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# WORKING PAPER SERIES

## **Beyond Gateway Cities: Economic Restructuring and Poverty Among Mexican Immigrant Families and Children**

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**Beyond Gateway Cities: Economic Restructuring and Poverty Among  
Mexican Immigrant Families and Children**

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## **Beyond Gateway Cities: Economic Restructuring and Poverty Among Mexican Immigrant Families and Children**

### **Abstract**

Our main objective is to better understand how new residential patterns have reshaped patterns of poverty among America's growing Mexican-origin population. We use data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Samples (IPUMS) to document recent changes in poverty rates among native-born and foreign-born Mexicans living in the Southwest and in new regions where many Mexican families have resettled. Our analysis focuses on how changing patterns of employment (e.g., in construction and food processing industries) have altered the risk of poverty among Mexican families and children. We demonstrate that the Mexican population dispersed widely throughout the United States during the 1990s. Perhaps surprisingly, Mexican workers, especially new immigrants, had much lower rates of poverty in the new destination regions and rural areas than their counterparts that remained in traditional areas of population concentration – the Southwest. As we show in this study, the dispersion of America's Mexican native-born and immigrant populations raises questions and hopes about their economic and political incorporation into American society.

## **Beyond Gateway Cities: Economic Restructuring and Poverty Among Mexican Immigrant Families and Children**

### **Introduction**

Poverty is a fact of life for a disproportionate share of first- and second-generation Mexicans residing in the United States (Saenz 2004; Lichter, Qian and Crowley 2005). Deficits in human capital, low rates of maternal employment, and high rates of unwed childbearing play significant roles (Hauan, Landale and Leicht 2000; Lichter and Landale 1995). But research also clearly implicates the historically low wages and unstable jobs available to Mexicans in America's southwestern states, where most Hispanics have concentrated historically (Allensworth and Rochin 1996; Cuciti and James 1990; Taylor, Martin and Fix 1997). In recent years, however, regional economic restructuring, especially in the low-wage, low-skill sector of the economy, has increased the demand for workers outside the Southwest and offered Mexican immigrants new opportunities for employment and better paying jobs. Indeed, many Mexican families have resettled in the Midwest and South – often in rural places and small towns (Durand, Massey and Capoferro 2005; Lichter and Johnson 2005; Kandel and Cromartie 2004; Saenz 2004). Between 1990 and 2000, for example, the Hispanic population increased by 71% in the South and 81% in the Midwest (Guzman 2001). The regional redistribution of jobs and immigrants has potentially important implications for the changing economic well-being of America's Mexican workers and their families.

Our main objective is to better understand how these new settlement patterns have reshaped patterns of poverty among America's growing Mexican-origin population. First, we

use data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Samples (IPUMS) to identify regional shifts in Mexican residence patterns in the United States between 1990 and 2000. Second, we document recent changes in poverty rates among native-born and foreign-born Mexicans living in the Southwest and in the new regions where many Mexican families have resettled. Third, we evaluate how new employment and residential patterns have reshaped the risk of poverty among Mexican families and children. As we show in this study, the dispersion of America's Mexican immigrant population raises new questions about their economic and political incorporation into American society.

### **Place and Poverty**

Historically high rates of poverty among low-educated Mexicans, including immigrant workers with few job skills, are reinforced by limited job opportunities in the colonias along the Rio Grande River, and in the economically-depressed barrios of Southwest border cities in which most of them live and work (Allensworth and Rochin 1996; Lichter and Landale 1995; Taylor et al. 1997). Immigrant minorities are typically confined to the low wage sectors of local labor markets. Indeed, discrimination often bars access to rewarding jobs. Lacking good alternatives, Mexican immigrants are often steered into a limited number of economic sectors, saturating the low-skill, low-wage labor market and depressing hourly wages (Huan et al. 2000). The result is that Mexican families and children are especially vulnerable economically. The low receipt and dollar value of public cash assistance limits assistance, and new provisions in the 1996 welfare reform bill have placed new restrictions on benefits to immigrants (Oropesa and Landale 1997; Lichter and Crowley 2002).

Yet, despite the new migration of Mexicans to the South and Midwest, little or no quantitative research has investigated how changing settlement patterns, including living in nonmetropolitan areas, have opened new avenues for upward socioeconomic mobility. Although America's Mexican population remains concentrated in the Southwest, their numbers have grown rapidly throughout other parts of the United States (Kandel and Cromartie 2004). Mexicans are now widely dispersed geographically, as shown in Figure 1. Moreover, since 1990, Mexican immigrants have increasingly by-passed traditional gateway cities in the Southwest (Durand, Massey and Charvet 2000; Kandel and Cromartie 2004; Saenz and Torres 2003). Many have settled in small towns and rural areas in America's heartland. Indeed, between 1990 and 2000, the Latino population increased by 70% overall – doubling in the Midwest and tripling in the Southeast (Lichter and Johnson 2005).<sup>1</sup>

[Figure 1 about here]

Economic considerations have simultaneously driven Mexicans out of the metropolitan Southwest, attracting them to fast growing areas in other parts of the country where the demand for low-wage labor is high. In California, for example, the saturation of immigrant workers in urban labor markets has caused many Mexicans to look for work in nonmetropolitan areas (Allensworth and Rochin 1996). Beginning in the early 1990's, immigrants were driven out of California by recession, unemployment, declining wages, and growing anti-immigrant sentiment culminating in proposition 187 (Durand et al. 2000; Hernandez-Leon and Zuniga 2000). Ethnographic accounts indicate that large numbers of Mexicans also left California, Texas and other Southwestern states in large numbers because of poor schools, crime-ridden neighborhoods, and crowded, expensive housing (Cantu 1995; Kandel and Parrado 2004). The

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<sup>1</sup> These numbers do not reflect the significance of Illinois as an immigrant destination, as the state's percent Mexican is declining while other Midwestern states gain (Saenz and Cready 1995).

general amnesty provisions that came with the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 also gave newly legalized immigrants freedom and courage to move (Durand et al. 2000, 2005).

At the same time, the growing demand for cheap labor in the low wage sector has created new employment opportunities for Mexican workers outside the Southwest. Meat processing in the Midwest and South is perhaps the most commonly noted occupational niche for Mexican workers. Shifts in diet, farm export policies, and retail demand for cut or pre-packaged meat have increased the scale of food processing in rural areas. Producers have reduced costs through occupational deskilling and routinization of the production line; and by shifting facilities from heavily unionized, urban employment centers toward nonmetropolitan areas where land and labor costs are much lower, and agricultural inputs much closer (Kandel and Parrado 2004; Martin, Taylor and Fix 1996). Local and state tax abatements, tax credits, training subsidies, and right-to-work laws further encourage relocation (Cantu 1995; Gouveia and Stull 1995, 1997).

But many workers are repelled by the industry's unpleasant, difficult, and hazardous working conditions; and its deteriorating wages and flat job hierarchies do not appeal to those with other options (Martin et al. 1996; Schluter and Lee 2002; Stull and Broadway 1995).<sup>2</sup> Turnover is extraordinarily high, and was estimated at 70% annually in one Georgia poultry plant, and 12% monthly in a Nebraska meat plant that hired and lost the equivalent of 76% of the local population between 1990 and 1992 (Gouveia and Stull 1997; Kandel and Parrado 2004).

High turnover, exodus of young people from the nonmetropolitan Midwest and South, economic recovery in the Midwest, and growth of other industries in the South have produced labor shortages in poultry and meat processing plants, and attracted Mexican workers seeking

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<sup>2</sup> In 2001, the U.S. meat industry had an injury rate of 20%, more than three times the injury rate of all private industry combined (5.7%). Common injuries include severe cut wounds, loss of limbs and damage from motions repeated more than 10,000 times per day (Compa 2005).



employment (Gouveia and Stull 1997; Johnson-Webb 2002). The industry's year-round work with limited wages and benefits allows them to minimally support a family, buy a modest home, and enjoy a quality of life that many previously thought impossible. In response, Mexicans have increasingly relocated to parts of the upper Midwest for jobs in turkey, beef and pork processing, and to the Southeast for employment in poultry, meat, and fish processing plants (Gozdziak and Bump 2004; Griffith 2005; Kandel and Parrado 2004; Stull, Broadway and Griffith 1995).

Other studies also describe Mexican workers moving to these regions for jobs in oil, timber, furniture, carpeting, textiles, and other nondurable manufacturing (Hernandez-Leon and Zuniga 2000; Kandel and Cromartie 2004; Murphy, Blanchard and Hill 2001; Passel 2004). Additionally, population growth and economic development have stimulated employment opportunities in construction, hospitality and other service industries in metropolitan areas of the South, West, and Northeast (Johnson-Webb 2002; Saenz 2004; Sassen and Smith 1992; Smith 1996; Stepick, Grenier, Morris and Draznin 1994). In many cases, the appeal of economic opportunity is enhanced by employer recruitment efforts in Texas, California, and Mexico which are driven by a perceived willingness among Mexicans to work hard, put in long hours, and endure poor working conditions for low wages (Cantu 1995; Gozdzia and Bump 2004; Martin et al. 1996).

### **Poverty among Mexican Families and Children**

Regional economic restructuring in low-wage industries and new settlement patterns of Mexicans have important, yet often ambiguous, implications for changes in poverty and economic well-being among families and children. On the positive side, new employment opportunities in parts of the Southeast and Midwest are often superior to those left behind in poor

Hispanic communities and neighborhoods in the Southwest. Tight labor markets outside of the Southwest also have drawn Mexican women into the labor force, providing an additional hedge against poverty. Indeed, unlike Mexican farm workers and their families, Mexican women are now increasingly settling alongside men, who are bringing or establishing new families intending to stay (Cantu 1995; Dalla, Cramer and Stanek 2002; Hernandez-Leon and Zuniga 2000). Since the lack of maternal work patterns has been a key factor shaping high rates of Mexican child poverty, the new employment opportunities for Mexican women in areas of resettlement areas benefit Mexican children (Lichter and Landale 1995). The implication is straightforward: New economic opportunities, job stability, and the rise in dual-worker families suggest that these new settlement patterns may have helped reduce poverty among America's Mexican-origin population.

Yet, the full economic implications of population dispersal among Mexican workers and their families are not easily discerned or understood. For example, many Mexicans who have resettled in states or regions outside of the Southwest are immigrants (Durand et al. 2000; Lichter and Johnson 2005; Kandel and Cromartie 2004). On the one hand, Mexican immigrants are strongly committed to work and the traditional family structure (Cuciti and James 1990), and immigrant Mexican women are less likely than their native counterparts to head single-family households with children (Wildsmith 2004). On the other hand, however, immigrants tend to be younger than native-born Mexicans, with less education, poorer English language skill, and larger families – all of which increase their risk of poverty (Cuciti and James 1990). A recent study of a Nebraska meat processing company, for example, revealed that 70% of Latinos (most of whom were Mexican) spoke little or no English, and two-thirds lacked a high school diploma (Gouveia and Stull 1997). Large shares are also recent arrivals in the United States; many are

undocumented (Passel 2004). Yet, other studies suggest that Mexican immigrants who settle in rural South or Midwestern states may have resources that are sometimes lacking among their counterparts in the Southwest. In a study of 52 communities in Western Mexico, men who immigrated to the Midwest were more educated, more experienced in service or manufacturing work, and were more likely to be documented and to have significant U.S. experience than those who moved instead to the Southwest (McConnell and LeClere 2002).

A large share of native- and foreign-born Mexican in-migrants to the Midwest and South have settled in nonmetropolitan communities, where high poverty rates often reflect much lower wages and a less favorable mix of industries compared to urban labor markets (Jolliffe 2002; Lichter and Jensen 2002). Significantly, poverty rates among Latino families declined faster than those of whites in the 1990's, yet rural racial and ethnic minorities, including most Latino populations, continued to suffer disproportionately high rates of poverty (Kandel 2003; Rogers 2003). Mexican immigrants are especially at risk in rural areas. They are typically young, poorly educated, and badly paid – circumstances that increase the risk of poverty, especially in rural communities where Latino populations are growing rapidly (Effland and Butler 1997; Kandel and Cromartie 2004; Rogers and Dagata 2000). Indeed, nonmetropolitan immigrants have rates of poverty exceeding those of both their native-born and their metropolitan counterparts (Effland and Butler 1997).

Not surprisingly, poverty rates among Mexican children are especially high. Mexican children are among the largest and poorest ethnic groups, with a 10% share of the total child population and a poverty rate of 30% in 2000 (Lichter, Qian and Crowley 2005). Unlike most other disadvantaged minority children, Mexican children typically live in two-parent households with a working male head (Lichter and Landale 1995). Yet, Mexican immigrant workers often

have difficulty earning enough to lift their family and children out of poverty. In 2000, 36% of first-generation Mexican children and 29% of second-generation children were poor, compared with 23% of third-generation Mexican children (Lichter et al. 2005). High poverty rates among today's Mexican children suggest a pessimistic future when they become adults and enter the work force, where inadequate education, poor employment prospects, and low earnings increase risk of deprivation (Cuciti and James 1990; Huan et al. 2000).

To summarize, few if any studies have examined whether Mexicans living in new settlement areas are financially better off or, just as importantly, *why* this might be the case. Our study seeks to fill this gap. First, we outline inter-regional shifts in the Mexican foreign- and native-born populations between 1990 and 2000. We describe changes in population distribution and the racial and ethnic composition of regions. Second, we document recent changes in resources and vulnerabilities among Mexicans, with special emphasis given to regional and nativity variations in poverty status among families and children. Third, we fit several logistic regression models of family and child poverty, which include immigrant status, regional and rural residence, and family and employment characteristics. Specifically, we also weigh the economic advantages of regional location, evaluate the effects of employment on poverty, and show how Mexican immigrants have fared in comparison with natives. After reviewing our findings, we conclude with a discussion of how the arrival of Mexicans and their children has altered the fortunes of both Mexicans and destination communities in positive and negative ways.

## **Methods**

### ***Data and Sample***

Our analyses are based on nationally representative data from the 1990 and 2000 five percent Integrated Public Use Microdata Samples (IPUMS). Our national samples include 3.6 million cases in 1990 and 4.1 million in 2000, and are weighted to represent all U.S. households in which the householder (or head of household) is of working age (18 to 64). This sample includes 147,503 Mexican households in 1990 and 227,909 in 2000.

We also analyze data for a secondary sample of (unmarried) Mexican children age 17 or younger residing with a working-age householder (from the household sample described previously). Children who are unrelated to the householder are excluded, with the exception of children of the householder's unmarried cohabiting partner. For our purposes, each child is linked to family and personal information and, in the case of married- or cohabitating-couple households, to their spouse or unmarried partner. This sample includes 371,788 children, and data are weighted to represent all Mexican children in 2000.

### ***Measures***

Our measure of poverty is based on whether family income from all sources is below the official family income threshold for family size and configuration provided by the Office of Management and Budget. Family income includes all earnings and non-earned income (e.g., interest income) received during the previous year. This means that 2000 poverty status is based on 1999 income and poverty thresholds.

Mexicans born outside the U.S., but not born abroad of American parents are classified as immigrants. Longevity in the United States is associated with acculturation, English acquisition,

citizenship, and income (Saenz 2004), and reduces poverty regardless of citizenship status (Kwon, Zuiker and Bauer 2004). We therefore measure the number of years since first immigrating to the United States: 0-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, and 21+ years. Native-born Mexicans have values of zero for both immigrant status and years in the USA.

We measure region and metropolitan status of residence. Following recent work by Kandel and Cromartie (2004) and Saenz (2004), we define the Southwest as Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico and Texas. We further follow Saenz with slightly altered Census region designations. The Midwest includes the East and West North Central Census divisions, with the exceptions of Oklahoma (included) and Ohio (excluded). The Northeast is comprised of New England and Middle Atlantic divisions, plus Ohio. The Southeast contains the South Atlantic, East South Central and West South Central Divisions, except Texas and Oklahoma. The West is comprised of the Mountain and Pacific Divisions, except for southwestern states. Individuals residing in metropolitan statistical areas are labeled metropolitan, and others as nonmetropolitan.

In our logistic regression models, personal and family poverty risk factors and householder human capital are included as controls. Because Mexicans often have large families (Cuciti and James 1990), family structure is measured as a combination of marital status and number of children. The categories are 1) married and childless; 2) married with one or two children; 3) married with three or more children; 4) single and childless; 5) single with one or two children; and 6) single with three or more children (the reference category). Sex is measured with a dummy variable for female. We also include a multiple-workers dummy, indicating that the householder is married and both spouses are employed.

Human capital and acculturation are measured by the householder's job qualifications and marketable cultural knowledge (see Kwon et al. 2004; Tienda and Neidert 1984). Age is

measured as years of age. Education is measured with a dummy indicator for less than high school education. Number of weeks worked is the number of weeks worked in the prior year. English skill is a dummy indicator that the householder speaks English exclusively or very well.

The employment of all heads of household is identified by Census 3-digit industrial code. Industrial sectors vary in the nature of work and in worker status, skills/credentials, and remuneration. Unlike most previous studies, we identify industries in which Mexicans are reportedly concentrated. For example, we consider *construction* and *agriculture*, which includes agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting. *Nondurable manufacturing* includes meat and food processing along with all other light manufacturing industries. *Low service and temporary* industries include temporary employment and services associated with buildings, landscaping, food, lodging, personal needs. *Average-wage industries* are those in retail trade; consumer rentals; art, entertainment, and recreation (except food and lodging); education, health, funeral and social services; religious, civic, labor and business organizations; mechanical and electrical repair; and business support services (except for professional, managerial, scientific, temporary, building or landscape services). *High-wage industries* (the reference category) are durable/heavy manufacturing; mining; wholesale trade, transportation and warehousing; utilities; information and communication; public administration; armed forces; finance, insurance and real estate (except consumer rentals); and professional, scientific, and management services. Individuals who were not employed (as defined by either employment status or industry) were classified as *not in the labor force* or *unemployed*, depending on employment status.

We use similar variables in our analysis of child poverty, with a few exceptions. First, the individual-level variables from the household analysis become parental variables. Because two-parent Mexican families have lower rates of maternal employment, we draw parental human

capital and employment data for children in two-parent (including stepparent) households from the male parent (Lichter and Landale 1995). Second, our typology of family structure excludes childless families because, by definition, no such families exist in our child-based sample. Third, rather than using a dummy category for female, as we do in the householder analysis, we include a dummy indicator for whether children live in a female-headed family.

In preliminary accounts of individual and household resources, we employ additional variables to describe householders. Income and wealth indicators include median family income and the percent residing in a home that is owned or being purchased. Citizenship and residence history information includes the percent of householders who are citizens and who lived in another home, Mexico, or the Southwest, five years ago. Rates of survival strategy usage include the percent whose households include multiple families, received welfare assistance (paid to oneself or one's spouse), or include grandchildren. The latter figure will appear lower than it is in reality because our sample excludes householders older than 64.

## **Findings**

### ***Residential Patterns***

Table 1 provides 1990 and 2000 snapshots of regional distributions of households (with working age householders) for various racial and ethnic groups, including Mexicans. The upper panel describes regional shifts in the percentage Mexican. The Mexican share of the working age householder population increased from 4.1% to 5.5% during the 1990's. The lion's share of this change is attributable to Mexican immigrants, who increased their share of the population by more than 75%. Mexican households rose by about 17% in the Southwest, but increased more rapidly elsewhere. Between 1990 and 2000, the Mexican share of the population roughly



doubled in the Northeast, Midwest and West, and tripled in the Southeast. In the Midwest and Southeast, nonmetropolitan growth outpaced metropolitan increases.

[Table 1 about here]

The lower panel illustrates that a smaller share of all Mexicans lived in the Southwest in 2000 while their representation increased in every other region. Only three quarters of Mexican householders lived in the Southwest in 2000, compared with 83% in 1990. Much of this shift is due to redistribution of immigrants, although nonimmigrants also are increasingly living outside the Southwest. Mexican growth is particularly evident in the nonmetropolitan Midwest and Southeast, owing chiefly to shifts among Mexican immigrants. Immigrant population shares increased by about 80% in the nonmetropolitan Midwest, and by 180% in the nonmetropolitan Southeast.

### ***Resources and Vulnerabilities***

Table 2 describes Mexican economic resources and vulnerabilities, employment, and survival strategies. Compared with native-born Mexicans, Mexican immigrants have higher poverty, less income and wealth, fewer resources, and greater economic vulnerability. They also are more likely to be married, but with more children than native-born Mexicans. In addition, they are more likely to be employed in low wage industries, especially in the service and temporary work sectors, and are far less likely to be in high-wage industries.

[Table 2 about here]

Significantly, immigrant Mexicans (householders) living outside the Southwest are younger, more often male, more mobile, more recently arrived, and are somewhat more likely to possess English language skills. Mexicans in the Midwest, Southeast and West worked an

average of one or two weeks longer last year than those in the Southwest. As a result, immigrants living and working outside the Southwest are less likely to live in poverty. This also is the case for native-born Mexicans. On the other hand, Mexican immigrants and natives in regions outside the Southwest are less likely to own their own homes and they are more likely to live in multiple-family households, a survival strategy common among poor nonmetropolitan Mexican households (Swanson 1999).

Our quantitative findings on Mexican employment patterns reinforce previous qualitative studies on Mexican employment. In the Southeast, for example, 21% of working-age immigrant Mexican householders are employed in the construction industry, as compared to rates ranging from 8 to 12% in other regions. Moreover, 10% in the Southeast and 13% in the Midwest are employed in nondurable manufacturing, compared with 6% to 8% elsewhere. Approximately 40% of these Mexican workers are employed in the meat processing industry. Clearly, Mexicans outside the Southwest have very high rates of employment in low-wage, low-skill industries, including agriculture, service, and temporary work. Unemployment rates, however, are similar to those of Mexicans in the Southwest.

### *Poverty*

Table 3 displays the odds of poverty generated from a set of logistic regression models. The inclusion of additional sets of covariates in successive models improves the fit of the model, as indicated by declines in the  $-2$  Log Likelihood. All coefficients are significant at  $p < .05$  except where noted.

The results of Model 1 indicate that the odds of poverty among immigrants are nearly triple those of native-born Mexicans. But these odds decline by about 16% for each additional 5

years in the United States, a clear indication that economic incorporation into American society is progressing. Significantly, the risk of poverty among immigrants changes little with the addition of region and metropolitan status in Model 2. At the same time, regional differences in poverty for Mexicans are large. Poverty is lower outside the Southwest, with odds reduced by 13% in the Northeast, 33% in the Midwest, 24% in the Southeast and 20% in West. The odds of poverty are 32% higher in nonmetropolitan areas (most nonmetropolitan area residents live in Southwest).

[Table 3 about here]

Model 3 introduces family and personal variables, including family structure, gender, and the presence of multiple workers. These characteristics affect the odds of poverty as predicted, but do not explain the high poverty rates among immigrants. Results do, however, suggest that some of the regional variation can be explained by their differences in family and personal characteristics (i.e., region effects shift toward 1.0). Clearly, part of the advantage of residence of living outside the Southwest reflects the selection into these regions of Mexican families with lower risks of poverty (e.g., married couple families and/or families with fewer children).

Compared with single parents with three or more children, other kinds of families had 26% to 73% lower odds of poverty. The number of children is an important predictor of poverty regardless of marital status. Householders with no children are the least likely to live in poverty, with odds 73% (in the case of married householders) and 70% (in the case of single householders) lower than those of single householders with three or more children. Families with one or two children are slightly more disadvantaged, with poverty odds 59% to 64% lower than those of our reference category. Among those with three or more children, marriage reduces the odds of poverty by 26%. Even after controlling for all other variables introduced by

this point, women are more than twice as likely as men to be in poverty. Compared to those in single-worker households, the odds of poverty for those in multiple worker households are 80% lower.

In contrast to family and personal attributes, the human capital and acculturation variables introduced in Model 4 explain a large portion of the effect of immigrant status, but none of the effect of residence outside the Southwest, as indicated by slightly stronger relationships between our region variables and poverty. For example, each additional year of age and week of work reduces the odds of poverty by 4% and 5%, respectively. The odds of poverty are 81% higher among those with less than high school education than for those with more education, while speaking English “very well” reduces odds of poverty by 16%. Overall, the nativity effect on poverty weakens significantly when human capital variables are taken into account – the coefficient for nativity declined from 3.27 in Model 3 to 1.57 in Model 4.

Industrial sectors are introduced in Model 5. Surprisingly, industrial sector explains little if any of the putative economic benefits associated with living and working outside the Southwest, or the effect of immigrant status. At the same time, the kinds of work Mexicans do clearly affect their odds of poverty. Not surprisingly, workers in high-wage industries have lower odds of poverty than those working in other industrial sectors. Odds of poverty for workers in agriculture and low service and temporary work are more than twice those of workers in high-wage industries. In contrast, construction and nondurable manufacturing (including meat processing) employment – both important inducements for Mexican migration out of the Southwest – each increase odds of poverty by less than a third relative to high-wage industries.

Results for parallel analyses for our sample of Mexican children, presented in Table 4, are strikingly similar. These analyses confirm that residence outside of the Southwest benefits

Mexican householders and children. Industries identified by existing research as drawing Mexicans to these places have separate effects that do not account for the regional economic advantage. Yet Mexicans located outside of the Southwest, and in two of the less disadvantaged industries (construction and nondurable manufacturing) are disproportionately immigrants who are at increased risk of poverty.

(Table 4 about here)

In some additional analyses (not shown), we include interactions to compare nativity differences in employment of industrial categories for householders' odds of poverty. We found statistically significant interactions between immigrant status and all of our industrial categories. The results indicate that immigrants are much less likely to be in poverty than are natives in the same industries. For example, natives employed in agriculture are 49% more likely than immigrants to live in poverty. For service and temporary workers, native Mexican workers are 81% more likely to live in poverty than immigrants. Significantly, any immigrant advantage is evident in those key industries thought to draw Mexicans out of the Southwest. Native-born Mexicans in nondurable manufacturing and construction jobs are 11% and 56% more likely, respectively, to live in poverty than are immigrants. Immigrants also have an advantage in the average-wage industries, but they have a distinct disadvantage in high-wage industries, where poverty rates for immigrant householders are 135% higher.

Further analysis largely reinforced these patterns of economic advantage and disadvantage among Mexicans immigrants in each of the regions outside the Southwest. In the Midwest, for example, native-born Mexican workers are 38% more likely to live in poverty than immigrants. The immigrant advantage is smaller in the South and Northeast, where natives' odds of poverty are only 15% and 19% higher, respectively. In contrast, immigrants (relative to

natives) are distinctly disadvantaged in the Southwest, where odds of poverty among immigrants are more than double those of native-born Mexicans. Finally, we added an interaction between immigrant status and nonmetropolitan residence, which shows that nonmetropolitan natives are 11% more likely to be poor than are nonmetropolitan immigrants.

There are a number of reasons immigrants might have higher incomes and lower poverty rates than natives in the same industries or places. Like almost all migrants, Mexicans who move to new employment centers outside the Southwest may be more ambitious, healthier, and better able to work more hours or more jobs than those in the Southwest. Family and friendship networks in new destinations may also provide opportunities for work that simply are not available in the area of origin. Immigrants are strongly motivated to work (Cuciti and James 1990). Many hold multiple jobs, often in the informal economy, and accounting for this alters the picture of Mexican labor force participation (Tienda and Rajjman 2000). It also may be the case that employers prefer Mexican immigrant workers to natives because of their assumed willingness to work hard, put in long hours, and endure poor working conditions for lower wages, especially if they have entered the country illegally or are undocumented (Johnson-Webb 2002). Perhaps paradoxically, this may translate into an immigrant economic advantage in the labor market.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Mexican Americans and immigrant families have been among the most economically disadvantaged populations in the United States historically (Saenz 2004). Our goal has been to evaluate whether emerging Mexican settlement patterns and changing regional economic opportunities have improved the economic well-being of Mexican families and their children.

This is an important objective. As we have shown, the Mexican population dispersed widely throughout the United States during the 1990s. The Mexican population grew at unprecedented rates in the Midwest and South. Many nonmetropolitan areas have become new destinations for low-skill Hispanics looking for work in construction, food processing, and service industries (Kandel and Cromartie 2004).

Geographic and economic mobility often go hand-in-hand; indeed, to get somewhere in life often means having to go somewhere else. Indeed, our empirical results clearly indicate that the economic well-being of Mexican families is inextricably linked to place of residence, but often in unexpected ways. On the one hand, regional differences in poverty among native-born Mexican and children were surprising modest, ranging from a low of 15% in the Midwest to 17% in the Southwest. These poverty rates are roughly double the poverty rate for the U.S. as a whole in 2000 (Danziger and Gottschalk 2004). Immigrant poverty rates were also lowest in the Midwest (18%) compared with most other regions (e.g., 25% in Southwest). Perhaps surprisingly, Mexican immigrants appear better able to find work in construction and manufacturing outside the Southwest, and these industries offer greater economic returns than do agricultural, low service and temporary industries to which they are often confined in the Southwest.

In fact, after taking into account regional differences in immigrant status, family and personal attributes, human capital and acculturation, and employment, poverty become much lower outside the Southwest among Mexican families and children. In other words, these Mexican families had lower rates of poverty than expected on the basis of their demographic or economic background characteristics (e.g., low education). Clearly, the growth of jobs outside the Southwest has provided Mexican families with low skill, low wage work opportunities that

are unavailable to them in their places of origin. Moreover, many Mexican workers have moved out of the seasonal agricultural work that initially lured them out of Southwest in the first place (Johnson-Webb 2002; Gourveia and Stull 1997; Kandel and Parrado 2004). Our quantitative analysis is clearly consistent with recent qualitative accounts that demonstrate improvements in the material circumstances among Mexicans in their new destinations.

On the other hand, poverty rates among Mexicans are roughly one-third higher in nonmetropolitan areas than in metropolitan places. The implication is that rural destinations, especially outside of the Southwest, may have become the new rural “ghettos” for poor Mexican families. Mexicans settling outside of traditional gateway cities and regions have less access to the important social networks that can provide needed information about job opportunities and community services. They are sometimes targets of prejudice and discrimination that spring from economic competition and cultural misunderstanding (Hernandez-Leon and Zuniga 2005; Rich and Miranda 2005; Shutika 2005). Incoming Mexicans are frequently assumed to be undocumented and are treated as such, and even Mexican American citizens often feel like they do not belong in the community. Many experience harassment from local police and from the INS, whose raids and improper deportations have shaken local populations, stirring sympathy and support even among non-Latino residents (Cantu 1995; Martin et al. 1996).

As their numbers grow and communities increasingly rely on their labor, the “Little Mexicos” of the Midwest and Southeast are potentially fertile ground for Mexican labor mobilization (Dunn, Aragonés and Shivers 2005; Hackenberg 1995). But this could encourage companies, which remain highly mobile, to close less profitable facilities and establish production elsewhere, jeopardizing hard won economic gains. Meat producers have already employed this strategy in fleeing from unionized urban centers, and they continue to suppress



unionization efforts through intimidation and firings (Compa 2005). Firms also recognize that Asians and Central Americans, like Mexicans, will move to rural areas in pursuit of similar employment opportunities (Gozdziak and Bump 2004; Martin et al. 1996; Stull 1994). These groups are not as plentiful as Mexican immigrants, whose numbers more than doubled between 1990 and 2000 (Grieco 2003). But post-September 11 immigrant crackdowns have already increased instability in the poultry industry (Kandel and Parrado 2004), and may lead to upheavals in immigrant employment that would endanger upward Mexican mobility. The high rates of Mexican poverty reported in this paper may increase under these circumstances.

For local communities, the good news is that the influx of Mexicans has arrested long-term declines in population and bolstered the local supply of willing workers. Between 1990 and 2000, Latinos accounted for 25% of nonmetropolitan growth, and immigrants offset population loss of natives in hundreds of counties (Lichter and Johnson 2005; O'Hare and Johnson 2004). New tax dollars and consumer spending by Mexican immigrants have, in some cases, revitalized stagnant local economies and strengthened struggling local businesses (Grey and Woodrick 2005; Schluter and Lee 2002). A third-generation resident of a small Illinois river town where a meatpacking plant prompted a 2000% increase in the Mexican population remarked: "Five, six years ago, you could go down to the square, it would be deserted. Now it's bustling all day long" (Kernek 2001, 2). Local businesses have begun providing services and stocking and selling goods, such as food and personal care products, that cater to the specific needs of new Mexicans in their communities (Griffith 2005). Some Mexicans have also started their own business establishments, serving both Mexicans and Anglos while infusing communities with new social and cultural diversity (Gouveia, Carranza and Cogua 2005; Hernandez-Leon and Zuniga 2000; Kandel and Cromartie 2004).

## **Policy Implications**

Communities anticipating a sudden influx of Mexicans have studied other communities with similar experiences in order to learn how best to manage growth and cultural change. The USDA recently funded a three-year study of industrial restructuring and community response in the Shenandoah Valley. The goal is to identify “best practices” for communities challenged by an influx of Mexican workers responding to the unmet labor demands of local meat packers (Gozdziak and Bump 2004). Communities with rapidly growing Mexican populations face new demands for adequate housing, police, health care and social and welfare services, and for assistance in crossing the language barrier. Local public officials and long-term residents often worry about housing shortages, rising crime, competition for available jobs, declining community health, and rising property taxes needed to support schools that face the new challenge of effectively serving Mexican children who may lack English language skills (Kernek 2001; Martin et al. 1996). Churches and private social groups often have a role to play. Many organizations are active in providing information, assistance, resources, and material needs, while also providing a cultural link to other Mexicans in the community (Gozdziak and Bump 2004; Kernek 2001). Communities could benefit from providing these organizations with more resources and from linking them to one another. Centralized sources of information about benefits, housing, temporary aid, transportation, laws and legal rights would ease the adjustment process.

In the long run, economic self-sufficiency depends heavily on investments in education. Latino immigrant children face serious barriers to educational progress and achievement.

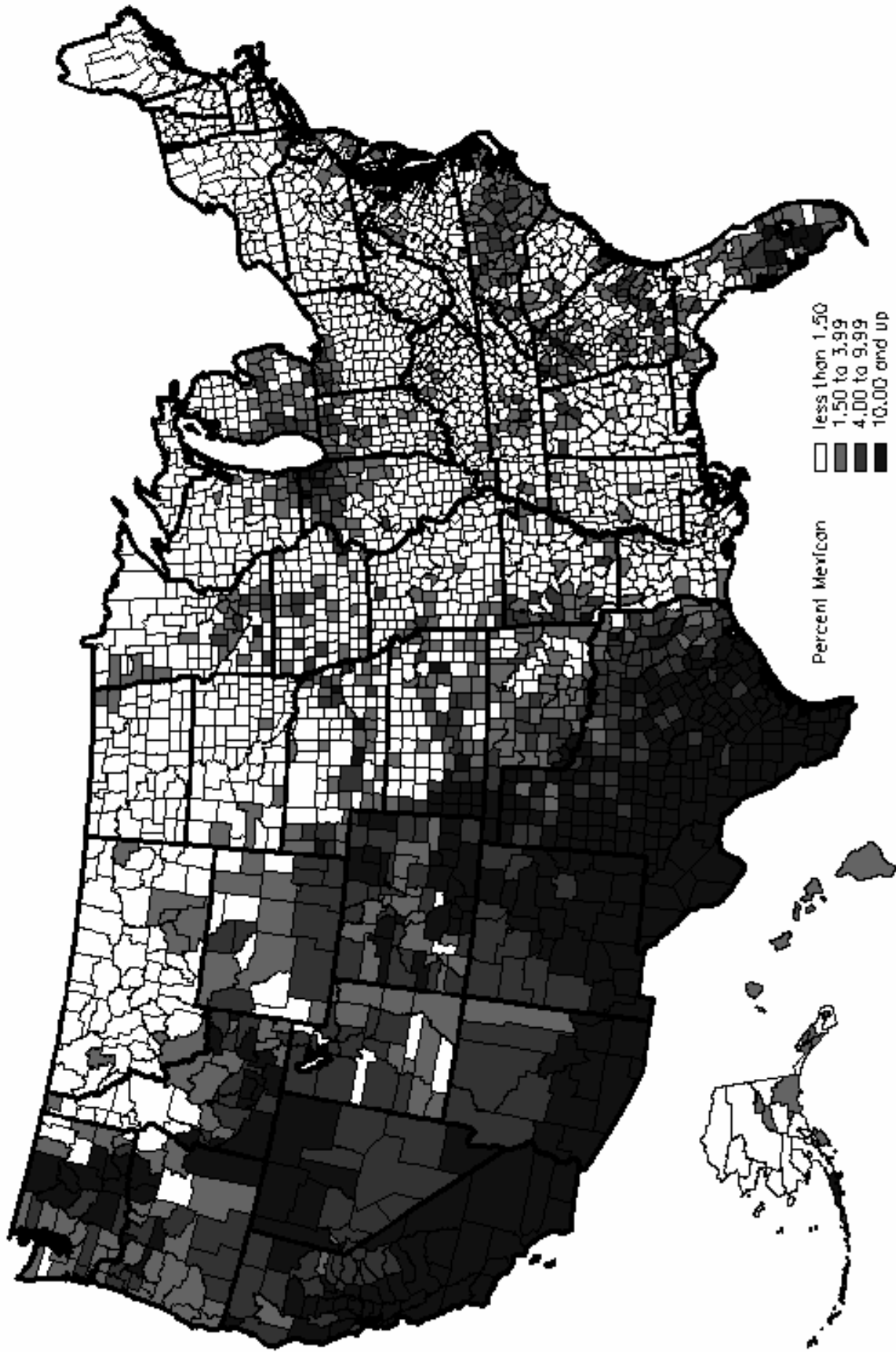
Indeed, Mexican children present new fiscal and budgetary concerns for schools in the form of overcrowding, language remediation and other cultural barriers, and shortages of bilingual elementary teachers – issues that many communities are simply not equipped to handle. Educational challenges are compounded by the poorer physical health of children of Latinos in general, but especially Mexican immigrants, most of whom lack health care coverage (Hernandez and Charney 1998). Poor student performance threatens overall test scores, which can jeopardize funding in some states (Zhou 1997).

Communities could promote the development of good language skills through volunteer programs that bring local and newly arrived populations together. Because many rural destination communities have aging populations, practitioners could consider organizing retirees to volunteer their time to help teach English to new arrivals and their children. But this assumes such volunteers have the Spanish language skills and cultural sensitivity to be effective. These are complicated issues, which show no sign of abating, as children of immigrants have become the fastest growing segment of the youth population (Van Hook 2003).

In the final analysis, the breakdown in ethnic enclaves in the Southwest and regional economic restructuring suggest continuing Mexican population growth over the foreseeable future in America's new immigrant destinations. The economic prosperity of newly-arriving Mexicans is far from assured, however. They face high rates of poverty by contemporary standards. Moreover, the economic and cultural incorporation of Mexican workers and their families has proceeded unevenly across the new destination communities (Donato, Stainback, and Bankston 2005; Gozdzik and Bump 2004). Clearly, local community leaders, policy makers, long-time residents will be challenged by the unanticipated social and material needs of

Mexican newcomers in destination communities, while maintaining positive inter-group relations and promoting cultural understanding.

Figure 1. Mexican Populations in U.S. Counties, 2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 1. Householders' Percent Mexican by Place, and Residential Distribution of Mexican Householders, 1990-2000.

	% Mexican		% Mexican Immigrant		% Mexican Native	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
Southwest	15.5	18.2	6.8	10.1	8.7	8.1
Metropolitan	15.4	18.6	7.1	10.5	8.4	8.0
Nonmetropolitan	15.9	15.3	4.8	6.6	11.1	8.6
Northeast	.3	.6	.1	.4	.2	.2
Metropolitan	.3	.7	.2	.5	.2	.2
Nonmetropolitan	.2	.4	.0	.1	.2	.3
Midwest	1.7	3.0	.8	1.8	.9	1.1
Metropolitan	2.2	3.6	1.1	2.3	1.1	1.3
Nonmetropolitan	.8	1.6	.2	.8	.6	.8
Southeast	.4	1.3	.2	.9	.3	.4
Metropolitan	.5	1.3	.2	.9	.3	.4
Nonmetropolitan	.3	1.1	.1	.8	.2	.3
West	2.5	4.6	1.0	2.8	1.5	1.8
Metropolitan	2.4	5.0	.9	3.0	1.5	1.9
Nonmetropolitan	2.7	3.8	1.1	2.3	1.6	1.5
Total U.S.	4.1	5.5	1.8	3.2	2.3	2.3
Metropolitan U.S.	4.9	6.3	2.3	3.7	2.7	2.6
Nonmetropolitan U.S.	2.1	2.9	.7	1.5	1.5	1.4

	All Mexicans		Mexican Immigrants		Mexican Natives	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
% Southwest	83.1	74.7	83.2	71.8	83.0	78.6
Metropolitan	72.3	67.6	75.7	66.5	69.6	69.1
Nonmetropolitan	10.8	7.1	7.5	5.4	13.4	9.6
% Northeast	1.7	2.6	1.7	2.9	1.8	2.3
Metropolitan	1.4	2.4	1.5	2.8	1.3	1.8
Nonmetropolitan	.3	.3	.1	.1	.4	.4
% Midwest	8.8	11.0	9.3	11.7	8.4	10.0
Metropolitan	7.3	9.1	8.4	10.1	6.4	7.8
Nonmetropolitan	1.5	1.8	.9	1.6	2.0	2.1
% Southeast	2.8	6.3	2.6	7.8	2.9	4.2
Metropolitan	1.9	4.6	1.8	5.6	2.0	3.2
Nonmetropolitan	.9	1.7	.8	2.2	.9	1.0
% West	3.6	5.4	3.3	5.8	3.9	5.0
Metropolitan	2.2	4.0	2.0	4.3	2.4	3.7
Nonmetropolitan	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.5	1.5	1.3
Total U.S.	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Metropolitan	85.1	87.7	89.4	89.2	81.7	85.6
Nonmetropolitan	14.9	12.3	10.6	10.8	18.3	14.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, IPUMS 5% sample.

Table 2. Resources and Vulnerabilities of Adult Working-Age Mexican Householders, 2000.

	Southwest		Northeast		Midwest		Southeast		West	
	Native	Immigrant	Native	Immigrant	Native	Immigrant	Native	Immigrant	Native	Immigrant
<b>Poverty, Income, and Wealth</b>										
% in Poverty	17	25	16	25	15	18	16	24	16	23
Median Family Income	\$35,000	\$28,500	\$35,150	\$28,800	\$35,672	\$33,100	\$33,000	\$25,800	\$33,500	\$27,500
% in a Home Owned or Being Purchased	53	45	40	14	51	45	46	29	45	38
<b>Personal and Family Attributes</b>										
<i>Family Configuration</i>										
% Married with 0 Children	14	10	15	16	15	12	18	18	16	11
% Married with 1-2 Children	32	36	27	33	29	38	30	33	29	36
% Married with 3+ Children	14	31	7	22	12	27	11	21	12	28
% Single with 0 Children	22	10	34	18	27	13	26	19	25	14
% Single with 1-2 Children	14	8	13	8	14	7	12	6	13	7
% Single with 3+ Children	4	4	3	4	4	3	3	3	4	4
% Female	34	22	37	21	35	17	33	15	34	18
% with Multiple Workers in Family	28	21	25	18	28	25	27	20	29	24
<b>Human Capital and Acculturation</b>										
Median Age	38	37	35	32	36	35	35	32	36	34
% Dropped Out of High School	26	69	19	61	25	65	27	69	23	69
Average Number of Weeks Worked Last Year	41	39	40	38	42	41	41	40	41	40
% Speaks English Very Well	87	27	90	25	88	26	88	25	91	27
<b>Employment</b>										
% in Agriculture	1	4	1	2	1	2	2	8	2	11
% in Construction	7	12	5	8	6	9	9	21	8	11
% in Nondurable Manufacturing	4	6	6	8	8	13	5	10	5	6
% in Meat Processing	0	1	0	0	2	5	1	4	0	1
% in Low Service or Temporary Work	6	12	6	21	6	13	8	13	8	15
% in Average-Wage Industries	26	14	25	12	21	10	20	8	25	12
% in High-Wage Industries	32	19	35	15	36	24	35	16	31	15
% Not in the Labor Force	20	28	18	29	18	25	17	22	16	24
% Unemployed	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	6
<b>Citizenship and Residence History</b>										
% Citizens	100	32	100	18	100	31	100	20	100	27
Five Years Ago, % Lived in...										
Another Home	55	56	63	65	59	63	67	76	68	73
Mexico	1	7	1	16	1	13	2	24	1	12
Southwest	52	47	13	4	7	8	16	11	16	15
<b>Survival Strategies</b>										
% in Multiple-Family Households	15	18	20	33	18	20	19	34	19	23
% Receiving (or Spouse Receives) Welfare	5	6	6	6	4	3	3	2	5	4
% with a Grandchild in Household	6	7	3	3	3	5	3	3	3	4
N	75,770	94,503	2,176	3,835	9,602	15,368	4,032	10,275	4,776	7,572

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, IPUMS 5% sample.

Table 3. Odds of Poverty for Mexican Heads of Household by Residence, Family Attributes, and Employment, 2000.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
<b><i>Immigrant Status</i><sup>1</sup></b>					
Immigrant	2.82	3.06	3.27	1.57	1.48
Years in USA	.84	.82	.79	.89	.90
<b><i>Residence</i></b>					
<i>Region</i> <sup>2</sup>					
Northeast		.87	.90	.81	.80
Midwest		.67	.72	.69	.71
Southeast		.76	.85	.80	.79
West		.80	.84	.82	.79
Nonmetropolitan		1.32	1.42	1.37	1.33
<b><i>Personal and Family Attributes</i></b>					
<i>Family Configuration</i> <sup>3</sup>					
Married, 0 Children			.27	.19	.19
Married, 1-2 Children			.36	.28	.29
Married, 3+ Children			.74	.63	.66
Single, 0 Children			.30	.26	.26
Single, 1-2 Children			.41	.42	.41
Female			2.09	1.32	1.29
Multiple Workers			.20	.31	.26
<b><i>Human Capital and Acculturation</i></b>					
Age				.96	.96
High School Dropout				1.81	1.77
Number of Weeks Worked				.95	.95
Speaks English Only/Very Well				.84	.85
<b><i>Industry and Labor Market Status</i><sup>4</sup></b>					
Agriculture					2.17
Construction					1.33
Nondurable Manufacturing					1.31
Low Service and Temporary					2.29
Average-Wage Industry					1.60
Not in the Labor Force					.97 <sup>NS</sup>
Unemployed					1.45
Constant	.20	.21	.49	14.66	12.73
-2 Log Likelihood	231238	230384	208772	173838	171643

<sup>1</sup> Natives' scores are zero.

<sup>3</sup> Single, 3+ children is reference.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, IPUMS 5% sample.

<sup>2</sup> Southwest is reference.

<sup>4</sup> High-wage industry is reference.

<sup>NS</sup> Denotes non-significance at  $p < .05$ .



Table 4. Odds of Poverty for Mexican Children by Residence, Family Attributes, and Parental Employment, 2000.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
<b><i>Parental Immigrant Status</i><sup>1</sup></b>					
Immigrant	3.03	3.19	3.84	1.99	1.87
Years in USA	.82	.81	.79	.86	.87
<b><i>Residence</i></b>					
<i>Region</i> <sup>2</sup>					
Northeast		.86	.84	.80	.78
Midwest		.63	.64	.64	.66
Southeast		.83	.88	.86	.86
West		.81	.83	.82	.78
Nonmetropolitan		1.27	1.35	1.33	1.28
<b><i>Family Attributes</i></b>					
<i>Family Configuration</i> <sup>3</sup>					
Married Couple, 1-2 Children			.45	.41	.43
Married Couple, 3+ Children			.92	.91	.94
Single Parent, 1-2 Children			.42	.43	.43
Female-Headed			3.14	2.32	2.21
Multiple Workers			.24	.33	.29
<b><i>Parental Human Capital and Acculturation</i></b>					
Age				.96	.96
High School Dropout				1.99	1.94
Number of Weeks Worked				.96	.95
Speaks English Only/Very Well				.83	.84
<b><i>Parental Industry and Labor Market Status</i><sup>3</sup></b>					
Agriculture					2.24
Construction					1.35
Nondurable Manufacturing					1.26
Low Service and Temporary					2.26
Average-Wage Industry					1.55
Not in the Labor Force					.99 <sup>NS</sup>
Unemployed					1.43
Constant	.29	.30	.41	9.25	8.13
-2 Log Likelihood	431915	430140	380467	329072	324927

<sup>1</sup> Natives' scores are zero.

<sup>3</sup> Single Parent, 3+ children is reference. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, IPUMS 5% sample.

<sup>2</sup> Southwest is reference.

<sup>4</sup> High-wage industry is reference.

<sup>NS</sup> Denotes non-significance at  $p < .05$ .

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