

What Proportion of Hispanic Children Have an Undocumented Parent?

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One-quarter of all children under age 18 in the United States are Hispanic. While the vast majority of these children are U.S. born (over 90 percent), the immigrant experience is still a reality for many (Murphey, Guzman, and Torres 2014). More than half of Hispanic children have a parent that is foreign-born and two-thirds speak a language other than English at home (Murphey et al. 2014; Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics 2015). Many Hispanic children also have a parent who lacks legal status in the U.S., although the exact number is not known.

Research demonstrates that having an undocumented parent is associated with adverse outcomes for children, including delayed development and diminished well-being across ranging domains. Hispanic children with undocumented parents have fewer cognitive skills, lower levels of educational attainment, and greater dependence on social services than their counterparts with only U.S.-born parents (Crosnoe 2007; Yoshikawa 2011; Borjas 2011). There are several reasons this is the case, but families with at least one undocumented parent face a variety of barriers to services and supports that many other disproportionately low-income families do not—including language barriers, limited access to jobs, and fear of deportation (Bean, Brown & Bachmeier 2015).

There is a growing body of research that utilizes a variety of methods to estimate the number of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. Some of these are reviewed below. However, limited work has explicitly extended these approaches to estimate the number of children that are impacted (Passel et al. 2011; Passel 2011; Massey 2015). Given the demographic importance of the child Hispanic population to the U.S. more generally, and the disadvantages children of undocumented immigrants face, this gap in the research hinders our understanding of the magnitude of the issue and perhaps our ability to address it.

The goal of this research is to fill this gap. Using multiple approaches utilizing a variety of data sources, this project provides estimates of the proportion of America's Hispanic children that are growing up with an undocumented immigrant parent. Our estimates of children with an undocumented parent rely on estimates of the number of undocumented immigrants in the United States. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Pew Hispanic Center both report that the undocumented immigrant population in the U.S. is between 11 and 12 million people, based on residual methods in which administrative records of the authorized immigrant population are subtracted from survey estimates of the total immigrant population.

Our estimates of the number of Hispanic children that have at least one undocumented parent are consistent across these various methods: one in four Hispanic children in the U.S. has an undocumented parent. There is some variation by country of origin.

Approach

In this paper, we employ four approaches to estimate the number of Hispanic children with undocumented parents. We discuss the findings from each of these approaches below, along with some of the assumptions and limitations of each approach. Further discussion of each approach is included in the appendix.

Approach 1: Our first approach simply puts a related estimate by the Pew Hispanic Center into percentage terms. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, 5.5 million children in the U.S. lived with an undocumented parent in 2010, and 4.8 million of these children¹ had at least one Latin America-born parent (Passel, et al., 2011). Therefore, of the 17.1 million Hispanic children in the U.S. (CPS), 28 percent of all Hispanic children in the U.S. lived with an undocumented parent.

Approach 2: In our second approach, we apply assumptions that allow for a logical link between three published estimates from government agencies. This approach is inspired by recent work from Douglas Massey (Massey, 2015). Comparing 2012 Department of Homeland Security and Census Bureau estimates, we conclude that 45 percent of immigrants born in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean are undocumented (Baker, et al., 2013; United States Census Bureau, 2012). Additional estimates based on ACS data find that 55 percent of Hispanic children in the U.S. have at least one immigrant parent (United States Census Bureau). Assuming that undocumented immigrants have the same fertility rate as other immigrants, only have children with those of the same status, and that all children with heritage in these regions are counted as Hispanic, 25 percent of Hispanic children in the U.S. have an undocumented parent—the product of the percent of immigrants from these regions who are undocumented and the proportion of Hispanic children with an immigrant parent. This is likely a conservative estimate given the aforementioned assumptions.

When we extend this approach using a broader range of Latin American countries of origin, we estimate that 22 percent of Hispanic children who were born in the United States have an undocumented parent, as 49 percent of Hispanic children who are native born U.S. citizens have an immigrant parent (U.S. Census Bureau). Furthermore, we find that the rate is even higher in Latino immigrant groups with particularly large undocumented populations (Massey, 2015). Among children with heritage in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Ecuador, we estimate that 34 percent of children and 30 percent of US-born children have a parent who is undocumented (United States Census Bureau).

Approaches 3 and 4: Our last two approaches use responses to the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) to estimate the proportion of Hispanic children with an undocumented parent. The SIPP directly asks questions about immigration status, but the estimate of undocumented immigrants based on survey responses is far lower than those previously mentioned likely due to the sensitive nature of these questions. Using methods similar to those of Bachmeier and colleagues (2014), 796 respondents are identified as undocumented immigrants from Central America, South America, or the Caribbean based on self-reports and lacking other evidence of documented status (e.g. not a government employee, did not receive social services, etc.). Using the characteristics of these 796

¹ See Figure A1 of Passel et al., 2011

respondents and Pew’s estimates of the total size of the undocumented immigrant population, we can estimate the percentage of Hispanic children with an undocumented parent in the two following ways.

First, we determine the ratio of undocumented adults to children with an undocumented parent and scale up. The 796 SIPP respondents who are undocumented immigrants from Latin America represent 8.6 percent of all immigrant respondents. Members of this group are parents to 10.0 percent of all Hispanic children from households in the same survey. This can be compared to Pew’s estimate that 24.2 percent of all immigrants from Latin America are undocumented (Passel, et al., 2009)². If the family formation habits of the group of undocumented immigrants that we have identified match the habits of other undocumented immigrants from Latin America, we can scale our ratio of undocumented immigrants to Hispanic children to estimate that 28.1 percent of Hispanic children in the United States have a parent who is undocumented³.

$$\frac{8.6\%}{10.0\%} = \frac{24.2\%}{?}$$

Alternatively, we impute undocumented status to a larger group of respondents based on the characteristics of the group that we have already identified. We assume that two-thirds of undocumented immigrants in the SIPP are unidentified given the aforementioned Pew and DHS estimates. We assign likelihood of undocumented status to each immigrant respondent to the SIPP based on how well they match the characteristics of the initially-identified group of undocumented immigrants. Using these likelihoods to assign undocumented status, we find that 25.3 percent of Hispanic children in the U.S. have a parent who is undocumented.

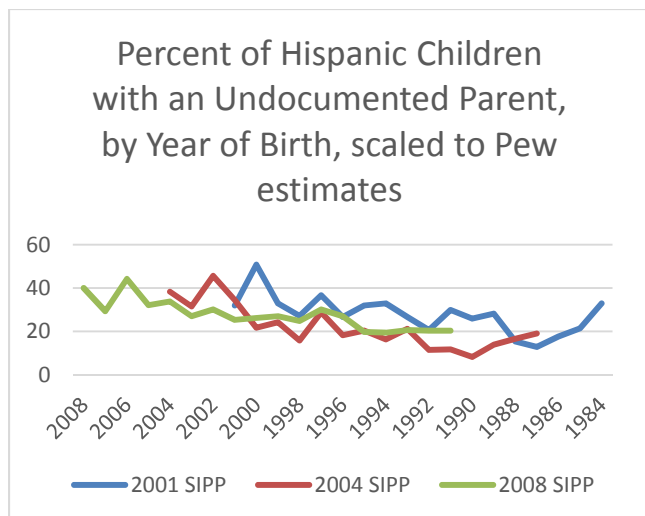
Summary and Implications

Across ranging approaches, we consistently find that one out of four Hispanic children has an undocumented parent. It is likely even higher for some subgroups, such as those from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Ecuador. Given that Hispanic children with an undocumented parent fare worse than their peers, it is critical to have an accurate estimate of the proportion of children with an undocumented parent in order to gain a better understanding of the influence and scope of this status on children’s well-being.

For PAA, we will discuss in more detail the four approaches to estimation, the limitations and assumptions of each approach, as well as the implications of having one-quarter of all Hispanic children in the U.S. having undocumented parents—for children and for society more broadly.

² See Figure 30 of Passel et al., 2009

³ A comparison of DHS (Hoefer, et al., 2009) and ACS (S0515) estimates for 2008 yields an estimate that 25.4 percent of immigrants were undocumented and born in Latin America. Scaled to this number, we would find that 28.4 percent of Hispanic children in the United States have a parent who is undocumented.



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Appendix: Further explanation of population estimates reported in the brief

Estimates of the Undocumented Immigrant Population

Department of Homeland Security

For several years, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) published an annual report entitled *Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States*. We have used the reports dated January 2008, January 2010, and January 2012. In these, the authors estimate the total undocumented immigrant population and provide sub-estimates for specific countries and regions of origin.

The authors explain the methodology used to reach their estimates this way: *“The unauthorized resident population is the remainder or “residual” after estimates of the legally resident foreign-born population—legal permanent residents (LPRs), naturalized citizens, asylees, refugees, and nonimmigrants—are subtracted from estimates of the total foreign-born population. Data to estimate the legally resident population were obtained primarily from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) while the American Community Survey (ACS) of the U.S. Census Bureau was the source for estimates of the total foreign-born population.”*

Pew Hispanic Foundation

Pew’s estimates begin with the same basic residual method as used by the Department of Homeland Security but make several further adjustments. These include adjustments for undercounting of undocumented immigrants in the Census and justifying counts of Mexican citizens in the Mexican and United States censuses. Further explanation of Pew’s methods can be found on their website in a [transcribed interview with Jeffery Passel](#), the main author of these estimates (Pew Research Center, 2013).

Estimates of the Proportion of Hispanic Children with an Undocumented Parent Derived from Other Sources

Pew Hispanic Center and the Current Population Survey (CPS), 2010

After estimating the total undocumented population, Pew Hispanic Center takes an additional step of imputing the legal status of immigrant respondents the Current Population Survey based on known characteristics of the undocumented population. This allows for a more fine-grained analysis of the characteristics of undocumented immigrants and their household members. This process is similar to what Child Trends does in our imputation of legal status to SIPP respondents, described below. [We need to make sure Pew is not pulling their characteristics from the SIPP.] In Passel & Cohn (2011), Pew reported that 5.5 million children in the US had an undocumented parent in 2010, with 4 million of those children being US citizens. Of the 5.5 million children with an undocumented parent, Pew reported that percent, or 4.8 million, had a parent born in Latin America.

Using the Census Bureau's DataFerrett tool to query the 2010 March Current Population Survey, Child Trends finds an estimated Hispanic population of 17,055,984 children aged 0-17 years. Dividing 4.8 million by 17.1 million, we arrive at our estimate that 28 percent of Hispanic children had an undocumented parent in 2010.

Department of Homeland Security and the American Communities Survey (ACS), 2012

In *Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States, January 2012*, the Department of Homeland Security reports that in 2012 the U.S. unauthorized immigrant population included 8.9 million people born in North America and 0.7 million people born in South America. Summing these, we take it to mean that 9.6 million undocumented immigrants originated in Latin America. This assumes that Canada contributes no undocumented immigrants and takes a very broad definition of Latin America.

Next, we query 2012 American Communities Survey 1-year estimates using the Census Bureau's American FactFinder tool to find the table *Selected Characteristics of the Foreign-Born Population by Region of Birth: Latin America, 2008 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (S0506)*. There, we find an estimate that 21,311,457 immigrants born in Latin America – as defined above – lived in the United States in 2012. We divide the prior figure (9.6 million undocumented immigrants from Latin America) by this one to find that 45 percent of immigrants from Latin America were undocumented in 2012.

Again querying the 2012 American Communities Survey 1-year estimates, this time using the DataFerrett tool, we find that 54.8 percent of those aged 0-17 and identified as Hispanic had at least one foreign-born parent in 2012. Of those children, 48.8 percentage points were born in the United States.

To compare these figures, we have to make a series of assumptions:

1. *Immigrants have children only with those of the same immigration status, origin, and history.* This assumption simplifies the analysis, allowing us to think about the parents' legal status together instead of individually. In reality, analysis of other sources shows that a high proportion – but less than all – child-rearing partners of undocumented immigrants are themselves undocumented.
2. *Undocumented immigrants have the same fertility rates as documented immigrants.* Together with our first assumption, this allows us to say that 45 percent of Latino immigrants who are undocumented produce 45 percent of all children born to Latino immigrants.
3. *All children with ancestors from Latin America, and only those children, are counted as Hispanic.* Combined with the prior two assumptions, this allows us to say that 45 percent of Hispanic children with immigrant parents also have undocumented parents.

This quantity is finally comparable to our estimate that 54.8 percent of Hispanic children have an immigrant parent. Multiplying 54.8 percent by 45 percent, we arrive at our estimate that 25 percent of Hispanic children had an undocumented immigrant parent in 2012. For those

Hispanic children who were born in the U.S. we make the same calculation (49 percent multiplied by 45 percent) to find that 22 percent had a parent who was undocumented.

For the five countries originally discussed by Massey, we refer to Massey's calculation that 56.3 percent of immigrants from those countries were undocumented in 2010. The corresponding 2010 ACS query tells us that 60 percent of Hispanic children with heritage in those five countries had an immigrant parent and that, of those, 53 percentage points were born in the United States. Multiplying these figures, under the series of assumptions described above, tells us that 34 percent of children and 30 percent of US-born children with heritage in these countries had an undocumented parent in 2010.

Estimates of the Proportion of Hispanic Children with an Undocumented Parent Based on Child Trends' Original Analysis

Initial Classification of Immigration Status

The starting point for our analysis of immigration status in the SIPP was Bachmeier, Van Hook, and Bean's (2014) "logical allocation" of immigration status with some modifications. We first designated legal status of immigrant respondents to the SIPP then linked those respondents to their own children living in the same household.

The SIPP contains a series of three questions regarding immigration status and an array of other questions which indirectly point to an individual having legal immigration status. Working with adult respondents who were born outside of the United States (n=10,103), we assigned two indicators to each person:

1. Responses to the series of immigration survey questions:
 - a. Negative: Gave valid responses to all three immigration questions, stating that the respondent was not a legal permanent resident
 - b. Positive: Stated that they were a naturalized citizen or a legal permanent resident
 - c. Missing: No valid response for at least one of the three immigration questions
2. Evidence to support responses to the series of immigration survey questions:
 - a. Negative: Did not report any of the below statuses
 - b. Positive: Reported at least one of the below statuses:
 - i. Government employment, including current or former military
 - ii. Received an economic stimulus payment from the Internal Revenue Service in 2008
 - iii. Received social security, unemployment benefits, Medicaid or public assistance

We consider persons with negative responses and negative evidence to be undocumented; those with positive responses and positive evidence are considered to be documented; and those with a missing response to an immigration question or one positive and one negative "macro indicator" are considered to have indeterminate immigration status. Of the 929

respondents who we determined to be undocumented in this way, 796 said they were born in Central America, South America, or the Caribbean. These are unweighted respondents; estimates reported in the brief are calculated using Census Bureau person weights.

Respondents' immigration status was taken out of consideration if they reported being enrolled in college and immigrated within 2 years of starting, assuming on-track completion of coursework. These respondents are assumed to have a student visa. Other analyses have also made allowance for asylees; we did not do this since our focus is on immigrants from Latin American countries. The Department of Homeland Security's Office of Immigration Statistics did not report any recent large flows of asylees from Latin America in 2008.

Table 1: Outcome of Child Trends' Initial Classification of Immigration Status

Status	Respondents (unweighted)
Documented	4,879
Undocumented	929
Indeterminate	4,295
Total	10,103

Ratio of Undocumented Immigrants to Children

This is a simple ratio as explained in the brief. The estimate that 24.2 percent of all immigrants from Latin America were undocumented in 2008 is reached by summing the number of undocumented immigrants from Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America in Figure 30 of Passel & Cohn (2009) and dividing by the total number of undocumented immigrants.

The question of whether this ratio is "scalable" rests on whether we have identified a representative sample of undocumented immigrants. The important ways in which our identified subgroup could fail to represent all undocumented immigrants are fertility and propensity to partner with others of the same immigration status. These could cause positive or negative bias, depending on the direction of the differences.

Imputation of Immigration Status

The steps we followed are:

- a. Categorize immigrants into documented, undocumented, and indeterminate pools on the basis of their responses to immigration questions and other evidence, as detailed above.
- b. Temporarily exclude observations with indeterminate status.
- c. Run a logistic regression of documentation status on a set of covariates that are correlated with immigration status. The estimates we report are produced using a list of covariates inspired by Bachman, Van Hook, and Bean (2014). These are immigration

status of spouse, earliest known U.S. migration, country of birth, English language proficiency, age, age-squared, sex, family size, family structure, number of minor children in the family, number of social security recipients in the family, poverty level, home ownership, and health insurance coverage. We also tested a list of covariates selected by a least absolute sum of squares operator (LASSO) – executed with the `-lars-` command in Stata – and obtained similar estimates.

- d. Adding back in observations with indeterminate status and using the coefficients generated by the logistic regression, we predict the likelihood that each immigrant observation is undocumented without regard for our earlier classification of their immigration status.
- e. Using Stata's `-gsample-` function, take a weighted random sample. Designate the first 30 percent of immigrants chosen, measured by person weight, as undocumented. This is chosen to match Pew's 2008 estimate that 30 percent of all immigrants are undocumented.
- f. Extract the subset of these individuals who have migrated from Latin American countries and link those individuals to their children who were surveyed in the same households and are identified as Hispanic.
- g. Repeat steps 5 to 7 five times, creating five separate data sets.
- h. Average across these five data sets to estimate the proportion of Hispanic children with an undocumented parent born in Latin America.

Child Trends' analysis of the Survey of Income and Program Participation was conducted using Stata. Copies of this code are available upon request.