

## Santiago Reyes, Alessandra Noli Peschiera, Melany Sarcevic, Tatiana Garcia, Leen Tlanepantla

### Abstract

- The terms Latino and Hispanic are often used interchangeably in the United States, despite distinct meanings.
  - Latino refers to individuals with ancestry from Latin America, emphasizing geographic origin.
  - Hispanic refers to those from Spanish-speaking backgrounds, emphasizing linguistic and cultural ties to Spain.
- Historically, these classifications were used to categorize immigrants from Latin American or Spanish-speaking countries.
- Over time, they have expanded to include U.S.-born individuals who identify with this heritage, regardless of race or immigration status.
- Although immigration rates have declined, the Hispanic/Latino population continues to grow, largely driven by second-generation Americans.
  - Today, this group makes up about 20% of the U.S. population, making it the largest minority group
- This research examines the complexity of Latino identity among Generation Z in the United States.
  - Focuses on the relationship between externally imposed categorizations and processes of self-identification.
- Particular attention is given to tensions between societal labels and lived experiences.
- The study utilizes a literature review of historical and statistical sources, alongside planned in-person interviews to further support analysis.



### Methodology

- We investigated the historical aspect of Latinos within the United States, although currently our actual study hasn't started interviewing individuals.
- From the literature review there is a demonstration of a societal pattern in formation in individual structure that exists.
  - Implications are grand, especially with problematic issues.
- The research depends on the collection of qualitative data as the main source of feedback and results.
  - **Recruitment**
    - Participants will be selected from their voluntary response for a mass outreach media.
    - Requirement of social construct criteria: Generation Z (born late 1990's and later 2000's), Born in the United States, and Latino/a
  - **Consent form distributed**
    - Standardize caution advisory
    - Additionally, the mentioning of visual and audio recording to be used in the analyzation of results and for future publication, given multiple options of participation:
      - (e.g.) I agree to be recorded as appropriate during the research study.
      - (e.g.) I do not agree that the audio recorded as appropriate can be used in publications or presentations.
    - Individuals will be reminded of their rights regarding their participation.
  - **One-on-one standardized open ended question(s) interview. Some example of the questions:**
    - In your own words, what does it mean to be Hispanic or Latino today in the U.S.?
    - Is there anything about being Hispanic or Latino as a Gen Z individual that you feel is often misunderstood or overlooked?
- The questions are meant to be open ended as there is no incorrect answers as it is based on the individuals experiences.
- Depending on individuals comfortability in recording their responses, it leads to the collecting and transcribing of them will follow. First noting the general similarity and differences in responses is crucial for a more reliable comparison. Leading into a more in-depth analysis of each individual response.



Geographical map of all countries considered to be apart of Latin America.

### Discussion

Identity is not fixed but rather fluid, contextual, and shaped by culture, history, and social environments. While theories like Social Identity Theory suggest that people define themselves through group membership, real-world identities are far more complex and constantly evolving. Especially in newer generations, such as Gen Z Latinos, may interpret and express their identity differently due to assimilation, shifting cultural ties, and language changes over time.

Cultural values also shape identity. Many Hispanic communities are often associated with collectivism, emphasizing family, relationships, and shared responsibilities, though this can vary widely depending on individual experiences and levels of assimilation. Over time, especially across generations, connections to language, traditions, and cultural practices may shift.

“Latino” and “Hispanic” are often used interchangeably, but they group together people from many different countries, cultures, and histories under one broad category, a concept known as panethnicity. This can create a sense of unity, but can also blur important differences and personal experiences.

Additionally, U.S. institutions reinforce these broad categories through official classifications, raising questions about how identity is shaped not just personally, but also by external systems. This highlights an ongoing tension between self-identification and imposed labels, and shows how complex and evolving these identities can be.

### Results

- While the results of this study remain preliminary, our research anticipates that Latino/Hispanic Americans within the Generation Z cohort will demonstrate distinct identity-forming experiences shaped by social, cultural, and technological influences.
  - This study relies on participants' self-reported experiences alongside standardized questions to identify both individual perspectives and shared patterns in identity construction.
- We expect that this group will exhibit overlapping understandings of identity, influenced in part by the widespread role of digital technology and social media.
- These platforms are likely to play a key role in shaping self-concept by enabling both exposure to diverse cultural narratives and active exploration of identity.
- Additionally, generational status within the United States—such as whether individuals are first-, second-, or third-generation—remains an important factor, as it may affect cultural connection, language use, and identity development. Together, these variables are expected to interact in meaningful ways, influencing the overall outcomes of the study.



### Acknowledgment and References

I would like to acknowledge Santiago Reyes and our fellow researchers for the opportunity they presented me to work alongside them on this project. During the process of this research I further expand my perspectives and knowledge on this topic.

