two objectives. First, we seek to determine the relationship between the concentration of Chicanos and the group's poverty level across U.S. counties and the degree to which region affects this association. Second, because of the paucity of research focusing on Chicano poverty, our analysis also seeks to detect the extent to which various groups of factors, which have been identified in the literature as correlates of poverty, are useful in

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