

Transnational Communities in Eastern North Carolina: Results from a Survey of Latino Families in Greene County

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Over the past twenty years, changing processes of globalization and economic integration have sparked an increase in Latino transnational migration to the United States. According to the most recent U.S. Census, Latinos are now the nation's largest minority group, comprising 12.5% of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census 2001). The majority of Latinos qualify as recent immigrants, with more than 70% having been born outside the U.S. (Boorstein 1997; Suárez-Orozco 1995). One noteworthy feature of recent Latino migration has been the emergence of new destination areas, outside of the traditional gateway states of California, Texas and Florida. Among the most significant of these new growth areas has been the Southeastern United States. Census figures show that the Hispanic populations of the states in the Southeast grew an average of more than 200% between 1990 and 2000.¹ As indicated in Table 1, no state in the country experienced a more dramatic increase during this time than North Carolina, which saw its Hispanic population grow 394% (Chatham County nd; Hyde and Leiter 2000; Johnson-Webb 2000; U.S. Census 2000a; Vargas 2000).

This accelerated immigration and settlement of Latino families is profoundly reshaping the demographic, economic, cultural and social landscape of North Carolina (Cravey 1997 and 2000; ECU Regional Development Institute 1999; Johnson-Webb 2000; Johnson-Webb and Johnson 1996; Leiter et al. 2001; Skaggs et al. nd). Yet there is little understanding of the processes of migration at work or the reality of Latinos in specific locales within the state. Our contention is that the Latino migration experience involves a complex set of relationships that link spaces and com-

munities across borders, in a fluid dynamic that we here call *transnationalism* (Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Glick Schiller and Basch 1995). We use this term to capture the ways in which Latinos maintain familial, cultural and economic ties to their 'home' and 'host' counties simultaneously, and thereby build and maintain networks and relationships that straddle nation-state boundaries (Cravey 2003).

In what follows, we present initial results from the first phase of a study focused on better understanding Latino transnational migration in Greene County, a tier-1 agricultural county in eastern North Carolina that has experienced dramatic growth in its Latino population during the past decade (Figure 1). The overarching goal of the study is to specify the patterns, processes and impacts of Latino transnational migration and community building in Greene County as a means of understanding some of the broader migration trends impacting the rural South. Following a brief introduction to transnational theoretical paradigms, the remainder of this report will provide preliminary study results focusing on Greene County Latino family employment and migration histories, as well as connections to home place and integration into the non-Latino local community. This represents an initial step in comprehending the intricate and multi-faceted processes of transnational community building that are flourishing in rural North Carolina.

New Directions in Migration Theory: Transnational Spaces and Communities

Traditional approaches to migration have tended to portray it as a process in which uprooted

Table 1. States With the Highest Hispanic Population Growth, 1990-2000

	Hispanic Population			
	1990	2000	Pop. Change	% Change
1. North Carolina	76,726	378 963	302,237	394
2. Arkansas	19,876	86 866	66,990	337
3. Georgia	108,922	435 227	326,305	300
4. Tennessee	32,741	123 838	91,097	278
5. Nevada	124,419	393 970	269,551	217
6. South Carolina	30,551	95 076	64,525	211
7. Alabama	24,629	75 830	51,201	208
8. Kentucky	21,984	59 939	37,955	173
9. Minnesota	53,884	143 382	89,498	166
10. Nebraska	36,969	94 425	57,456	155

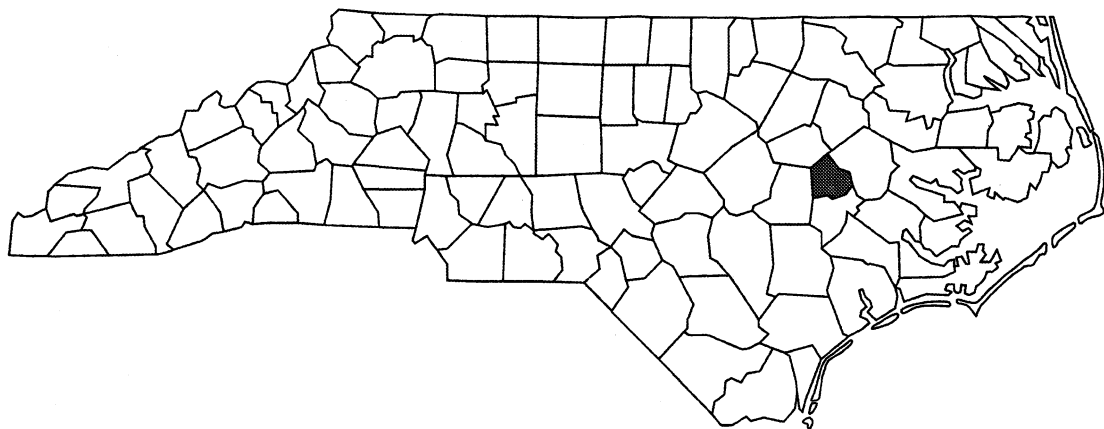


Figure 1. Greene County

settlers break ties to their homeland while seeking to assimilate into a new society (Kivisto 2001; Portes et al. 1999). In a world increasingly subject to global forces, however, there is a need to develop more dynamic and fluid conceptualizations of international migration. This is evident in recent shifts in migration theory that explicitly reject the traditional "bipolar" or "binary" logic of origin and destination

(Anderson 2000; Kearney 1995; Rouse 1992). These shifts reflect a broader critique of population geography, and have served as a catalyst to introduce new theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of international migration (Findlay and Graham 1991; Gutting 1996; Halfacree and Boyle 1993; McHugh 2000; White and Jackson 1995).

Scholars observe that migrants do not rupture

permanently with their countries of origin. Instead, they develop complex familial, economic and cultural networks that transcend spatial and political boundaries to bridge their home and host locations. These circumstances have led to a growing body of research that draws on the notion of 'transnationalism' as a theoretical construct for understanding human migration (Bailey et al. 2002; Rouse 1991; Faist 2000; Glick Schiller 1997; Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Glick Schiller and Basch 1995; Goldring 1998; Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Portes 1996; Portes et al. 1999). Transnationalism embodies the multifaceted linkages, interactions, and relations between people and institutions spanning across increasingly fluid political boundaries of nation states (Vertovec 1999). Through these linkages and processes emerge "transnational communities" (Bresser 1998; Portes 1996) that, according to Conway and Cohen (1998:27), "are characterized by the incorporation of migration (and remittances) cultures into the very adaptive fabric of the social system, such that people live between two worlds: North America and 'home' communities in Mexico, Latin America and the Caribbean."

Geographers have much to contribute to our understanding of these processes, by focusing attention on the role of space and place in the construction of transnational communities. Migrants, from this perspective, are active in the construction of "transnational spaces," which embody not only physical territories but also the larger opportunity structures, networks, ties, social practices and meanings that bind and connect distinct places (Bailey et al. 2002). According to Mitchell (1997:110), geography is ideally suited to examine these complex relationships, and she calls upon us to undertake "transnational spatial ethnographies." Such studies can contribute to the burgeoning literature on transnationalism, by highlighting the ways in which mobility becomes integrated into migrants' sense of space, place, home and community.

Latino Migration in Rural North Carolina

The data presented in Figures 2-4 and in Table 2 suggest that the dynamics of Latino transnational migration in North Carolina are complex and changing. For example, a comparison between Figure

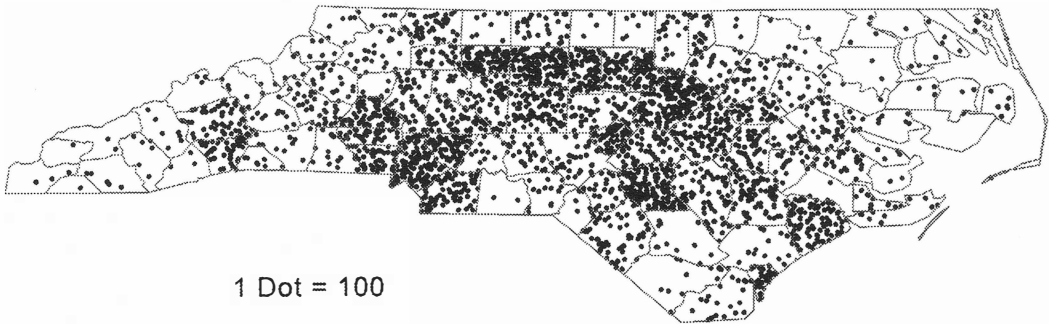
2 and previous maps published in this journal by Johnson-Webb and Johnson (1996, p. 23) indicate that recent Hispanic settlement is much more widely distributed across all parts of the state. Thus, although census figures show that the largest Hispanic communities continue to be located in metropolitan counties such as Mecklenburg (Charlotte), Wake (Raleigh), and Forsyth (Winston-Salem), there is also a significant concentration in the South-Central Piedmont region and smaller concentrations in both Western Carolina and the eastern Coastal Plain. In a number of rural counties (Duplin, Lee, Montgomery, Sampson), Latinos now comprise more than 10% of the total population (see Figure 3). This is striking given that in 1995, only two counties in the state had Latino populations exceeding 5% (Johnson-Webb and Johnson 1996). It is not surprising, then, that counties experiencing the largest increases in Hispanic population are predominantly located in rural areas across the state (see Figure 4). Indeed, a number of rural counties (among them Hoke, Randolph and Tyrrell) saw their Hispanic populations grow more than 1000% between 1990 and 2000.

In part, the growth of the Latino population in rural North Carolina can be attributed to the state's large agricultural sector, which, along with considerable recent growth in manufacturing and agro-industries, has generated employment opportunities for Latinos. To date, however, there has been scant research into the nature and extent of migration into rural areas of North Carolina. To address this, the Department of Geography at East Carolina University has initiated a research project aimed at documenting the transnational experiences of Latino families in Greene County, a predominantly agrarian community located in the eastern Coastal Plain. During the past decade, Greene County experienced a dramatic 894% increase in its Hispanic population, placing it 12th among North Carolina Counties (U.S. Census 1990 and 2000b). Hispanics now make up 8.0% of the county's population, the 6th highest proportion in the state (U.S. Census 2000b). Latinos also comprise 12% of public school children, and the kindergarten class, a sensitive indicator of growth in the Hispanic population, is now over 20% Hispanic (Greene County Public

Table 2. North Carolina counties ranked by: Hispanic Population in 2000; Percent change in Hispanic Population, 1990-2000; and Hispanic Population as a percent of total population

	Hispanic Pop. ('00)		% Change '90-'00	Hispanic Pop. ('00)		% Hispanic
1 Mecklenburg	44,871	1 Cabarrus	1,271	6,620	1 Duplin	15.1
2 Wake	33,985	2 Tyrrell	1,264	150	2 Lee	11.7
3 Cumberland	20,919	3 Alamance	1,100	8,835	3 Sampson	10.8
4 Forsyth	19,577	4 Randolph	1,078	8,646	4 Montgomery	10.4
5 Durham	17,039	5 Union	1,031	7,637	5 Chatham	9.6
6 Guilford	15,985	6 Hoke	1,008	2,415	6 Greene	8.0
7 Onslow	10,896	7 McDowell	965	1,214	7 Johnston	7.7
8 Johnston	9,440	8 Yancey	876	478	8 Durham	7.6
9 Alamance	8,835	9 Davie	837	1,209	9 Onslow	7.2
10 Randolph	8,646	10 Forsyth	831	19,577	10 Hoke	7.2
11 Catawba	7,886	11 Burke	824	3,180	11 Cumberland	6.9
12 Union	7,637	12 Greene	794	1,511	12 Alamance	6.8
13 Duplin	7,426	13 Sampson	791	6,477	13 Randolph	6.6
14 Cabarrus	6,620	14 Catawba	756	7,886	14 Surry	6.5
15 Sampson	6,477	15 Robeson	751	5,994	15 Yadkin	6.5
N.C. Total	378,963		394	378,963		4.7%

Hispanic Population in 2000 by County

**Figure 2.**

Schools 2003). Greene County now ranks among the top five counties in North Carolina with respect to Hispanic births as a proportion of total births, reaching 13.6% in 1997 (Johnson et al. 1999).

Initially, predominately male migrant workers were drawn to work in the fields of Greene County,

which encompasses the most tobacco dependent region in the state. More recently, however, the nature of this migratory flow has shifted toward more "permanent" migration and settlement of families including women and children. Indeed, there are strong indicators of lasting Latino community

Change in Hispanic Population, 1900 - 2000

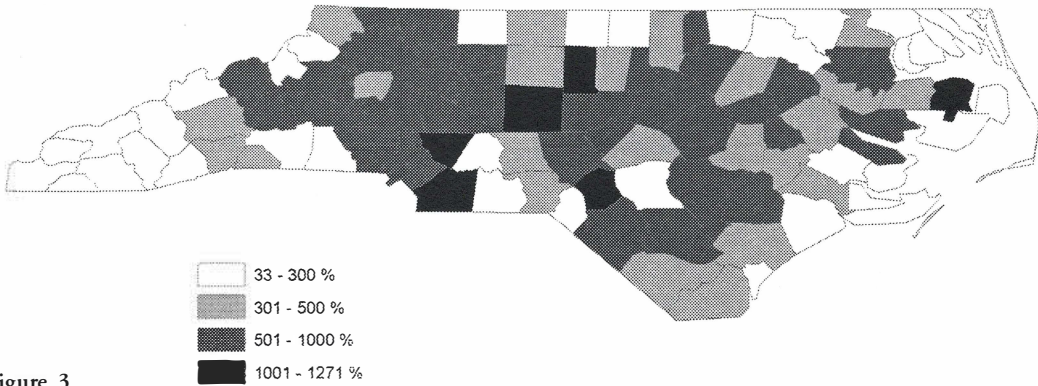


Figure 3.

Hispanic Population as a Percent of Total Population, 2000

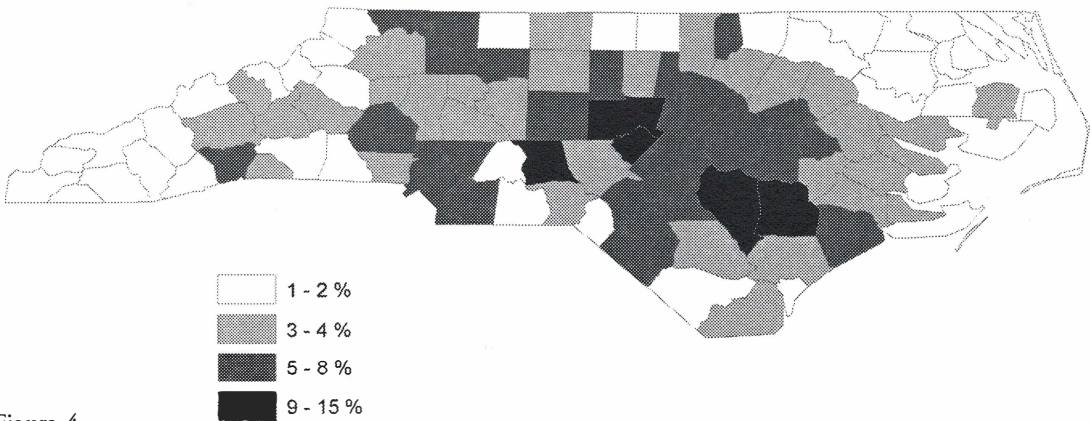


Figure 4.

building in Greene County, such as the proliferation of small Latino-managed *tiendas* (stores) in nearly every major neighborhood in the county. Services offered range from fast food to bus tickets, Western Union money transfers and Mexican cowboy boots. Several informal Latino businesses now offer construction, landscaping and auto repair services to clients outside the Latino community itself, and local

salsa bands find enough gigs to make a reasonable second income for band members. The county now has a small, but vigorous adult soccer league, which is largely comprised of Latinos, and Greene Central High School, a bastion of baseball, recently added a varsity soccer program. Snow Hill, the county seat, plays host to a Latino Festival weekend in the late summer months, which serves not only to provide a

meeting venue for Latinos from surrounding counties, but also one in which Latinos and non-Latinos can meet outside the work environment. Eastern North Carolina, in other words, is rapidly becoming a transnational community. The growing Latino presence is fundamentally altering the economic, cultural and social landscape of the region.

Methodology

In 2002, three geographers affiliated with ECU's Rural Development Initiative (Rebecca Torres, Jeff Popke and Holly Hapke), in collaboration with the Greene County Public School System (GCPS) and the ECU Rural Education Institute (REI), received funding from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation in support of "Los Puentes: Dual Language Immersion Multicultural Education and Research Program." This project combines approaches to "two way" or "dual language" immersion and multicultural education with a program of supportive academic research. Within this context, the ECU Geographers initiated an empirical study of the area's demographics that sought also to identify the needs of parents and children in the community. Specifically, this research is focused on better understanding the patterns, processes and impacts of Latino migration to eastern North Carolina and the socio-economic realities of Latino residents.

The first step of the research has been to conduct an extensive socio-economic survey of Latino families with children enrolled in Greene County Public Schools. "Families," for the purposes of this study, are defined as any households with children enrolled in GCPS—whether they are under the care of parents, relatives or other guardians. In spring 2003, initial survey forms were designed, covering a wide range of topics, from socioeconomic status and living conditions, to remittance behavior and use of social services. The survey forms were pilot tested with mothers enrolled in the local Family Literacy program and revised accordingly based on feedback. Given the literacy barriers that exist, the decision was made to conduct telephone interviews with parents or guardians in lieu of sending home written survey forms with children.

Interviews were conducted throughout the summer and fall of 2003. A total of 139 surveys were completed, representing a 39% sample of all 358 Latino households with children enrolled in GCPS. Including all household members, 697 people were represented in the study sample households (an average of 5 people per household). Households were contacted and asked to participate on a voluntary basis. While most of the questions were focused on obtaining household-level information there were also queries specific to the respondents' personal experiences. In most cases, those agreeing to participate were women. This is due, in part, to their lower participation in the labor market making them more likely to be home and available to answer questions. Also, because the survey was viewed as being linked with the school system and involving issues related to children, males tended to defer to female members of the households. As a result, although women account for less than half (46%) of adult household members in the study, they comprised 78% of all survey respondents. The resulting gender bias must be considered in the analysis of the specific questions related to the respondent (as opposed to the household).

Presented below are selected preliminary results focused on those variables that indicate some measure of transnationalism among Latinos living in Greene County. We view this survey as the first phase of a long-range examination of Latino transnational processes in North Carolina. The next phase, which we hope to commence in the spring of 2004, will comprise a series of in-depth interviews, focus groups and family histories designed to add more personal narratives to the data presented here. In the long run, it is our hope that the research initiated here will contribute to a better theoretical understanding of the dynamics of transnational migration in the rural Southern U.S., while also making a strong, practical contribution to enhanced policy formulation and service delivery by the Greene County school system, government institutions and their state-level counterparts.

Preliminary Results: A First Look at Latino Families in Greene County, NC

I. Latino Household Structure, Employment and Poverty Indicators

One of the primary survey objectives was to collect socio-economic background data on Latino households that would serve as a baseline for future investigations. These data are useful in situating Latino families within the eastern North Carolina socio-economic framework. In terms of household structure, of the 697 Latinos living in households surveyed, 322 (or 46%) are adults of at least 18 years of age. Of these, 54% are men and 46% are women. In general, Greene County Latino households tend to follow a nuclear family structure, with few extended family members resident. Indeed, survey respondents, their spouses and children account for 91% of all household residents, with the remaining 9% divided among siblings (4%), grandparents (2%), parents (1%), and cousins (1%).

As with findings reported in other studies, a preliminary analysis of the data revealed that Latino households are over-represented in low-skilled employment and live on the margin of poverty. This, in part, reflects the relatively low levels of education demonstrated by adult household members surveyed, averaging only 7 years of schooling completed (6th – 7th grade equivalency). An analysis of household employment patterns revealed that, in the 139 households surveyed, there were a total of 200 adults employed (not including 63 who identified themselves as “homemakers”). Figure 5 provides a summary of the principal occupations represented in the sample. Agriculture was the predominant form of employment with approximately 38% of the employed household members working as farm laborers. This reflects the fact that agriculture continues to provide the economic foundation of Greene County, particularly tobacco, cotton, hog and poultry production. Other important employment categories included construction (23%) and non-farm low-skilled labor (21%). The balance

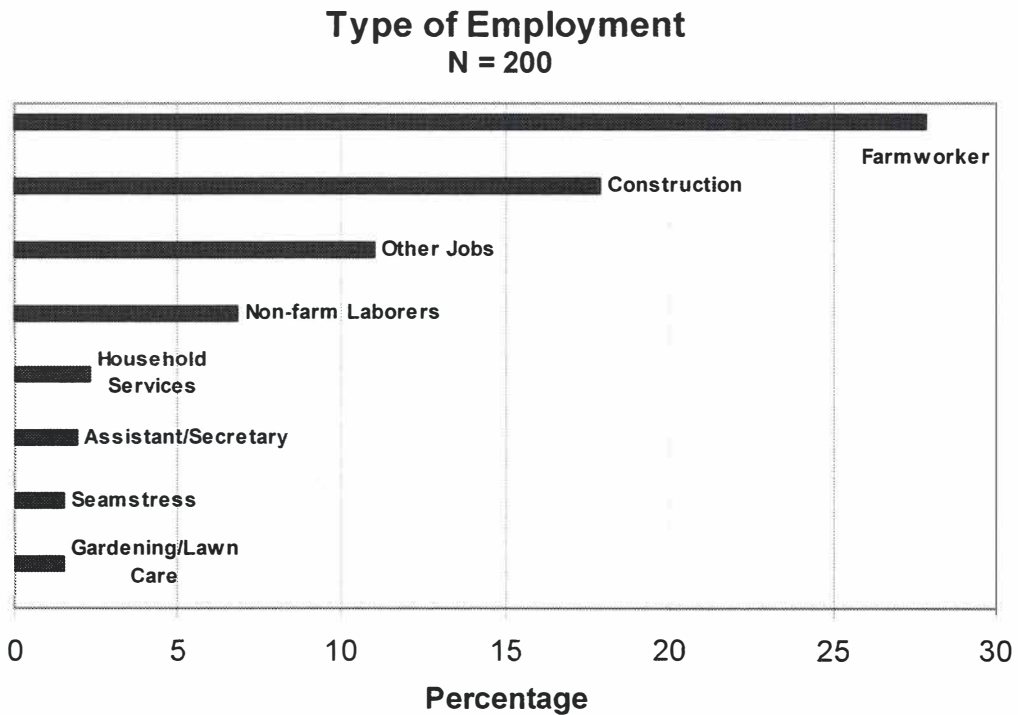


Figure 5.

of employment was sprinkled among a diverse group of labor categories, including administration, secretarial, domestic, gardening and restaurant work, among others.

An analysis of average household monthly income suggests that most Latino families live on very low wages. Respondents reported an average monthly salary of approximately \$600 per employed worker. Three quarters of all of the households surveyed live on average household earnings of less than \$2000 a month (see Figure 6). This places a significant number of respondent households at or below poverty thresholds as determined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.²

Other data also suggest relatively high levels of poverty among Greene County Latino families. For example, 90% percent of all households qualify for free or reduced lunches for their school-aged children, a common poverty indicator used by school systems. One-third of the families rent their housing, while 55% own their home and 8% live in accommodations provided by their employers. Nearly 90% of the families live in "single wide" mobile homes, among the poorest housing available

in a county that is notorious for its high number of dilapidated, fully depreciated trailers. Twenty percent of the families own a computer and only 10% have Internet access in their homes, highlighting the so-called 'digital divide' in access to technology among different ethnic and racial communities in the U.S.

II. Transnational Routes to Eastern North Carolina

One of the principal objectives of the survey was to improve understanding of the patterns and processes surrounding Latino transnational migration to rural eastern North Carolina. The survey included a series of questions designed to acquire migration histories of informants and other household members. Specific questions included birthplace, prior residence, place of arrival in U.S., duration in the U.S. and NC, and factors influencing decision to settle, among others. Presented below is a brief discussion and graphic representation of selected study results related to the migration history of the sample population.

Greene County Latino families are overwhelmingly Mexican by origin. Of the 319 adult household members accounted for in the survey,

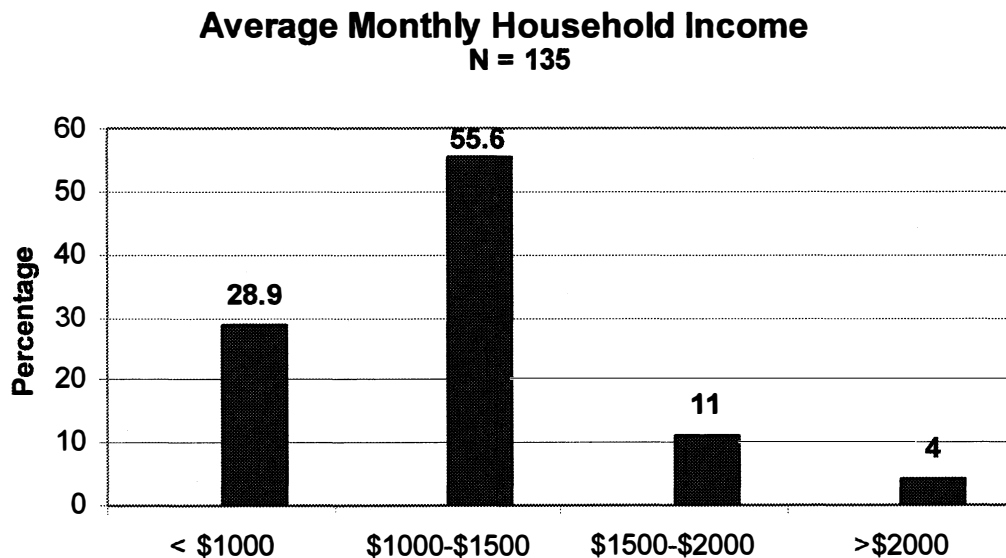


Figure 6.

nearly all were Mexican (95%), excepting 4 from Honduras and 11 born in the U.S. (Table 3). While 19 different Mexican states were represented in the sample, there are certain patterns to the source regions. In particular, we found that 56% of Mexican-born Latinos come from one of three states—Michoacán, Guanajuato or Tamaulipas (see Figure 7). The next four most common birth states (Hidalgo, San Luis Potosí, Guerrero and Veracruz) account for an additional 29% of household residents. In some sense, these findings are not surprising as both Michoacán and Guanajuato are traditional regions of out-migration, ranking 2nd and 3rd respectively as sending states of immigrants to the U.S. (INEGI, 2000).

Interestingly, 53% of respondents indicated that their first city of arrival upon entering the United States was in North Carolina. Although this may partly reflect female respondents arriving to join spouses who had come earlier, it also suggests the existence of fairly well-established direct transnational routes between Mexico and the state of North Carolina. A relatively small number of respondents, for example, found their way to Greene County after first arriving in traditional gateway states such as Texas (the second most common response, at 23%) or Florida (12%), and only one

respondent came by way of California. It is also noteworthy that all of the 75 respondents who followed a direct path from Mexico to North Carolina came initially to smaller cities and towns, rather than to larger 'gateway cities' within the state (Table 4). Not a single Greene County respondent, for example, first arrived in Charlotte, the Triangle, or the Triad region. Instead, respondents came directly to eastern NC cities and towns such as Snow Hill, Farmville and Wilson. This suggests that the transnational routes of the rural East may be somewhat isolated and distinct from those that comprise the large Latino communities of North Carolina's larger urban areas.

Survey respondents, for the most part, arrived in the U.S. with other family members, including partners (with or without children) and, to a lesser extent, siblings, parents and other extended family members. Only 15% of respondents arrived alone. This reflects, in part, the sample bias towards female respondents who are less likely to migrate alone than are males. But it also suggests that family ties play an important role facilitating migration and settlement in North Carolina. Approximately 56% of respondents were initially housed by family members upon arriving to the U.S. Another 24%

Table 3. State of Birth

Mexico		303 (97.1%)			
Michoacan	83	Guerrero	19	Tabasco	6
Guanajuato	48	Veracruz	15	Zacatecas	5
Tamaulipas	39	Distrito Federal	2	Jalisco	4
Hidalgo	23	Durango	9	Aguascalientes	3
San Luis Potosi	20	Sinaloa	8	Morelos	3
United States		5 (1.6%)		Honduras	
Texas	5			San Pedro Zula	2
Florida	3			Lempiras	1
North Carolina	3			Lloro	1

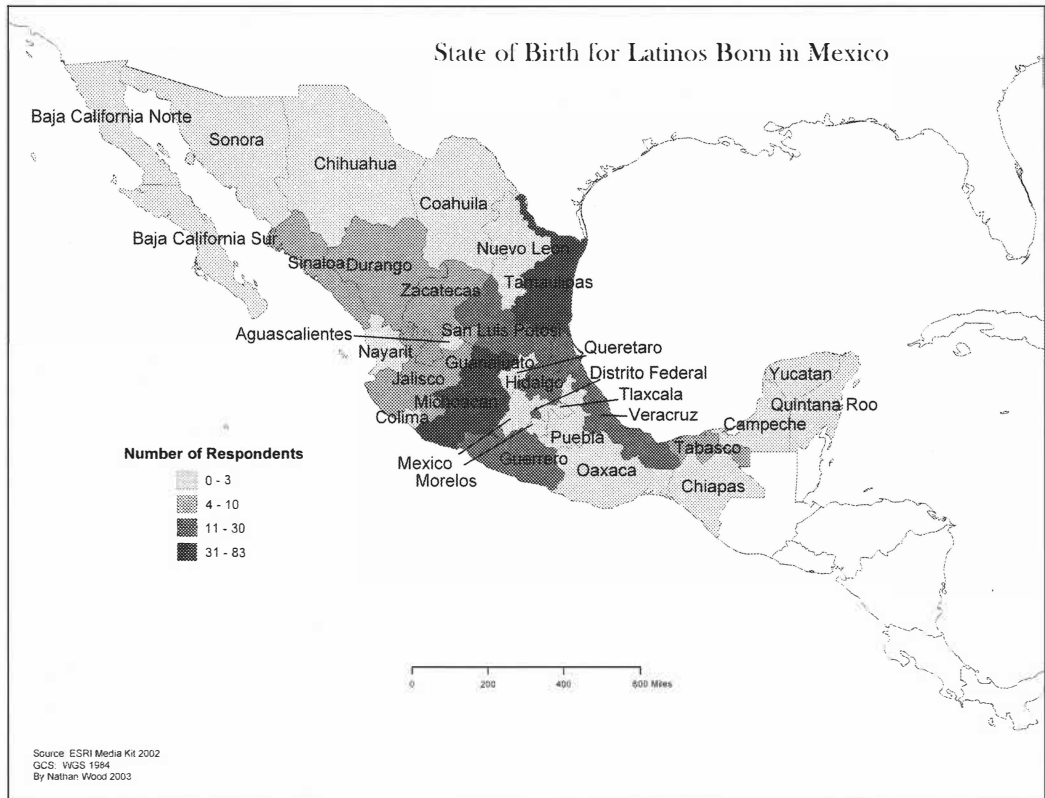


Figure 7.

first stayed in housing provided by their employers, a common practice for agricultural workers.

Several factors influenced household members in making the decision to migrate to the U.S. Figure 8 reviews the principal factors that played a role in their decision to migrate to the U.S.. Among the frequently stated reasons for coming to the U.S. were employment (86%), education (73%) and relatives (46%). When asked for the most important reasons for settling specifically in Greene County, once again employment was the most frequent response (81%), followed by family ties (68%) and the quality of schools (58%). These are consistent with the overall reasons why Latinos migrate to the U.S. Relatives and personal linkages also play an important role in drawing families to settle in Greene County. Seventy-six percent of all respondents heard about Greene

County from either family members or friends. Other issues influencing household decisions to settle specifically in Greene County included cheap housing (50%) and low crime rate (38%) – both arguably associated with the rural nature of the county. Figure 9 reviews the principal factors that influenced families' decision to settle in Greene County.

III. Transnational Connections Between Eastern North Carolina and Mexico

Greene County Latino families appear to be a relatively permanent and stable population, in contrast to the stereotypical image of the male migrant farmer worker. Of those surveyed, 59% indicated that they intended to remain permanently in the United States, with a further 29% indicating they were 'unsure' about their long-term plans. Only

Table 4. First City of Arrival in the United States (For Respondents Arriving First in North Carolina)

<u>City of Initial Arrival</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>% of Total</u>
Snow Hill	26	35.6
Farmville	8	11.0
Wilson	6	8.2
Greenville	4	5.5
La Grange	4	5.5
Walstonburg	3	4.1
Goldsboro	3	4.1
Elm City	2	2.7
Smithfield	2	2.7
Winterville	2	2.7
Hookerton	2	2.7
Oriental	2	2.7
New Bern	2	2.7
Macclesfield	1	1.4
Grimesland	1	1.4
Bailey	1	1.4
Stantonsburg	1	1.4
Pamlico	1	1.4
Morehead City	1	1.4
Cove City	1	1.4
Total	73	100.0

12% of Latino respondents indicated that they did not intend to stay in the U.S. This sense of stability is related to the fact that most Latinos surveyed were not recent arrivals to Greene County, but have resided there for some time. For example, only 16% of all Latino children enrolled in GCPS during 2003 met "migrant" status, which is defined as children who are foreign born and have lived in the county for less than 3 years (Greene County Public Schools, 2003). As Figure 10 indicates, most respondents arrived in the U.S. in the early or mid-1990s, with relatively smaller numbers arriving in the past four years. Overall, respondents have lived an average of 6 years in Greene County, 8 years in North Carolina and 9 years in the United States.

Although these figures suggest some degree of 'permanence' within the Greene County Latino community, there are also indications that households remain well connected to their home countries. Analysis of survey data shows that Greene County

Latino families have continued to maintain strong ties to their home places, and are indeed constructing a transnational community linking eastern North Carolina to their homeland and its traditions, customs and culture. For example, over half of survey respondents indicated that they hope to return to their home country in the future, while an additional 30% indicated that they missed their homeland (Figure 11). Although very few respondents regretted their decision to migrate to the U.S., it seems that Latinos continue to feel attachments that cut across the boundaries of nation-states and cultures.

Language, perhaps more than any other single factor, sustains and conveys culture. While the average length of stay in the U.S. for respondents was 9 years, Spanish continues to be the language most frequently spoken at home for 80% of the families. Nineteen percent of families indicated that both Spanish and English were spoken equally at home while only 1% spoke solely English in the household. While language

Factors Influencing Decision to Migrate to the U.S.

N = 139

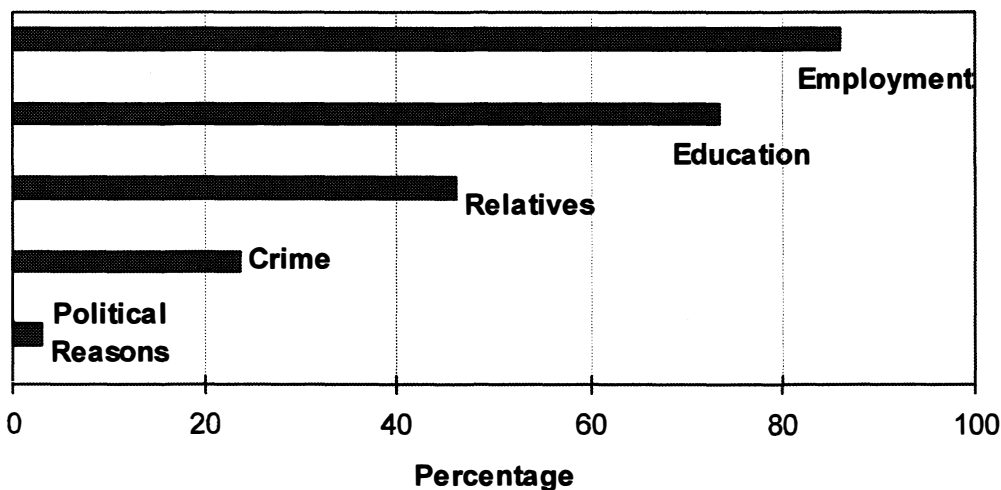


Figure 8.

is typically lost with first and second generation immigrant children, it would appear that Spanish continues to be passed on to the children of Greene County immigrants. Indeed, 25% of respondents indicated that Spanish remained the strongest language for their children. Nevertheless, through school and outside social contacts, children also acquire English. Twenty-two percent of households indicated that their children spoke English with greater fluency than Spanish, and over half stated that their children spoke English with equal fluency.

One of the most important indicators of transnational linkages to home place is the remittances sent regularly to families back home. Approximately one third of the Greene County Latino families stated that they send remittance back to their place of origin. This is significant as remittances by families with children are typically much lower than those made by single, unaccompanied persons. Remittances are regular, if somewhat infrequent (see Figure 12), with most sending monthly (14%) or "every few months" (18%). The dollar amount of remittances from Greene

County Latino families is relatively small. Ninety-one percent of those who reported sending remittance sent amounts of \$300 or less. Remittances were used overwhelmingly by family members back home for subsistence level maintenance, the purchase of items such as food and consumable goods (96% of cases), and to a lesser extent to build or improve a home (10%) or for farming (3%) (see Figure 13). While relatively small, these remittances are a strong indicator of ties to the homeland. They are also an important source of foreign exchange for home countries. Mexico, the highest recipient of remittances from the U.S., is dependent upon this income as a social safety net for many of its most economically vulnerable households (O'Neil 2003).

IV. Integration of Latinos Into the Greene County Community

While Latino families have established transnational ties with their homeland, they are also exhibiting a certain degree of integration into the mainstream non-Latino Greene County

community. Preliminary data suggest that, although Latino families remain somewhat isolated by barriers of language, class and legal status, they are nevertheless more integrated into the mainstream than is typical of unaccompanied, often male, migrant workers. In part, these findings can be attributed to the fact that our survey focused on families with school-age children. The presence of children builds ties to the school system, which in turn supplies families with information regarding local services, activities and social events. Children also increase opportunities for families to interact with non-Latinos through school activities and local social events such as birthday parties. It is also likely that the local community is more accepting of families with women and children than they are of groups of single male workers who have little opportunity to interact with local community members outside their work (Griffith, 2003).

It is noteworthy in this respect that 68% of children in households surveyed were born in the United States (56% percent of them in North Carolina), making them U.S. citizens and indicating some measure of family stability over the long-term. This high level of citizenship among Latino children contrasts sharply with that of adult survey respondents, only 19% of whom indicated that they were citizens. Clearly, the lack of citizenship among Latino adults is an important barrier to integration. This is evident, for example, in the finding that Latinos seldom participate in the political process; only 4% had household members who have voted in U.S. national or local elections.

Citizenship is not the only barrier to the integration of Latino adults in Greene Country.

**Factors Influencing Decision to Settle in
Greene County**
N = 139

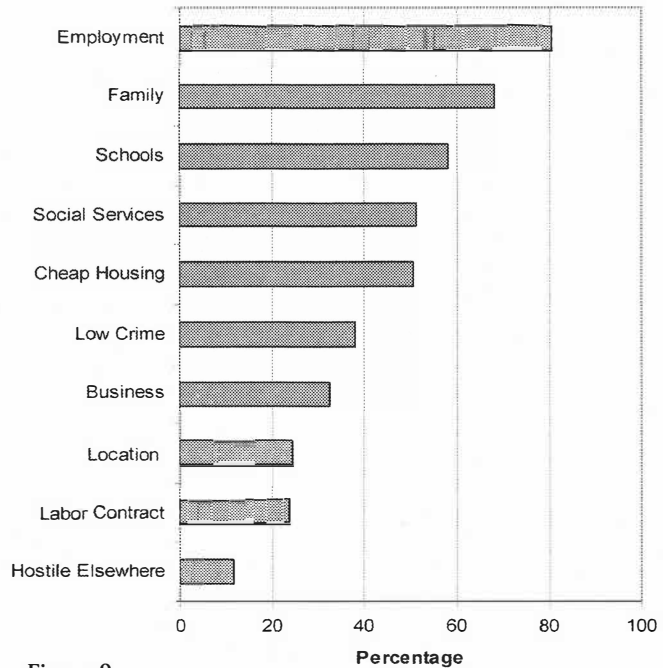


Figure 9.

Another is the low level of English language proficiency exhibited by respondents – 72% indicating that they spoke “no” or “little” English.³ In answers to an open-ended question regarding the stresses associated with being an immigrant in the U.S., several respondents raised the language issue. They expressed frustration at their inability to help children with schoolwork, limited job opportunities due to lack of English and a feeling of isolation stemming from the inability to communicate with others.

The low level of involvement of Latino families in local civic activities may be attributed, in part, to language barriers that inhibit Latinos from participating (see Figure 14). The highest degree of participation was in church-related activities and group functions (15%). This logically follows from the fact that 82% of Greene County Latino families reported that they attended church regularly. This

Year Participant Came to the US N = 133

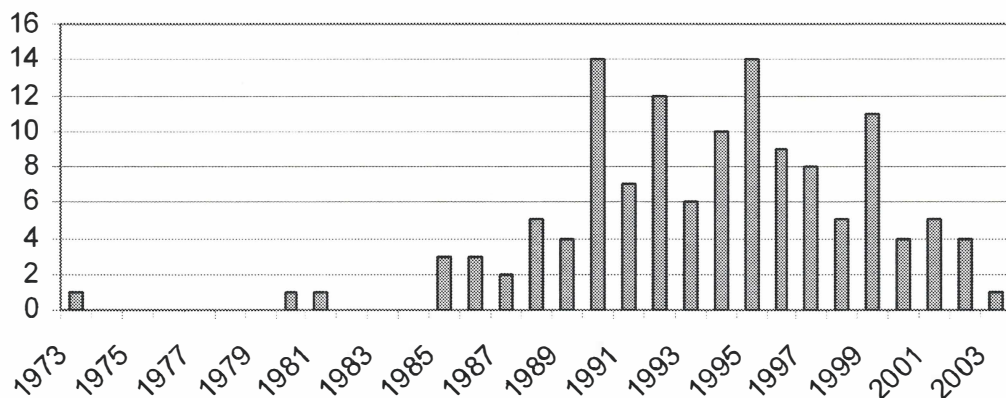


Figure 10.

Participants Feelings About Home N = 139

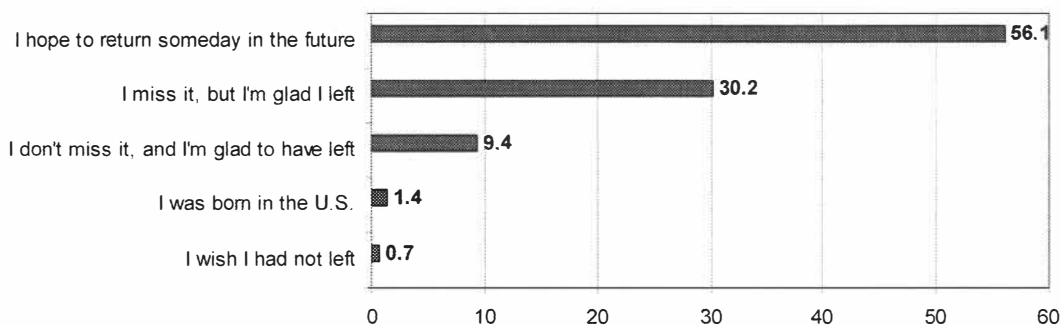


Figure 11.

is one activity where language is not a barrier, as 98% of church-going families attend services held in Spanish. After church-related activities, the highest rate of family participation was found in local sporting teams (12%), typically through their children. Other than these two areas, participation in civic organizations is very low.

In contrast to their low participation in civic activities, Latino families exhibited relatively high levels of participation in local social events; particularly those involving their children (see Figure

15). School activities ranked highest on the list, followed by family activities such as trips to the beach, local fairs and parks. Families also maintain links with Latino community social events, with nearly 50% participating in the Snow Hill Latino Festival and a third attending Latino dance or music events and *Cinco de Mayo* festivities.

Another sign of growing integration into the local mainstream is that nearly 50% of the families surveyed revealed that they had non-Latinos whom they considered close friends. This suggests that

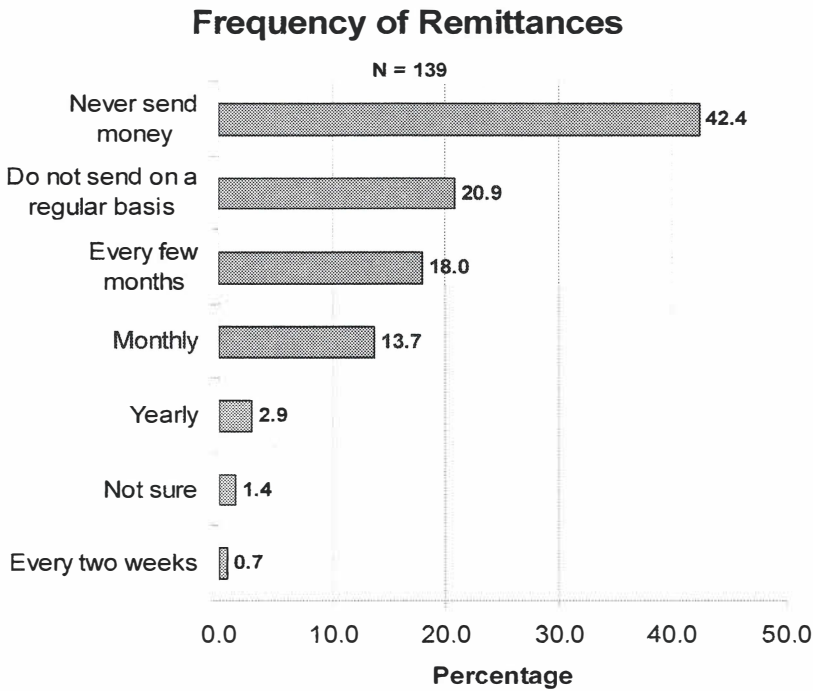


Figure 12.

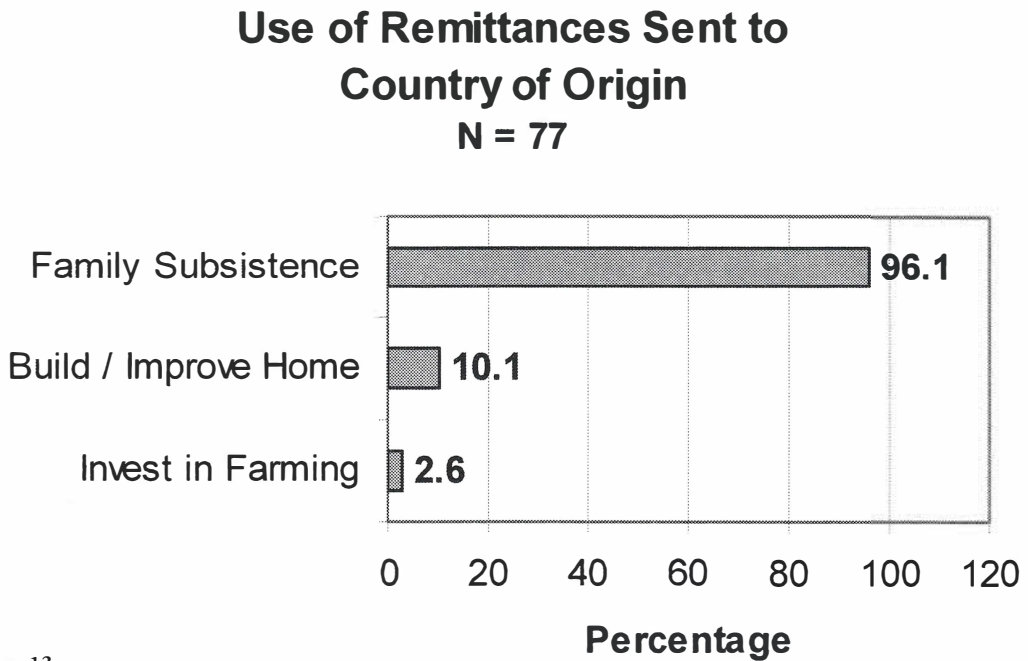


Figure 13.

meaningful relationships are gradually being built outside the Latino community. Despite this, approximately 20% of Latino families reported that people 'have been mean or unkind' to them. In several cases respondents reported feeling "discriminated against." Other frequently mentioned sources of stress included legal status and fear of deportation; the inability to speak English; the lack of freedom and resources to visit family back home (especially post-9/11); the scarcity of jobs for immigrants and an inability to pay the bills. Nevertheless, most respondents suggested they were relatively content living in Greene County, frequently describing it as "*tranquilo*"—peaceful and laid-back. Many families mentioned being pleased with the school system, the local health clinic and services available to children and families. Overall, Greene County is considered by Latinos to be a good place to live.

Conclusions

While we are hesitant to draw definitive conclusions from research that is still in its preliminary stages, the data presented here do suggest a number of interesting trends that might warrant further investigation. First, it seems clear that Latino migration is having a greater impact upon rural areas of North Carolina than has been the case in the past. Although the state's larger metropolitan areas continue to be home to the largest numbers of Latino families, smaller cities and towns have witnessed a much more dramatic demographic transformation, and thus perhaps also a more salient social and cultural impact than some of the more long-standing destination areas. Second, and despite the increased diversity in migration patterns, Latinos continue to be concentrated predominantly in low-wage

Participation in Civic & Social Activities

N = 139

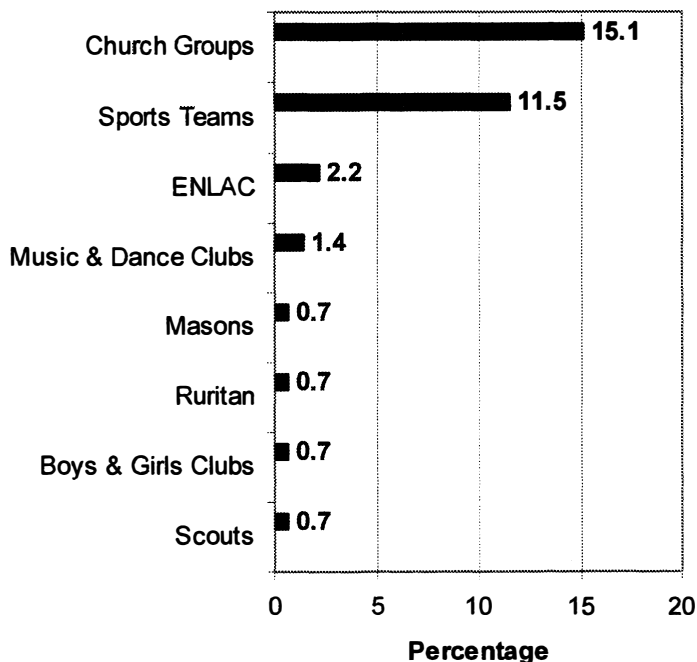


Figure 14.

occupations, and to suffer from higher than average rates of poverty. This low socio-economic status clearly has complex underlying causes, the investigation of which should be of priority for researchers and service providers alike. Third, there is significant evidence that Latinos in North Carolina have constructed, and are maintaining, transnational connections that span across political boundaries. There is evidence, for example, that there are direct migration routes between Mexico and eastern North Carolina, routes that are strengthened by extended family networks and the economic impacts of remittances sent back home. Less clear is the extent to which the transnational communities of eastern North Carolina are integrated into other such networks elsewhere in the state, or whether they exist in relative autonomy from, for example, the large Latino communities in the state's metropolitan areas. Fourth and finally, there is evidence that Latinos in

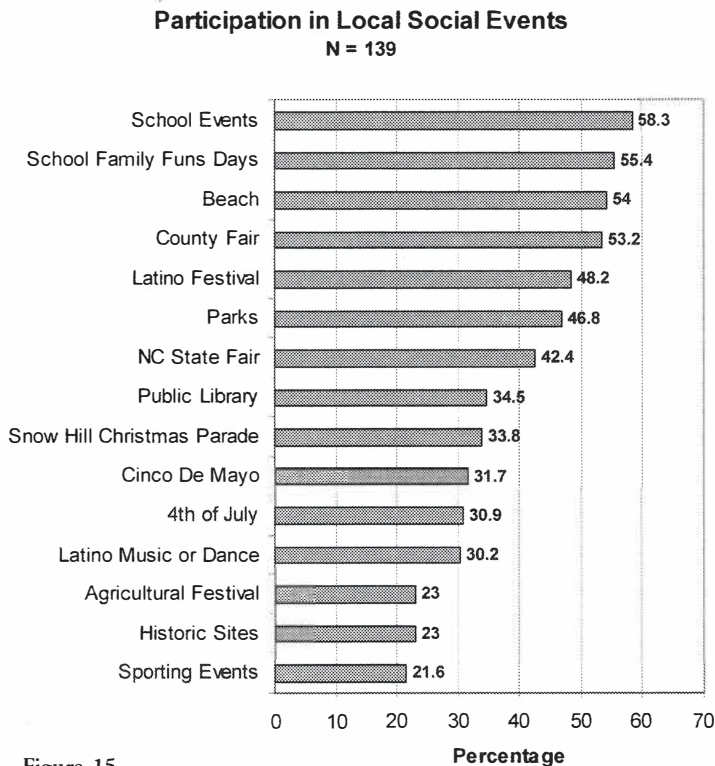


Figure 15.

Greene County are building local transnational communities that draw upon the social and cultural resources of both their home and host countries simultaneously. By all appearances, these are not transient communities. Latino families and their children are building long-term futures in places like Greene County and, despite barriers of language and occasional prejudice, are integrating into the local social milieu. At the same time, it is clear that Latinos maintain important and meaningful connections to their home culture. The ways in which Latinos manage these 'hybrid' social identities is a potentially interesting focus for further research.

Endnotes

¹ As defined here, the Southeast includes Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

² According to the Health and Human Services Poverty Thresholds for 2003, the poverty level for a family of 5 is annual household earnings below \$21,540 (Federal Register, 2003)

³ In part this may reflect the gender bias of the survey sample as women exhibited lower levels of outside labor participation and therefore had fewer opportunities to develop English language skills on the job.

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