

Profile of the Puerto Rican Population in United States and Puerto Rico: 2008

Authors: Sonia Collazo, Camille Ryan, Kurt Bauman

The Puerto Rican population in the United States has reached about 4.2 million according to the 2008 U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey data, surpassing the 3.8 million in Puerto Rico. Despite the fact they represent the second largest Hispanic population in the United States, recent literature lacks a comprehensive picture of characteristics of this population compared to other Hispanic groups. According to Sandefur and Tienda (1988), of all Hispanic origin groups, Puerto Ricans had the lowest labor force participation rates, the highest unemployment levels, the highest incidence of poverty and of welfare utilization, and the lowest average levels of education of Hispanic groups in the 1980 Census. How this comparison may have changed since that time has not been documented.

The Puerto Rican population is characterized by high levels of migration in both directions between Puerto Rico and the mainland U.S., implying that conditions on the island of Puerto Rico influence the characteristics of mainland-based Puerto Ricans, and vice-versa. In addition, Sandefur and Tienda suggested that one reason why other Hispanic groups such as Mexicans fare better than Puerto Ricans is that Mexicans tend to be concentrated in areas of the country where there is economic growth where Puerto Ricans are concentrated in areas of economic decline. Therefore, it is of interest to compare Puerto Ricans and other groups across locations in the mainland U.S. as well as between the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

The main objective of this paper is to present an up-to-date profile of the Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. and the Puerto Ricans living in the island of Puerto Rico. Using data from the 2008 American Community Survey (ACS) and the 2008 Puerto Rico Community Survey (PRCS). The paper will address three main issues.

1. What are the basic characteristics of the populations? We will examine demographic, social and economic variables such as educational attainment, school enrollment, language and other characteristics over time for these populations.
2. How do the two populations compare with other groups like Mexicans, Cubans, Blacks, White non-Hispanics, and other Hispanic groups? We will examine demographic, social and economic variables across populations.
3. What geographic and migration factors influence the difference between Puerto Ricans compared to other groups? We will examine this question by tabulating characteristics by geographic location.

Table 1 present data from the 2008 American Community Survey and 2008 Puerto Rico Community Survey to show some characteristics that we will explore using more recent data. From this picture, it seems that Puerto Ricans are not "worse off" than Mexicans in every respect. Further examination of the data in the ways outlined above will make patterns clearer.

Table 1. Population Profile for different groups by Hispanic Origin in the United States and the Population in Puerto Rico: 2008

Subject	Puerto Rican in United States ⁽¹⁾	Puerto Rico ⁽²⁾	Mexican ⁽¹⁾	Cuban ⁽¹⁾	Other Hispanic or Latino ⁽¹⁾	White, not Hispanic or Latino ⁽¹⁾	Black or African American, not Hispanic or Latino ⁽¹⁾
Total population	4,216,533	3,954,037	30,738,559	1,617,010	10,319,354	198,942,886	36,701,103
SEX AND AGE							
Male	50.0%	48.0%	52.4%	50.2%	50.2%	49.1%	47.6%
Female	50.0%	52.0%	47.6%	49.8%	49.8%	50.9%	52.4%
Median age (years)	29.0	35.9	25.7	41.4	30.9	41.1	32.3
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT							
Population 25 years and over	2,375,539	2,571,234	15,816,915	1,139,940	6,225,113	139,289,828	22,162,799
Percent high school graduate or higher	72.9%	67.0%	54.8%	75.6%	68.6%	90.1%	80.8%
Percent bachelor's degree or higher	15.8%	21.2%	90.0%	25.4%	19.4%	30.7%	17.5%
LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME AND ABILITY TO SPEAK ENGLISH							
Population 5 years and over	3,788,020	3,718,494	26,990,822	1,513,610	9,346,083	187,941,160	33,970,480
Speak English only	34%	4.8%	23.8%	16.6%	20.5%	94.2%	93.3%
Speak Language other than English	66%	95.2%	76.2%	83.4%	79.5%	58.0%	67.0%
Speak English less than "very well"	20%	81.1%	38.4%	41.7%	40.6%	17.0%	23.0%
INCOME IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS (INFLATION-ADJUSTED DOLLARS)							
Households	1,347,080	1,186,497	7,639,880	582,520	3,057,865	80,953,272	13,110,447
Median household income (dollars)	39,039	18,401	40,647	42,724	44,861	56,826	35,435
POVERTY LEVEL							
Percent below Poverty Level	24.0%	44.8%	22.9%	14.2%	16.7%	9.3%	24.1%
EMPLOYMENT STATUS							
Population 16 years and over	2,973,757	3,089,254	20,446,025	1,316,054	7,666,011	162,673,898	27,776,954
In labor force	64.0%	47.4%	69.7%	61.9%	72.2%	65.5%	64.2%
Civilian Labor force	62.9%	47.3%	69.3%	61.6%	71.7%	65.0%	63.5%
Employed	56.6%	40.3%	64.2%	57.4%	66.6%	61.6%	56.1%
Unemployed	6.3%	7.0%	5.1%	4.2%	5.1%	3.4%	7.4%
Armed Forces	1.1%	1.0%	4.0%	3.0%	4.0%	5.0%	7.0%
Not in Labor force	36.0%	52.6%	30.3%	38.1%	27.8%	34.5%	35.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey. 2008 Puerto Rico Community Survey.

Note: ¹ Data from the American Community Survey.

² Data from the Puerto Rico Community Survey.