Sociodemographic Comparison of Caribbean Hispanic Older Adult Immigrants in the U.S. and Origin Countries

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Abstract

Caribbean and adjacent Latin American countries are key sources of Hispanic immigrants to the U.S. There has been rapid growth in the older adult Hispanic populations both among immigrants in the U.S. and in their home countries of emigration. This paper supports hypothesis generation for international comparative Hispanic aging studies by comparing older adult sociodemographic characteristics of U.S. immigrants versus those in sending countries. The analysis also provides context for the global family of health and retirement studies in the region including the ongoing Caribbean American Dementia and Aging Study (CADAS) which is collecting harmonized data on healthy aging in Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, and Cuba. We analyze census microdata from these countries along with other major Hispanic Caribbean-adjacent sending countries including Mexico, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. We compare older adults in these sending countries to country-specific immigrant samples in the U.S. American Community Survey, focusing on socioeconomic differences such as education, as well as marital status and co-residence patterns related to caregiver availability. We also examine differences by citizenship and immigration age to further explore immigrant selectivity patterns. The highly varied experiences of these cohorts will help inform future comparative research on Hispanic healthy aging.

Introduction and Background TODO: Rewrite this whole intro

Latin American and Caribbean Countries (LACCs) are key sources of Hispanic immigrants to the United Sates (Passel 2024). In 2022, people of Mexican origin made up nearly 60% of the U.S. Hispanic population, totaling about 37.4 million. Puerto Ricans were the next largest group at 5.9 million, with an additional 3.2

million living on the island. Salvadorans, Cubans, Dominicans, Guatemalans, Colombians, and Hondurans each have populations exceeding 1 million in the United States (Noe-Bustamante 2023).

These immigrant populations include a rapidly growing subgroup who are aged 65 and above, among whom there is wide variation in socioeconomic and caregiving resources. In this paper we explore sociodemographic variation of U.S. older adult immigrants by country and cohort of emigration, and compare these U.S. immigrants to the corresponding cohorts of older adults in their home countries of emigration.

The paper is designed to support hypothesis generation for international comparative Hispanic aging studies. This includes providing background context for the global family of health and retirement studies in the region such as the ongoing Caribbean American Dementia and Aging Study (CADAS) which is collecting harmonized data on healthy aging in Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, and Cuba (Llibre-Guerra et al. 2021). We analyze census microdata from these countries along with other major Hispanic Caribbean-adjacent sending countries including Mexico, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. We compare older adults in these sending countries to country-specific immigrant samples in the U.S. American Community Survey, focusing on socioeconomic differences such as education, as well as marital status and co-residence patterns related to caregiver availability. We also examine differences by citizenship and immigration age to further explore immigrant selectivity patterns. The highly varied experiences of these cohorts will help inform future comparative research on Hispanic healthy aging.

Literature Review

International migration patterns are shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including labor market demands, educational opportunities, and political and economic instability (McAuliffe, Bauloz, and Kitimbo 2024; Valentine et al. 2017). In the North American context, Massey et al. posit that established social networks play a pivotal role in migration dynamics, with family reunification serving as a primary motivator (Silva and Massey 2014). This reunification imperative creates a self-perpetuating cycle of migration flows (Massey et al. 1994). Age also significantly influences migration patterns, with younger individuals typically dominating migrant populations. Mexican migrants exemplify this trend; despite recent cohorts showing a slight increase in average age, they

remain predominantly youthful(Angel, Vega, and López-Ortega 2017). This persistent age pattern underscores migration's enduring appeal to younger generations, even as sending countries' overall populations age [TODO: Will, do you know any good papers to cite here? Maybe an HCAP paper?].

Other LACCs similarly exhibit diverse migration drivers and patterns, with specific political agreements further shaping these movements and creating unique migration landscapes across the region. Puerto Rico's special status as a U.S. territory since 1898, for instance, has facilitated legal entry to the U.S. mainland for its residents[1]. Likewise, the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 and subsequent policies, such as the "wet foot, dry foot" policy (1995-2017), have significantly influenced Cuban migration to the United States (Duany 2017). These examples illustrate how political arrangements can create facilitated migration channels, potentially leading to what migration theorists term "migration systems" or "transnational social spaces" (Kritz, Lim, and Zlotnik 1992).

Economic factors underpin much of the migration from Latin America to the United States, exemplifying classic push-pull migration theory (Hanson, Orrenius, and Zavodny 2023). Economic insecurity in Latin American countries acts as a push factor (Capielo Rosario et al. 2023; Larotta Silva 2019), while periods of US economic growth further amplify wage differentials between the two regions (Bahar 2024). For instance, Colombian and Guatemalan workers in the U.S. earn $288-$299 for every $100 earned by their counterparts at home, while Nicaraguan migrants see an even larger differential (Clemens, Montenegro, and Pritchett 2009)[2]. However, these wage differentials are partially explained by positive selection, as migrants often possess characteristics associated with higher productivity and adaptability. This selection bias is further evidenced by research showing that immigrants tend to have longer life expectancies than native-born populations (Aldridge et al. 2018).

Alongside economic factors, political instability has been a significant driver of forced migration from Latin American countries to the United States, aligning with theories of refugee and asylum migration (FitzGerald and Arar 2018). Historical events underscore this trend. The Cuban Revolution of 1959, for instance, generated the largest refugee movement to the United States in history,

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[1]Despite their high out-migration rate, Puerto Ricans in the United States send less money than Dominicans and Mexicans to their relatives back home. Possible explanations for this are the extensive public support system in place on the island and relatively higher standard of living compared to other LACCs. (Duany 2010)

[2]Beyond wages, housing availability (Henao, Lis-Gutiérrez, and Balaguera 2023) and access to technology (Nevado-Peña, López-Ruiz, and Alfaro-Navarro 2019) significantly influence life satisfaction and migration decisions (Causa and Pichelmann 2020; Winkler 2016)

resulting in approximately 1.4 million Cuban refugees (Duany 2017)[3]. Similarly, the Salvadoran Civil War (1979-1992) led to the displacement of about 1 million people, many of whom subsequently migrated to the U.S., often through irregular channels (Cervantes 2018). Guatemala and Honduras experienced similar trajectories of political instability, exacerbated by U.S. interventions in the mid-20th century (Jonas 2018; Pine 2008). These events led to substantial emigration waves, with Guatemalan immigrants in the U.S. increasing from 71,000 in 1980 to over 480,000 by 2000, and Honduran immigrants from 39,000 to 283,000 (Batalova 2021). Recent data underscores this trend: in the first 11 months of 2023, over 50% of approximately 412,000 asylum applications to the Department of Homeland Security came from Venezuela, Cuba, Colombia, and Nicaragua ("Nationwide Encounters | U.S. Customs and Border Protection" 2024).

Much of the literature on Latin American migrants predominantly focuses on individuals who emigrated during periods of economic distress and political upheaval. However, there is a notable paucity of research examining those who opt to remain in their home countries under similar circumstances. Additionally, there is a shortage of comparative studies that analyze Latin American migrants in relation to both their counterparts who stayed in their home countries and themselves prior to migration, limiting our understanding of the full spectrum of migration outcomes and selectivity. We addresses this gap by conducting a comparative analysis of older adults from Latin American countries who have migrated to the United States and their counterparts who have remained in their countries of origin. By examining the sociodemographic characteristics of these populations, this research aims to elucidate the selectivity of migration processes and their long-term implications.

Data and Methods

Census data for this study were obtained from IPUMS International (Ruggles et al. 2024). The current analysis draws on the latest harmonized census data available in IPUMS for Colombia (2005), Cuba (2012), the Dominican Republic (2010), El Salvador (2007), Guatemala (2002), Honduras (2001), Mexico (2020), Puerto Rico (2010), and the United States (2020)[4]. We on individuals aged 60

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[3]This record was recently surpassed 2021-23 (González 2024)

[4]PR 2010 is a 1% sample, PR 2020 is 5%, US 2010 is 1%, and US 2020 is 5%. The 2010 and 2020 census data available through IPUMS International are limited to 1% and 5% samples, respectively. While the U.S. IPUMS database offers larger samples, it lacks certain variables,

to 89, as some datasets, such as Puerto Rico's, top-coded ages at 89 (TODO: update the justification here). To ensure comparability, we standardized means in the international censuses based on the U.S. sex-specific age distribution. We also applied weights provided by IPUMS to make the samples nationally representative.

Table 1 presents means of sociodemographics of all 65-89 year-olds from each country's census. The variables included are age, percent married/cohabiting, and highest educational level obtained (using internationally standardized categorizations of less than primary, primary, secondary, and university). Table 2 displays means for each country's counterparts who have emigrated to the U.S. In addition to the variables in Table 1, it includes percent English speakers, percent naturalized citizens, mean age at immigration, and mean years in the U.S. based on the American Community Survey data. Table 3 shows the same variables as in Table 2, drawn from the American Community, but categorized by race/ethnicity and nativity status.

Results and Comparative Analysis

TODO: Identify which migrant groups moved to the US at the youngest ages comparatively Variations in migration motivations and experiences Disparities in socioeconomic outcomes and integration patterns Unique challenges faced by specific national groups

Questions: which countries send the most skilled workers, which have the most educated people? Differences in age, gender, and education levels among various national groups Geographic distribution and settlement patterns within the United States Healthcare access and outcomes Housing conditions Who are the people choose to stay, and why do they stay?

Hispanic older adults in their native countries

Table 1 shows sex-specific sociodemographic characteristics among older adults aged 65 to 89, comparing across current country of residence in the Hispanic Caribbean and adjacent countries. Rates of current marriage/cohabitation are substantially higher among men than women; among women, they vary significantly across countries, ranging from 38% in the Dominican Republic to 48% in

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such as country of birth for the Dominican Republic.

the U.S. Regarding education, there are even larger differences between neighboring countries. E.g., among women in this age group, 76% of Dominicans have less than primary education compared with 31% of Cubans and Puerto Ricans; the highest rate is Honduras at 86% and lowest is the U.S. at 4%. There are similarly large differences among men . ### Hispanic older adults as migrants in the U.S.

Table 2 presents sociodemographics of migrants from these countries living in the U.S. The youngest groups are men from El Salvador (71.23), Guatemala (70.78), and Honduras (71.5), who are about two years younger than their counterparts in their native. The oldest group consists of Cuban women (73.35), who are slightly younger than U.S. women overall (73.75), while Cuban men (74.6) are older than the U.S. average for men (73.13). These differences reflect a combination of differential mortality rates and varying immigration patterns by birth cohort. Marital/cohabitation status is also affected by these factors as well as potentially by different cultural influences on partnership; for many countries rates are somewhat lower among immigrants in the U.S. For example, the age-adjusted married/cohabiting rate among women in Cuba is 43%, compared to 31% for Cuban-born women immigrants in the U.S.

Many of these migrant groups have low rates of reporting that they speak English, with women generally less likely to speak English than men. The lowest English speaking rates are among migrants from the Dominican Republic, where only 60% of female and 70% of male migrants speak English, and Mexico, with 65% of female and 74% of males speaking English. In contrast, migrants from Cuba (71% of females and 78% of males), Colombia (83% of females and 88% of males), and Guatemala (79% of females and 87% of males) have higher English speaking rates.

In terms of citizenship, females are slightly more likely to become naturalized U.S. citizens than men. Typically, men emigrate to the U.S. at a younger age, about two years earlier on average. For example, females from Honduras arrive at an average age of 36.48, while males arrive at 34.42, often resulting in longer U.S. residency for men—Honduran men report an average of 37.16 years compared to women's 36.17 years. However, Guatemala is an exception; despite migrating at a younger age (32.05), Guatemalan men have spent fewer years in the U.S. (38.75) compared to women (39.26).

Men are more likely to have a college degree across all groups: Guatemalan men (12%) compared to women (8%), Honduran men (14%) versus women (11%), and Salvadoran men (10%) against women (5%). The largest gender gap is

among Colombian migrants, with 24% of men holding a college degree compared to 16% of women. The least educated groups are Mexican migrants (6% of men and 4% of women with college degrees) and those from the Dominican Republic (9% for men and 7% for women). These relative gender patterns are similar to their counterparts living in their native countries (Table 1), however overall the U.S. migrants have markedly higher education than those still living in their countries of birth.

Race/ethnicity and nativity in U.S.

Table 3 is similar to table 2, but now looks by racial category (Black, White, and Other racial identities), Hispanic, and native-born category. Average ages across these groups are quite similar. Both Hispanic migrant and native Blacks are much less likely to be married or cohabitating, with rates of 28% and 27%, respectively. In contrast, individuals identifying as White, whether Hispanic migrant or native, are more likely to be married or cohabitating. Black migrants are slightly more likely to speak English but are less likely to become naturalized citizens. They also tend to immigrate at an older age and spend fewer years in the U.S., while Whites and those of other Hispanic races have similar immigration patterns. White Hispanic migrants have slightly longer U.S. residency. Interestingly, the college degree gap between Black and White migrants is nonexistent; both groups are equally likely to earn a degree. This contrasts with non-Hispanic US native populations, where only 17% of Black men hold a college degree compared to 36% of White men. Hispanic migrants identifying as a race other than White or Black are the least likely to have a college degree and most likely to have less than primary education, with 33% of women and 32% of men in this category having less than a primary education.

Discussion

This study will provide a comprehensive sociodemographic comparison of older adult Hispanic populations both in their countries of origin and as immigrants in the United States. The analysis so far reveals significant variations in education levels marital status and migration patterns across different Hispanic subgroups. These findings have important implications for understanding the diverse experiences of Hispanic older adults and for informing policies related to healthy aging and caregiving. The ongoing analysis (to be reported in the full paper) is expanding this analysis to further examine patterns by immigration

cohort, also using multivariate regression to better parse mechanisms underlying the observed differences.

That Mexican migrants have fewer years of formal education is a finding that other researchers have come across (Hanson, Orrenius, and Zavodny 2023).

The complexity of migration from Latin America to the United States is underscored by the region's evolving migration landscape, which has seen a dramatic increase in intra-regional movement and return migration since 2010, challenging the traditional narrative of unidirectional flows to North America and Europe while still maintaining significant outward migration patterns (Tanco 2023). Additionally, this paper does not capture return-migrants to Latin America. Lastly, this research considers migrant populations and host countries prepandemic, which is markedly different than post-pandemic patterns (Hanson, Orrenius, and Zavodny 2023).

Table 1: Sociodemographics by Country and Sex: Hispanics in Caribbean and Adjacent Countries

Gender	Demographics	Colombia	Cuba	Dominican Republic	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras	Mexico	Puerto Rico	United States
Women	Age	73.65	73.74	73.62	73.67	73.49	73.56	73.66	73.81	73.73
	Married/Cohabiting	0.34	0.43	0.35	0.34	0.47	0.4	0.42	0.39	0.48
	Less than Primary	0.6	0.31	0.75	0.83	0.84	0.87	0.51	0.3	0.04
	Primary	0.29	0.5	0.16	0.11	0.11	0.09	0.35	0.26	0.09
	Secondary	0.06	0.15	0.06	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.09	0.33	0.62
	University	0.02	0.05	0.03	0.01	0.01	-	0.05	0.11	0.25
	Unknown	0.03	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Men	Age	73.03	73.13	72.99	73.08	72.92	72.94	73.04	73.13	73.11
	Married/Cohabiting	0.66	0.67	0.67	0.71	0.79	0.72	0.73	0.67	0.7
	Less than Primary	0.6	0.23	0.71	0.77	0.81	0.85	0.45	0.24	0.03
	Primary	0.26	0.5	0.19	0.15	0.13	0.1	0.35	0.29	0.08
	Secondary	0.06	0.2	0.06	0.05	0.03	0.04	0.09	0.35	0.55
	University	0.04	0.07	0.04	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.11	0.13	0.33
	Unknown	0.04	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 2: Sociodemographics of Hispanics in the U.S. by Birth Country and Sex (2020 Census)

Gender	Demographics	DR	Mexico	PR	cuba	foreign hispanic	foreign not hispanic	native hispanic	native not hispanic
Women	Age 60 - 69	0.61	0.59	0.58	0.39	0.56	0.51	0.55	0.51
	Age 70 - 79	0.28	0.3	0.29	0.37	0.3	0.31	0.29	0.3
	Age 80 - 69	0.12	0.11	0.13	0.24	0.14	0.18	0.16	0.2
	Married/Cohabiting	0.3	0.48	0.36	0.37	0.41	0.51	0.46	0.49
	English Speakers	0.58	0.59	0.88	0.69	0.7	0.9	0.98	1
	Citizen	0.59	0.5	-	0.78	0.51	0.72	-	-
	mean_age_at_immigration_15	0.19	0.29	-	0.2	0.21	0.28	-	-
	mean_age_at_immigration_15to49	0.63	0.58	-	0.65	0.53	0.56	-	-
	mean_age_at_immigration_50plus	0.18	0.13	1	0.15	0.27	0.16	1	1
	mean_yrimm	0.17	0.12	0.09	0.15	0.13	0.11	-	-
Men	Less than Primary Completed	0.33	0.42	0.18	0.11	0.28	0.12	0.12	0.02
	Primary Completed	0.31	0.32	0.3	0.26	0.28	0.14	0.23	0.12
	Secondary Completed	0.3	0.23	0.44	0.48	0.36	0.5	0.56	0.66
	University Completed	0.06	0.03	0.09	0.15	0.09	0.24	0.1	0.2
	Age 60 - 69	0.61	0.64	0.6	0.44	0.6	0.55	0.59	0.56
	Age 70 - 79	0.3	0.27	0.31	0.36	0.29	0.31	0.28	0.3
	Age 80 - 69	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.2	0.1	0.14	0.13	0.14
	Married/Cohabiting	0.67	0.75	0.62	0.66	0.71	0.78	0.68	0.71
	English Speakers	0.71	0.7	0.94	0.75	0.78	0.94	0.99	1
	Citizen	0.55	0.49	-	0.74	0.49	0.73	-	-
	mean_age_at_immigration_15	0.16	0.33	-	0.21	0.23	0.25	-	-
	mean_age_at_immigration_15to49	0.68	0.58	-	0.67	0.53	0.6	-	-
	mean_age_at_immigration_50plus	0.15	0.09	1	0.11	0.23	0.16	1	1
	mean_yrimm	0.13	0.09	0.09	0.11	0.1	0.11	-	-
	Less than Primary Completed	0.25	0.43	0.17	0.12	0.28	0.08	0.09	0.02
	Primary Completed	0.3	0.31	0.29	0.25	0.27	0.11	0.21	0.11
	Secondary Completed	0.33	0.21	0.44	0.47	0.34	0.43	0.55	0.57
	University Completed	0.11	0.05	0.1	0.17	0.11	0.38	0.15	0.3

Table 3: Sociodemographics of U.S. Older Adults by Race/Ethnicity and Nativity

Gender	Demographics	Hispanic Black Foreign	Hispanic White Foreign	Hispanic Other Foreign	Non-Hispanic Black Native	Non-Hispanic White Native	Non-Hispanic Other Native	All Native Hispanic
Women	Age	73.74	73.75	73.14	73.19	73.87	72.96	73.17
	Married/Cohabiting	0.28	0.4	0.38	0.27	0.51	0.42	0.41
	English Speakers	0.75	0.72	0.7	-	-	0.99	0.99
	Citizen	0.51	0.55	0.53	-	-	-	-
	Age at Immigration	37.29	33.49	33.79	-	-	-	-
	Years in US	36.58	40.17	39.23	-	-	-	-
	Less than Primary Completed	0.24	0.26	0.33	0.03	0.01	0.03	0.08
	Primary Completed	0.25	0.26	0.27	0.15	0.06	0.09	0.17
	Secondary Completed	0.41	0.38	0.34	0.64	0.66	0.6	0.62
	University Completed	0.1	0.1	0.07	0.18	0.27	0.27	0.13
Men	Age	72.85	73.01	72.36	72.37	73.25	72.59	72.5
	Married/Cohabiting	0.55	0.69	0.68	0.52	0.72	0.63	0.61
	English Speakers	0.8	0.79	0.78	-	-	-	0.99
	Citizen	0.49	0.53	0.51	-	-	-	-
	Age at Immigration	34.78	31.13	31.42	-	-	-	-
	Years in US	37.95	41.8	40.79	-	-	-	-
	Less than Primary Completed	0.22	0.26	0.32	0.04	0.01	0.03	0.07
	Primary Completed	0.26	0.25	0.27	0.16	0.06	0.08	0.15
	Secondary Completed	0.4	0.37	0.33	0.63	0.57	0.57	0.6
	University Completed	0.11	0.12	0.08	0.17	0.36	0.32	0.18

Table 4: Summary Statistics by Country and Sex For Hispanics in Their Native Countries (Ty's new table 1)

Gender	Demographics	Mexico_2010	Mexico_2020	PR_2010	PR_2020	US_2010	US_2020
Women	Age	73.63	73.66	73.81	73.78	73.76	73.73
	Married/Cohabiting	0.41	0.42	0.39	0.39	0.45	0.48
	Less than Primary	0.66	0.51	0.3	0.16	0.04	0.04
	Primary	0.26	0.35	0.26	0.23	0.15	0.09
	Secondary	0.06	0.09	0.33	0.43	0.63	0.62
	University	0.02	0.05	0.11	0.18	0.17	0.25
	Unknown	-	-	-	-	-	-
Men	Age	73.04	73.04	73.13	73.14	73.11	73.11
	Married/Cohabiting	0.73	0.73	0.67	0.63	0.72	0.7
	Less than Primary	0.62	0.45	0.24	0.16	0.04	0.03
	Primary	0.26	0.35	0.29	0.25	0.14	0.08
	Secondary	0.06	0.09	0.35	0.41	0.54	0.55
	University	0.06	0.11	0.13	0.17	0.28	0.33
	Unknown	-	-	-	-	-	-

Acknowledgments

Appendix