

# A Generation at Risk: The Threats to Texas in the Current Immigration Landscape



In its 2019 report, *Beyond the Border: Family Separation in the Trump Era*, UnidosUS demonstrates how the current trajectory of the nation's immigration policies is threatening to sabotage the future of an entire generation of American children. Today, 80% of Latinos\* are U.S. citizens<sup>1</sup> and half of those remaining are legal permanent residents.<sup>2</sup> While the portion of Hispanic adults who lack permanent legal immigration status is small, the impact of punitive immigration policies is felt by millions of families and has an outsized impact on American children. A growing body of research finds that indiscriminate immigration enforcement reaches beyond immigrant families, affecting Americans of Hispanic descent and their communities<sup>3</sup> by harming their physical and mental health,<sup>4</sup> undermining their trust in government,<sup>5</sup> and stoking fear for their families' safety.<sup>6</sup>

This issue brief on Texas is part of a series that builds on this analysis by exploring what is at stake at the state level if the immigration policy status quo prevails. It compiles available population estimates to sketch a portrait of children in Texas's Latino immigrant families. For instance, while 95% of Latino children in Texas are U.S. citizens, nearly half have at least one immigrant parent. Furthermore, Latino children make up 50% of the state's youth and are thus crucial to Texas's future success across various measures. Today, 38% of workers in Texas are Latino,<sup>7</sup> as are 30% of its voters;<sup>8</sup> thus, federal and state-level anti-immigrant policies that undermine the life outcomes of an entire generation of Latino children in Texas also depress a key engine of the state's economic and political future. The implications of restrictionist immigration policies extend well beyond harming children and their families in Texas: the long-term economic, social, and political health and vibrancy of the nation is at stake.

**95%** of Hispanic children in Texas (ages 0-17) are U.S. citizens.



**49%** of Hispanic children in Texas (ages 0-17) have at least one foreign-born parent.



\* The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race. This document may also refer to this population as "Latinx" to represent the diversity of gender identities and expressions that are present in the community.

## Hispanic Children in Texas (Ages 0-17) and Their Families

Nearly half of all children in Texas are Hispanic.<sup>9</sup> The overwhelming majority of Hispanic children in the state are U.S. citizens, as are most Hispanic adults.<sup>10</sup> If we scratch the surface, an estimated 49% of Hispanic children in Texas have at least one foreign-born\* parent.<sup>11</sup> This points to a sizeable population of Hispanic parents in Texas who were born outside of the U.S. and ultimately naturalized. It is thus concerning that a growing body of research shows that the children of Hispanic immigrants, including naturalized citizens, experience the diffuse harms of punitive immigration enforcement policies,<sup>12</sup> such as fearing U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), toxic stress, and discrimination based on immigration status—even though the vast majority of Latino children are U.S. citizens.<sup>13</sup>

- 95% of Hispanic children in Texas (ages 0-17) are U.S. citizens.<sup>14</sup>
- 49% of Hispanic children in Texas (ages 0-17) have at least one foreign-born parent.<sup>15</sup>
- 73% of Hispanic adults in Texas are U.S. citizens;<sup>16</sup> of those who are not, nearly 50% are legal permanent residents.<sup>17</sup>

Based on the best available research,<sup>†</sup> below are some characteristics of Texas’s nonresident (non-green card holding) Hispanic and immigrant populations and their children:

- Approximately 1.36 million Hispanic Texans lack legal immigration status. They represent roughly 85% of Texas’s undocumented population, but only 13% of the state’s Latinos.<sup>18</sup>
- An estimated 1.03 million U.S.-born children in Texas live with at least one undocumented family member.<sup>19</sup>
- A reported 107,730 Texans are Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)‡ recipients.<sup>20</sup> Research suggests that 26% of DACA recipients have at least one U.S.-born child;<sup>21</sup> estimates show as many as 46,700 U.S.-born children in Texas may have a DACA recipient parent.<sup>22</sup>
- As of 2017, 45,000 Hispanic Texans had Temporary Protected Status (TPS).§ They are thought to have at least 55,000 U.S.-born children.<sup>23</sup>

Table 1: Child Populations

	Population, Ages 0-17		Hispanic Population Share
	Total	Hispanic	
TX	7,399,484	3,663,389	50%
U.S.	73,352,242	18,638,707	25%

Source: UnidosUS calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, “2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates,” American Community Survey, data.census.gov (accessed October 21, 2019).

\* The U.S. Census Bureau defines foreign-born as anyone who is not a U.S. citizen at birth, including individuals who later become citizens through naturalization.

† By their nature, it is difficult to measure populations who lack stable immigration status. While these estimates do not provide definitive counts, they rely on the best available research of these populations.

‡ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) data show that approximately 94% of DACA recipients are of Hispanic origin.

§ Temporary Protected Status is a designation that USCIS can grant eligible nationals who are present in the U.S. at the time that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) deems their country of residence temporarily unsafe for return, e.g., due to ongoing conflict or natural disaster.

## Health Outlook for Texas's Hispanic Children

For more than a decade, significant progress has been made to reduce health coverage gaps for our nation's children, including Latino children. Following the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the coverage disparity between Latino children and non-Hispanic White children shrank from 7% to 4% nationwide.<sup>24</sup> However, in recent years, this progress has been undermined.

Child uninsured rates have been rising as Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) enrollment rates have been dropping across the country since 2017. There is little evidence that a strong economy—which should correspond with greater participation in employer-sponsored health coverage—is causing dropping enrollments.<sup>25</sup> Instead, child health experts believe that a variety of complex factors may be depressing enrollment, including the Trump administration's restrictionist immigration policies.<sup>26</sup> The impacts of these policies are called “chilling effects” because they create widespread fear that confuses and intimidates people from exercising their rights or accessing services for which they are legally eligible.

Since 2017, nearly 215,000 children have disenrolled from Texas's low-income health programs—a troubling 6% drop.<sup>27</sup> Dropping enrollments may be one of the reasons that Texas has the most uninsured children in the country; today, 20% of uninsured children in America live in Texas,<sup>28</sup> and in 2019, 65% of the uninsured children in Texas were Hispanic. This trend creates cumulative harms for Hispanic children in the state: the majority have immigrant roots, are disproportionately uninsured, and are at greater risk of chilling than their peers,<sup>29</sup> even though nearly all are U.S. citizens who live with working parents.<sup>30</sup>

While not the only driver in coverage loss for children in Texas, immigration policies are certainly an important contributor to the challenging environment that children face to enroll in and maintain public coverage.

Table 2: 2019 Uninsured Rates, Children in Texas (Ages 0–17)

All children in Texas	<b>11.7%</b>
U.S.-born Hispanic children of U.S.-born parents	<b>10.6%</b>
U.S.-born Hispanic children of foreign-born parents (all immigration statuses)	<b>17.6%</b>
Foreign-born Hispanic children	<b>47.2%</b>

Source: UnidosUS calculations using Sarah Flood, Miriam King, Renae Rodgers, Steven Ruggles, and J. Robert Warren. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 6.0 [ASEC]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D030.V6.0> (accessed Nov 22, 2019).

## Economic Outlook for Texas’s Hispanic Children

Hispanic children in Texas are more than three times as likely to live in poverty (26%) as their non-Hispanic White peers (8%).<sup>31</sup> Even though Hispanic workers have a higher labor force participation rate than the U.S. average, they earn the lowest median wage of any ethnic group, regardless of immigration status.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, Hispanic families are likely to experience financial shocks more acutely than their peers. During the Great Recession (2005–2009), Hispanic households lost 66% of their collective household wealth, compared to White non-Hispanic households’ 16% loss.<sup>33</sup> Immigration status compounds these disparities for families and the communities where they live, as observed during the foreclosure crisis of 2005–2012; Hispanic foreclosure rates in counties with higher shares of immigrant detentions and undocumented immigrant owner-occupied homes were significantly higher than in comparable counties in the same time period.<sup>34</sup>

During the Great Recession (2005–2009), **HISPANIC HOUSEHOLDS LOST 66%** of their collective household wealth

Table 3: The Burden of Housing Costs\*

Texas families who spent 30% or more of monthly income on housing in 2018	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic White
Renters	51%	47%
Homeowners	34%	26%

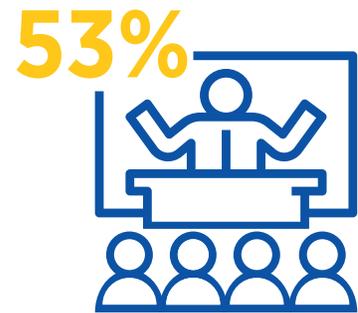
Source: UnidosUS calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, “2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S0201” American Community Survey, data.census.gov (accessed October 21, 2019). Bureau, “2018 American Community Survey 1-Year

Moreover, the intergenerational transfer of wealth is becoming an increasingly important factor in upward economic mobility, or the “American Dream.” Growing research shows that income inequality in the U.S. today is likely to play a larger role in future adult outcomes than talent and hard work.<sup>35</sup> Not only are American children in immigrant families more likely to live in poverty, their parents’ ability to pass on future opportunities will be limited if they continue to be excluded from the economic advantages of naturalized citizenship,<sup>36</sup> either by restrictive federal immigration policy, the high cost of naturalization in the U.S.,<sup>37</sup> or both. The earning potential of more than a quarter of Texas’s future workers will certainly impact prosperity in immigrant communities and the broader economy alike.

\* Studies find that children in households with high housing cost burdens have worse health outcomes than their nonburdened peers. Sandra J. Newman, “Housing Affordability and Child Well-Being,” *Housing Policy Debate* 25, no. 1 (2015): 116–151, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2014.899261> (accessed July 25, 2019).

## Education Outlook for Texas’s Hispanic Children

Despite educational gains in recent decades for many Latino students, there are still significant barriers to universal quality education in the U.S., among them, the stress of an anti-immigrant climate. Three separate studies from the University of California, Los Angeles detail growth in behavioral and emotional problems in schools with large immigrant populations due to fears associated with immigration enforcement.<sup>38</sup> Teachers from primarily White schools report increasingly hostile school environments for ethnic minority students at levels unprecedented in their careers.<sup>39</sup> School is already a difficult developmental stage for all children; Hispanic children in the U.S.—in addition to experiencing common childhood anxieties—also fear family separation and share collective worries with their impacted classmates.



**53%**  
of K-12 students in Texas are Hispanic.

- 53% of K-12 students in Texas are Hispanic.<sup>40</sup>
- 33% of Hispanic K-12 students in Texas are designated English learners (EL).<sup>41</sup>
- 95% Hispanic youth (ages 0-17) in Texas are U.S.-born American citizens.<sup>42</sup>

Table 4: Texas Attainment on the Nation’s Report Card (NAEP 2019)\*

Percent of students at or above NAEP Basic\*

	Non-Hispanic White	Hispanic (Non-English learners)	Hispanic English learners
4th grade Math	92%	85%	75%
4th grade Reading	79%	61%	36%
4-year HS graduation rate	94%	88%	77%
% of college-going HS graduates**	52%	46%	n/a

\* “The [NAEP] Basic cut score represents the minimal performance to meet the requirements described for that level.” National Center for Education Statistics, 2019.

\*\*Denotes high school graduates who enroll in any form of higher education within 16 months of graduation.

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, “NAEP Data Explorer,” National Center for Education Statistics, Washington, DC, 2019, <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/xplore/NDE> (accessed January 29, 2020); and California Department of Education, “DataQuest,” <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (accessed January 29, 2020).

\* The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is “the largest continuing and nationally representative assessment” of student knowledge and ability in key subjects. The congressionally mandated program is managed by the U.S. Department of Education and is commonly used by researchers to compare academic progress across states.

Immigration-related stress not only undermines Texas's students, it also poses a risk to the state's teachers. In a 2018 UCLA Civil Rights Project survey, 85% of 3,500 educators surveyed across the U.S. reported an "increase in anxiety and stress due to their students' experiences with increased immigration enforcement" in the past year; many exhibited symptoms consistent with Secondary Traumatic Stress.<sup>43</sup> High levels of stress and lack of institutional support are central drivers in the national teacher shortage crisis, especially in schools where students experience higher rates of poverty and inequality-related factors.<sup>44</sup> Texas is experiencing a critical teacher shortage;<sup>45</sup> the state cannot afford to lose additional qualified educators due to immigration-related stressors. Everyone in Texas loses when students are too stressed to focus, and educators are too stressed to teach.

## Measuring Chilling Impacts in Texas: The Public Charge Case Study

Direct harms produced by anti-immigrant policies are only half the story; their indirect, or chilling, impacts can be far-reaching. For example, following the Welfare Reform Act in 1996 (PRWORA),\* restrictions imposed on eligible immigrant access to social safety nets had negative spillover effects, such as disenrollment in assistance programs by eligible U.S. citizens.<sup>46</sup> The opposite also appears to be true: states that maintained access to health and nutrition safety nets for eligible immigrants post-Welfare Reform saw an increase in high school graduation rates among Hispanic students, including a ten percentage point boost among students who would not have been subject to changes under PRWORA.<sup>47</sup>

More than 20 years later, equivalents include policy changes such as the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) public charge

regulation and its progeny. In many cases, the policy underpinnings for these rules expressly incorporate assumptions about their chilling impacts on eligible Americans in mixed-status families,<sup>48</sup> running contrary to evidence which shows that child poverty causes negative life outcomes that can be mitigated by government antipoverty programs.<sup>49</sup> Similar chilling effects can be observed following mass worksite raids and other immigration enforcement activities.<sup>50</sup>

**More than 1.3 million U.S. citizen children in Texas live with an eligible family member who participates in a public support program.**

## THEY ARE MOST AT RISK OF CHILLING UNDER POLICIES LIKE PUBLIC CHARGE.<sup>51</sup>

- The ripple effects of the DHS public charge regulation are expected to cost the Texas economy \$876 million to \$2.5 billion and between 6,000 and 17,000 jobs.<sup>52</sup>
- Fewer than 19% of Latino households in Texas accessed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) at some point in 2017.<sup>53</sup> That same year, SNAP helped lift nearly 500,000 Latino children out of poverty in the U.S.<sup>54</sup>
- Early local government data, notably out of New York City, confirm anecdotal reports of dramatic public charge-related chilling impacts on SNAP enrollment on citizen and noncitizen Latinos alike. Enrollment by eligible Hispanic citizens in New York City unexpectedly dropped 6.4 percentage points between January 2018 and January 2019.<sup>55</sup> While state and federal government

\* Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), Pub. L. 104-193. August 22, 1996.

data are not yet available, it is possible that a similar phenomenon will be observed among the 95% of Hispanic children in Texas who are U.S. citizens.

The DHS public charge regulation inspired other policy changes in its image, notably, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD)\* proposed rule targeting American children in mixed-status households.<sup>56</sup>

- Approximately 21,140 households that are eligible to receive rental supports in Texas have at least one noncitizen member.<sup>57</sup>
- Among those families who would lose their homes under the proposed HUD rule, 85% are Hispanic.<sup>58</sup>
- In 2017, 283,300 Hispanic children were lifted out of poverty in the U.S. by housing assistance.<sup>59</sup>

## Conclusion

With a Texas child population that's nearly 50% Latino, the influence and importance of Latinos to the state's success will only continue to grow. Protecting and growing Texas's achievements will rely in part on investing in and protecting its homegrown Hispanic talent: more than 25% of the state's entrepreneurs are Hispanic, roughly 25% of household spending power in the state's economy comes from Latino families,<sup>60</sup> and three out of every ten Texas voters are Latino. Texas's diversity is rich with potential for the state's future, but the state must be careful to safeguard this wealth against anti-immigrant, anti-family policies. History shows that righting this ship is possible, but the stakes are also high if the status quo prevails. Our future as a nation hangs in the balance if we do not cultivate and promote the full health, abilities, and well-being of Latino children in Texas, half of whom live in immigrant families.

## About Us

UnidosUS, previously known as NCLR (National Council of La Raza), is the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Through its unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an [Affiliate Network](#) of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico, UnidosUS simultaneously challenges the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos at the national and local levels.

For more than 50 years, UnidosUS has united communities and different groups seeking common ground through collaboration, and that share a desire to make our country stronger. For more information on UnidosUS, visit [www.unidosus.org](http://www.unidosus.org) or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

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\* HUD's proposed rule would change eligibility under Section 214 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1980. According to the agency's own analysis, the rule would force at least 55,000 eligible children to choose between eviction from their home and living with an ineligible parent or loved one.

## Endnotes

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