

# Hispanic births booming in U.S.

**60% of new Latino citizens last year were born here**

BY HAYA EL NASSER

Hispanics remain the United States' fastest-growing minority group, but most of their population increase comes from births here rather than immigration, according to Census Bureau estimates released Tuesday.

As debate over immigration policy is roiling the nation, government numbers show that 60 per-

cent of the 1.3 million new Hispanics in 2005 are citizens because they were born here.

"When all the attention is on immigration, natural increase is what's driving the population change," says Roberto Suro, director of the Pew Hispanic Center.

A third of the nation's 296.4 million people are considered minorities. Hispanics are the largest minority group at 42.7 million, up 3.3 percent from mid-2004 to mid-2005. The Census counts all residents and makes no distinction between those here legally and illegally. The Pew Hispanic Center estimates that up to 12 million U.S. residents are illegal, most of them Hispanic.

"Obviously, a very large share of U.S. population growth and of Hispanic growth is driven by illegal immigration," says Steven Camarota, research director at the Center for Immigration Studies, which advocates stricter immigration controls.

## Median age is 27

In effect, the data show that even if immigration came to a standstill, the Hispanic population boom would not end for at least another generation.

"Illegal immigration has long-term consequences," Camarota says. "What this shows is that they have hundreds of thousands of children born here."

William Frey of the Brookings Institution says one of every two new Americans every year is Hispanic.

"Hispanics are here and they're part of our future and they're a large part of our young population," he says. "They're a part of America because they're born in America."

The Census estimates also show that Hispanics are the youngest group. Their median age is 27.2 compared with 36.2 for the nation as a whole. About one-third of Hispanics are children.

The widening gap between age and ethnicity is carrying over into the makeup of American voters. Older people, who are predominantly white, tend to vote in larger

numbers. Younger people vote less.

"You've got this steady flow of new people becoming eligible to vote but low rates of participation," Suro says. "The racial composition of the electorate won't look like the population for a long time. There will be a lag."

The Census estimates for the 12-month period also show:

◆ Blacks increased 1.3 percent to 39.7 million.

◆ Asians grew 3 percent to 14.4 million. Only 43 percent of the new Asians were born here.

◆ About 30 million non-Hispanic whites — 15 percent — are 65 and older.

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