

## Hispanic or Latino?

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Even though the term "Hispanic" is commonly used and often seen in official reports, the term "Hispanic" should only be used when referencing Census data or reports that specifically use that term. It can be appropriately used when referencing Census data because that is the term and definition around which the Census collects its data.

The federal Office of Management and Budget first introduced the term "Spanish/Hispanic origin" classification in the 1970s to acknowledge that growing Spanish speaking population from Latin American countries in the United States. The Bureau of Census then began to use the term "Hispanic" as an official Census category. In 2000, the Census started using both "Hispanic and Latino" in its data tables.

The term "Hispanic" has been widely criticized as a "government invention" that falsely homogenizes diverse groups of people. The major objection to this term is that it lumps together too many diverse groups, losing sight of distinctions between groups such as Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cuban Americans. Another objection is that it emphasizes the European culture and ancestry and masks the African and indigenous cultures that are also part of the history of many of the groups included under this umbrella term. Also, because of how the data is collected, it includes recent white "Spaniards" from Spain--which is another criticism of the "Hispanic" term. Despite these objections, the term has become popularly used by individuals to self-identify.

Generally, best practice is to use the term that a cited report uses when referring to that report, even if this means switching terms throughout your own report. Resist editors who ask you to use one term, especially if you are quoting reports or people who identify themselves using specific terms such as Mexican American, Chicana, or Latino.

However, if you control the labeling process, the term "Latino" is the most apolitical, generally accepted term you can use. This use of "Latino" covers all the people from Central and South American countries plus Puerto Rico, Cuba, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, but not Spain. Sometimes you will see it used as "Latino/a" to acknowledge men and women.

Other Recommendations:

Use the most specific label that accurately describes the group:

- Mexican Americans
- Puerto Ricans
- Mexican Immigrants/Americans = Mexican Americans and Mexican Immigrants
- Latinos or Latinas/as = Cuban Americans, + Mexican Americans + Puerto Ricans (etc.)

For persons of Mexican descent, there are many terms used:

- Latino/a
- Mexican American
- Chicana/o (implying a political consciousness/identity)
- Spanish Americans (used by elderly Mexican Americans along the Texas border)
- Mestizos (persons recognizing their mixed Mexican and Indian indigenous heritage)

Do not put a hyphen between the ethnic term and "American."

- Don't use "Mexican-American."
- Critiques have been written about being called "hyphenated Americans".

When talking to or writing about an individual, use the term they use to self-identify themselves and others like themselves.

Note that Puerto Ricans are American citizens since Puerto Rico is a U.S. commonwealth.

References:

Mary Romero. 1997. "Introduction" p. xv in "Challenging Fronteras: Structuring Latina and Latino Lives in the U.S." edited by Mary Romero, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Vilma Ortiz. New York: Routledge.