

7. Life Satisfaction, Priorities and Values

Large majorities of Hispanics, whether young or old, native born or foreign born, are satisfied with their lives. They are also optimistic about their futures. A majority of young Latinos say they expect to be better off financially than their parents, and a majority of older Latinos say they expect their children will be better off than they are.

When it comes to their core social values, young Latinos who are either immigrants themselves or whose dominant language is Spanish tend to be more conservative and family-oriented than young Latinos who are in the third and higher generation. Latinos who are second generation typically fall in between.

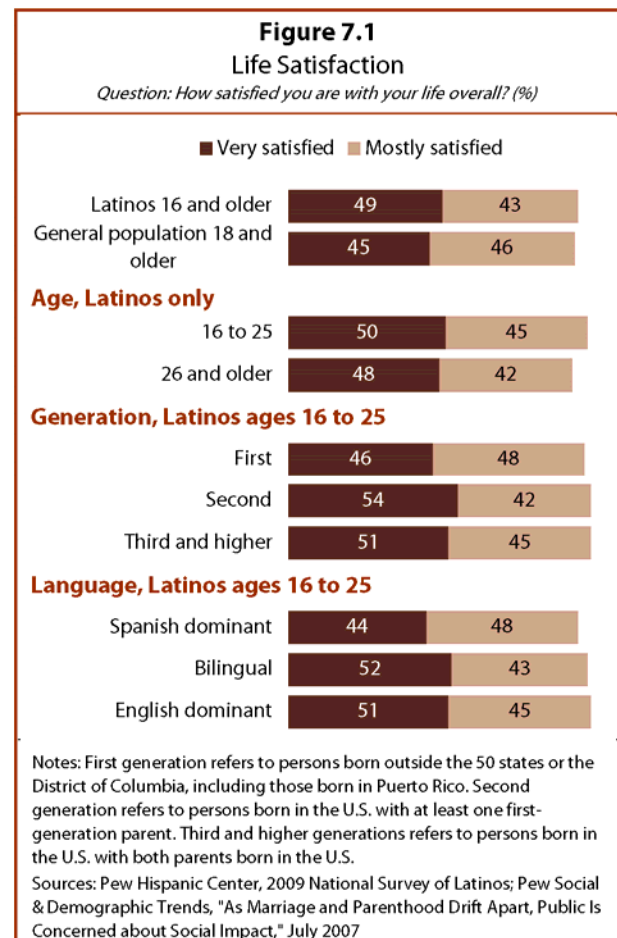
Satisfied and Optimistic

In their overall satisfaction with life, Hispanics look very much like the U.S. population as a whole. More than nine-in-ten (91%) Hispanics say they are very or mostly satisfied with their lives overall, while 91% of the general public says the same ([Taylor, Funk and Clark, 2007](#)). Life satisfaction is high among all groups of Hispanics—young as well as old.

Optimism about the future is also high among young Hispanics. Nearly three-in-four (72%) young Hispanics expect to be better off financially than their parents, and an additional one-in-five expect to do at least as well as their parents.

Native-born young Latinos are more optimistic about their upward mobility than are foreign-born young Latinos. Nearly eight-in-ten (78%) third-generation young Latinos and 74% of second-generation young Latinos say they will be better off than their parents financially. Among immigrant young Latinos, just two-thirds (66%) say the same.

A similar pattern is evident among young Latinos when these responses are analyzed by language use. Three-in-four young Latinos who speak primarily



English (76%) or who are bilingual (73%) say they expect to be better off financially than their parents. Among young Latinos who speak predominantly Spanish, 63% say the same.

The belief in a better future for the next generation is also widespread among older Hispanics, 75% of whom expect their children to be better off financially than themselves.

Perceptions of Discrimination

Notwithstanding their satisfaction with life and optimism about the future, a sizable minority of Hispanics say that they or someone they know has been the target of racial or ethnic discrimination. Nearly four-in-ten (38%) young Hispanics and 31% of older Hispanics say this has happened to them, a family member or a close friend in the past five years.

Perceptions of discrimination are more common among native-born young Latinos than among those who are foreign born. More than four-in-ten (42%) third-generation young Latinos and 40% of second-generation young Latinos say they or someone they know experienced racial or ethnic discrimination in the last five years. Among immigrant young Latinos, less than a third (32%) say the same.

Racial self-identity is linked with perceptions of discrimination. Some 26% of young Latinos who say their race is white say they, a family member or friend has been the target of discrimination, compared with 35% who describe their race as Hispanic or Latino and 43% who identify their race as “some other race.”

Table 7.1
Being Better Off Financially Than Their Parents, among Latino Youths

Question: Do you think in your lifetime, you will be better off, about the same, or less well-off financially than your parents? (%)

	Better Off	About the Same	Less Well Off
All Latino Youths	72	22	4
Generation			
First	66	24	8
Second	74	22	1
Third and higher	78	18	3
Language			
Spanish dominant	63	25	11
Bilingual	73	22	2
English dominant	76	20	2

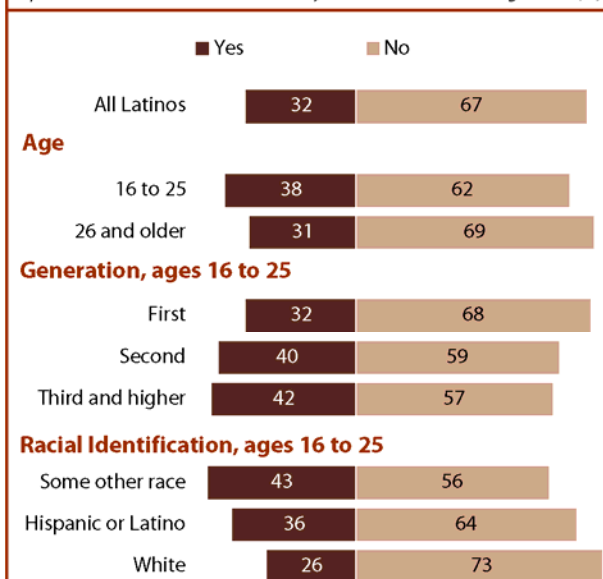
Notes: "Youths" refers to 16- to 25-year-olds. First generation refers to persons born outside the 50 states or the District of Columbia, including those born in Puerto Rico. Second generation refers to persons born in the U.S. with at least one first-generation parent. Third and higher generations refers to persons born in the U.S. with both parents born in the U.S.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center, 2009 National Survey of Latinos

Figure 7.2

Experience with Discrimination

Question: During the last 5 years, have you, a family member, or close friend experienced discrimination because of your racial or ethnic background? (%)



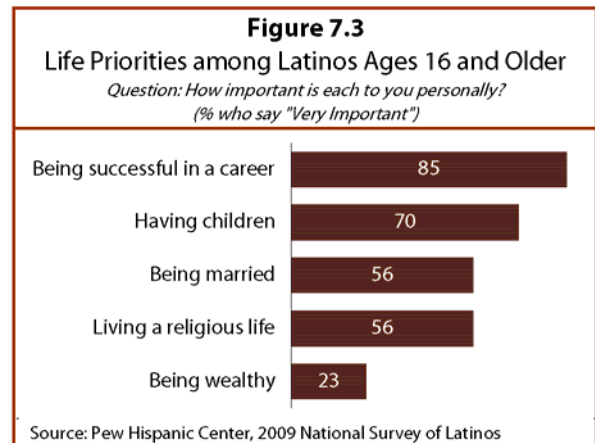
Notes: "Hispanic" or "Latino" in response to the racial identity question was volunteered by respondents. First generation refers to persons born outside the 50 states or the District of Columbia, including those born in Puerto Rico. Second generation refers to persons born in the U.S. with at least one first-generation parent. Third and higher generations refers to persons born in the U.S. with both parents born in the U.S.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center, 2009 National Survey of Latinos

Perceptions of discrimination may also have an impact on life satisfaction. Among young Hispanics who say they or someone they know has experienced discrimination, 7% say they are dissatisfied with their lives, while among those who have not experienced discrimination just 3% say the same. This gap in life satisfaction is even more pronounced among native-born young Hispanics. One-in-ten (10%) of the native born who say they or someone they know has experienced discrimination say they are dissatisfied with life, while only 3% of the native born who have no experience with discrimination say the same.²³

Life Priorities—Career, Family, Religion

Asked how much value they place on different types of goals and priorities in life, Latinos ages 16 and older generally rate career success higher than they rate marriage, children and religion—and much higher than they rate wealth. More than eight-in-ten (85%) Hispanics ages 16 and older say success in a career is very important to them. Seven-in-ten (70%) say the same about having children; 56% say the same about being married and about living a religious life; and just 23% say the same about being wealthy.



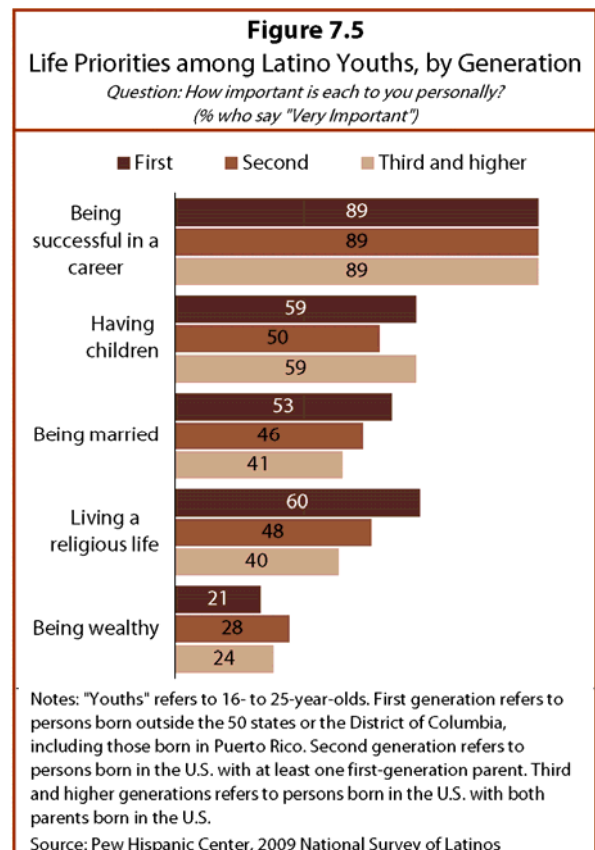
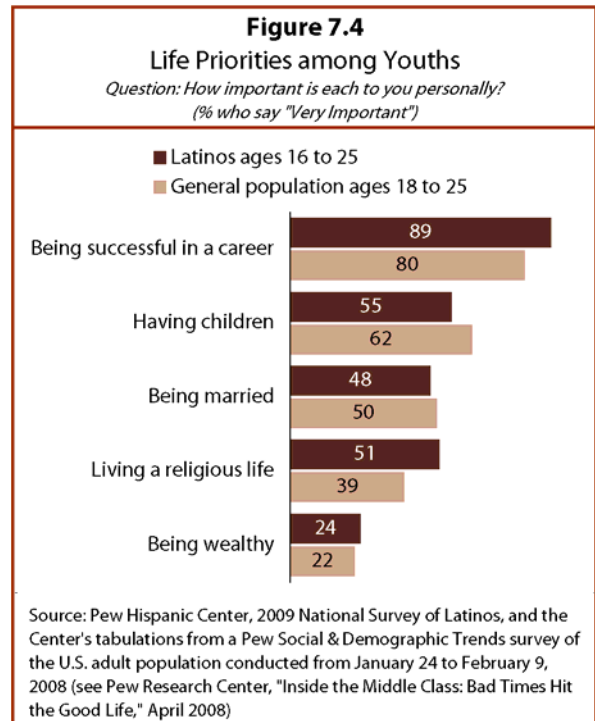
A 2008 Pew Research survey (Taylor et al., 2008) that presented this same battery of questions to the full U.S. population (18 and older) found much smaller gaps between the importance of career success (61% very important), having children (61%), being married (53%) and being religious (52%). In short, while Latinos ascribe more value to each of these priorities than does the U.S. population as a whole, they also are more disposed than the population as a whole to place career success on a higher pedestal than their other life priorities.

Some of this difference is attributable to the fact that Latinos ages 16 and older are much younger than the U.S. adult population—and career success tends to be a very high priority among younger adults. In fact, when one compares the 2009 responses of young Latinos ages 16 to 25 with the 2008 responses of all young adults ages 18 to 25, the rankings tend to converge. Being successful in a career is by far the top priority for both groups. Nearly nine-in-ten (89%) young Latinos say it is very important, as do eight-in-ten (80%) young adults in the full population.

²³ Some of these differences fall short of statistical significance.

All groups of young Latinos, irrespective of generation, share the view that being successful in a career is a high priority. On other priorities, however, immigrant young Latinos differ from second- and third-generation young Latinos. Six-in-ten (60%) foreign-born young Latinos say living a religious life is very important. This is higher than the share of second-generation (48%) and third-generation (40%) young Latinos who say the same. On being married, more than half (53%) of immigrant young Latinos say it is very important, while 46% of second-generation and 41% of third-generation young Latinos say the same.

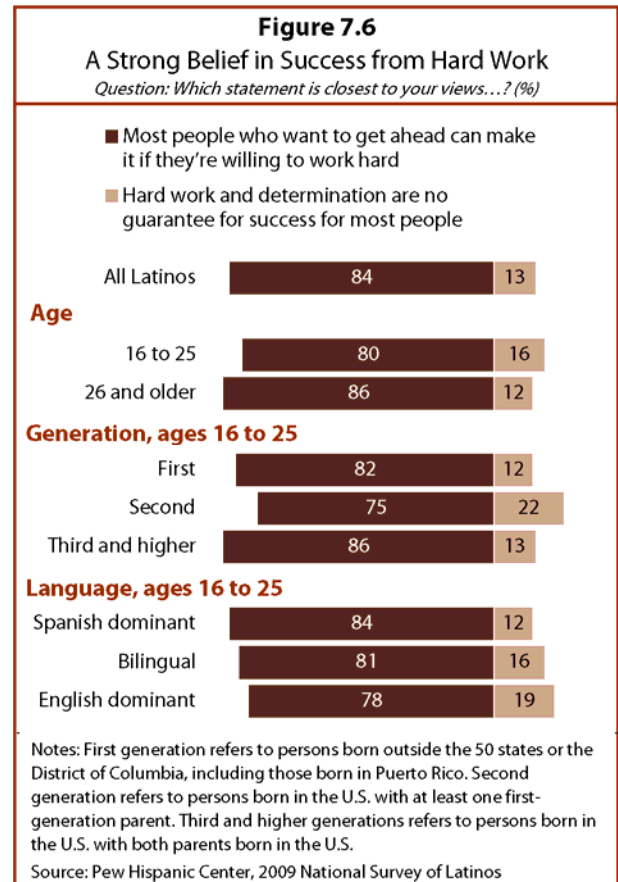
The generational patterns involving children and wealth are not as linear. When it comes to having children, the second generation sees it as somewhat less of a life priority than does either the first or third generation. This difference in priorities may reflect the relative youth of the second generation even among those ages 16 to 25 (see Table 2.2). And when it comes to wealth, this priority peaks among the second generation, though the differences here are so small that they fall short of statistical significance.



The Rewards of Hard Work

When asked which of two statements comes closer to their views about the rewards of hard work—that one can get ahead by working hard or that hard work and determination are no guarantee for success—Latinos are more likely than the general U.S. population to say that one can get ahead by working hard. More than eight-in-ten (84%) Latinos ages 16 and older say this, while just 64% of all adults (ages 18 and older) said the same in a 2006 survey ([Kohut, Keeter, Doherty, Suro and Escobar, 2006](#)).

Opinions about working hard to get ahead are similar across all groups of Latinos. Eight-in-ten young Latinos ages 16 to 25 and 86% of Latinos ages 26 and older say most people can get ahead if they work hard. Similarly, more than eight-in-ten (82%) young Latino immigrants, 75% of those in the second generation and 86% of those in the third generation say that one can get ahead by being willing to work hard.



Family Values

Gender Roles

Latino cultures around the world are known for a streak of paternalism. But a question in the 2009 National Survey of Latinos about whether the husband should generally have the final say in family matters finds mixed attitudes among Latinos living in the United States. Only about four-in-ten (43%) Latinos agree with the statement, while 56% disagree.

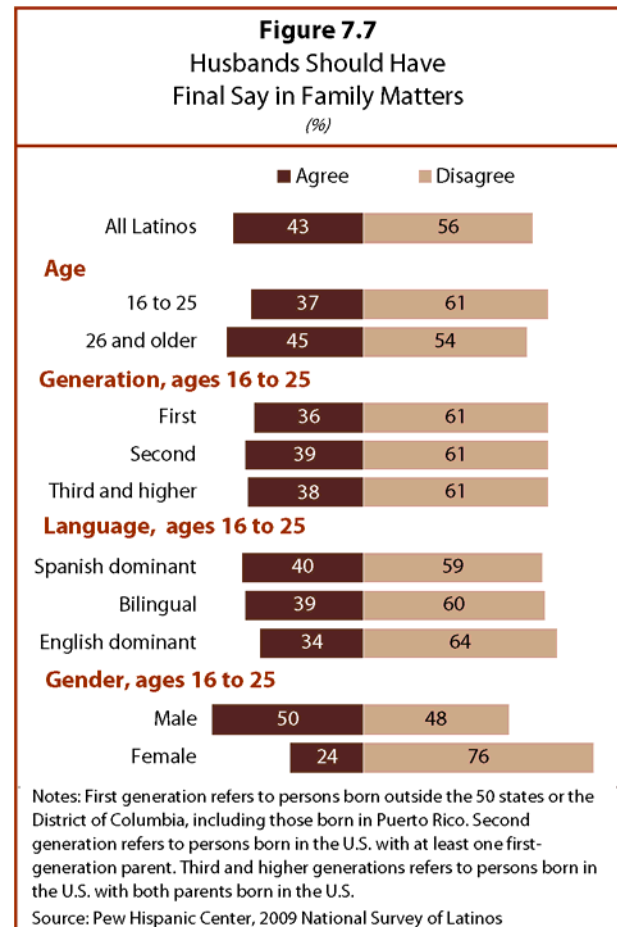
Here again, there are some age differences; 37% of all Latino youths agree with the statement, versus 45% of older Latinos who agree. And among foreign-born older Latinos, half (50%) agree with the statement.

But the bigger difference by far is by gender. Young Hispanic males are twice as likely as young Hispanic females to agree with the statement—50% versus 24%. Among older Latinos, there is virtually no gender gap. Some 46% of older Hispanic males and 43% of older Hispanic females agree that husbands should have the final say in family matters.

When this same question was posed on a Pew Hispanic survey in 2002 ([Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2002](#)), just 36% of all respondents said that the husband should be the lead family decision-maker.

Children Living at Home

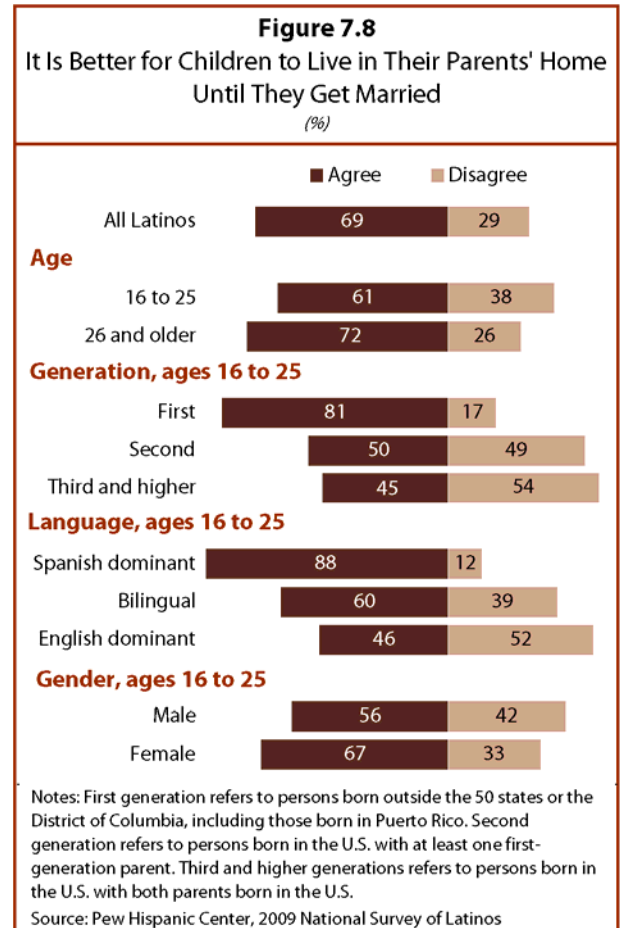
Another question designed to explore the strength of traditional family values asks whether it is better for children to live in their parents' home until they get married. Nearly seven-in-ten (69%) Latinos say that it is, but there are significant differences on this question by age and generation. More than six-in-ten (61%) young Latinos feel this way, compared with seven-in-ten (72%) older Latinos.



Among young Latinos, those who predominantly speak Spanish are most likely to agree with the statement. Eighty-eight percent of Spanish-dominant young Latinos agree, while six-in-ten (60%) bilingual young Latinos and 46% of English-dominant young Latinos say the same.

By generation, young Hispanic immigrants are most likely to agree that children should live at home with their parents until they get married. More than eight-in-ten (81%) foreign-born young Hispanics say this, compared with half (50%) of those in the second generation and less than half (45%) of those in the third and higher generation.

The view that children should live with their parents until they marry is especially widespread among older foreign-born Hispanics. Some 82% feel this way, compared with just 54% of native-born older Hispanics.

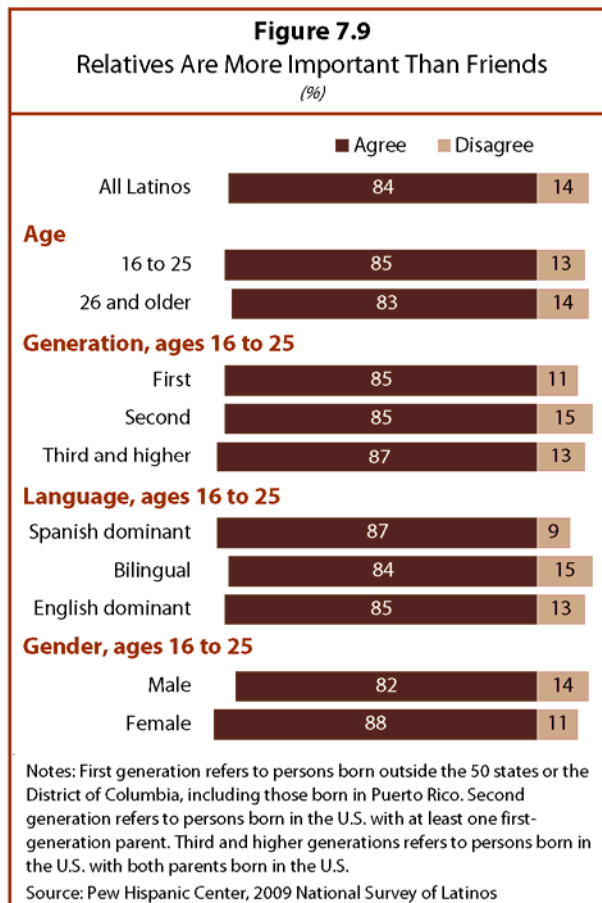


“[In] Caucasian culture, you’re expected to be out of your house when...you’re done with high school. 18. And Latinos...no! We are expected to be with our parents until we get married.”
21-year-old Hispanic male

“With us [Latinos], our grandmother lives in the house, our grandfather is there, our uncle lives with us and we can stay in the house till whenever. They [parents] don’t ever ask you to move out. [They’ll say] ‘Until you get old enough, you’re good, you help us pay some bills. You don’t have to leave.’ Its like ‘You’re living with us.’”
25-year-old Hispanic female

The Importance of Relatives

A large majority of Latinos (84%) agree that relatives are more important than friends. This is similar to the share (89%) of Latinos who said the same in 2002 ([Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2002](#)). The view that relatives are more important is held by all groups of Latinos. Among young people, 85% agree that relatives are more important than friends, while among older Latinos, 83% say the same.



Religion

Attendance at Religious Services

Hispanics are very similar to the general U.S. population in their frequency of attending religious services. Overall, 37% of Hispanics and 37% of the adult U.S. population say they attend a church or other house of worship at least weekly. Among youths, 36% of Hispanics ages 16 to 25 and 33% of all youths ages 18 to 25 say they attend religious services weekly.²⁴

Among young Hispanics, immigrants attend church services more regularly than do the native born. Four-in-ten (40%) young immigrants say they attend church weekly, while one-third (33%) of second-generation and 31% of third-generation young Hispanics say the same. Church attendance falls off most steeply among the third generation, nearly one-in-five (19%) of whom say they never attend.

Table 7.2
Religious Services Attendance
Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services? (%)

	Weekly	Sometimes	Never
All Latinos	37	50	10
Latinos, by Age			
16 to 25	35	49	13
26 and older	37	51	9
Latino Youths, by Generation			
First	40	45	11
Second	33	54	13
Third and higher	31	49	19
Latino Youths, by Primary Language			
Spanish dominant	42	42	14
Bilingual	38	52	9
English dominant	29	52	17
General Population, by Age			
18 to 25	33	53	15
18 and older	37	49	12

Notes: "Youths" refers to 16- to 25-year-olds. First generation refers to persons born outside the 50 states or the District of Columbia, including those born in Puerto Rico. Second generation refers to persons born in the U.S. with at least one first-generation parent. Third and higher generations refers to persons born in the U.S. with both parents born in the U.S.
Sources: Pew Hispanic Center, 2009 National Survey of Latinos, and Pew Research Center Aggregated Surveys, 2009

"[For Hispanics] everything is 'god forbid' or 'god willing'"

16-year-old Hispanic female

"We do a Rosario once a month and who ever offers [their home] gets to have the Virgin Mary [statue] in their home. And then who ever offers the house, gets to keep [the Virgin Mary] for a month, and everyone brings food and prays for an hour."

25-year-old Hispanic female

²⁴ Results for the general population are from tabulations of Pew Research Center Aggregated Surveys, 2009.

Religion Preferences among Latinos

A majority (60%) of Hispanics identify as Catholic. Among young Hispanics, this figure falls to 56%, and among second- and third-generation young Latinos, just under half (49%) say they are Catholic.

Language usage is related to religious identity. Two-thirds (67%) of Spanish-dominant young Latinos say they are Catholic, while only 57% of bilingual and only 47% of English-dominant young Latinos say the same.

	Catholic	Protestant	Evangelical	Other	No Religion
All Latinos	60	3	14	14	6
Age					
16 to 25	56	4	15	16	7
26 and older	62	3	13	14	6
Generation (ages 16 to 25)					
First	66	1	13	10	7
Second	49	7	18	19	5
Third and higher	49	5	14	21	10
Primary Language (ages 16 to 25)					
Spanish dominant	67	1	13	4	11
Bilingual	57	4	18	15	5
English dominant	47	6	14	25	6

Notes: First generation refers to persons born outside the 50 states or the District of Columbia, including those born in Puerto Rico. Second generation refers to persons born in the U.S. with at least one first-generation parent. Third and higher generations refers to persons born in the U.S. with both parents born in the U.S.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center, 2009 National Survey of Latinos

Opinions on Social Issues

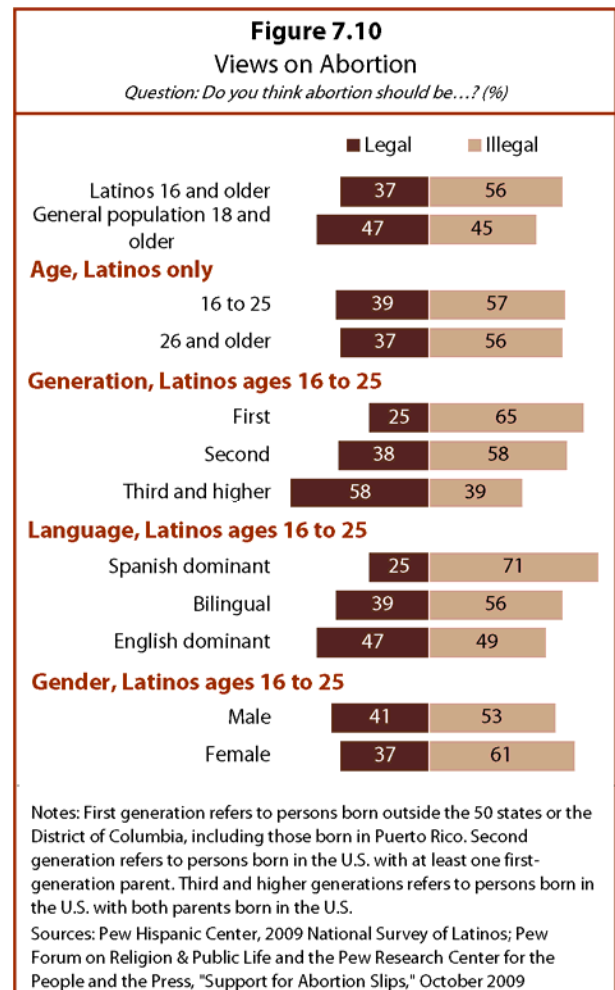
Latinos tend to be more conservative than other Americans on social issues such as abortion and gay marriage. Among young Latinos, there are notable differences by generation, with the foreign born and second generation more conservative than the third and higher generations.

Abortion

Hispanics overall hold a more conservative view than the general U.S. population about abortion rights. More than half (56%) of Hispanics ages 16 and older say abortion should be illegal in most or all cases, compared with less than half (45%) of the adult U.S. population that says the same ([The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life and The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2009a](#)).²⁵

Among young Latinos, opinions about abortion vary strongly with generation. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of foreign-born young Latinos and 58% of second-generation young Latinos say abortion should be illegal. In contrast, less than four-in-ten (39%) third-generation young Latinos say the same.

Differences in opinion about abortion are also strongly correlated with language usage. More than seven-in-ten (71%) young Hispanics who predominantly speak Spanish say they oppose abortion. Opposition among bilingual young Hispanics is lower, but still more than half (56%) oppose it. Among those who predominantly speak English, just under half (49%) say abortion should be illegal.

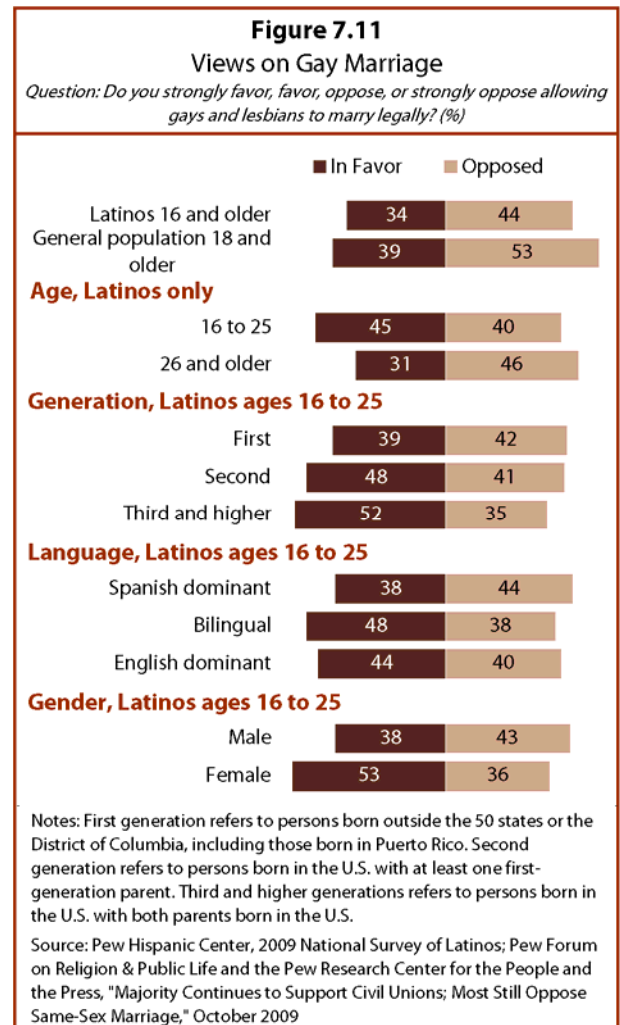


²⁵ The phrasing of this question on abortion rights is "Do you think abortion should be legal in all cases, legal in most cases, illegal in most cases or illegal in all cases?" The responses "legal in all cases" and "legal in most cases" are grouped as "legal." And the responses "illegal in most cases" and "illegal in all cases" are grouped as "illegal."

Gay Marriage

Just as they do with abortion, Latinos tend to hold somewhat more conservative views than the general U.S. population on the subject of gay marriage. More than a third (34%) of Latinos ages 16 and older in the 2009 National Survey of Latinos say they favor gay marriage, an opinion shared by nearly four-in-ten (39%) of the general population of adults, according to a recent survey of the U.S. population ([The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life and The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press 2009b](#)). Yet while Latinos are less likely to favor gay marriage, they are also less likely than the general U.S. adult population to oppose it. Less than half (44%) of Latinos ages 16 and older say they oppose gay marriage, while more than half (53%) of the general adult population says the same. This apparent paradox is explained by the fact that more than one-in-five (21%) Latinos ages 16 and older refuse to answer the question or have no opinion, compared with just 8% of the general U.S. adult population.

Young Hispanics have a more favorable attitude toward gay marriage than do older Hispanics—45% versus 31%. But among young Hispanics, support varies. Four-in-ten (40%) young immigrant Hispanics say they favor gay marriage, as do 38% of second-generation young Hispanics. In contrast, among third-generation Hispanics, more than half (52%) favor gay marriage. In addition, young Hispanic females are more favorable toward gay marriage than are young Hispanic males—53% versus 38%.



Unmarried Women Having Children

More than half (56%) of Latinos see the growing trend in unmarried women having children in the U.S. as a bad thing for society, while about a third (35%) say it doesn't make much of a difference. Overall, young Latinos and older Latinos hold similar views on this trend. More than half of young Latinos (53%) and 57% of older Latinos say the trend is bad for society.

There are some differences on this question by generation. Young foreign-born Latinos are somewhat more likely than either second- or third-generation young Latinos to see this trend as bad for society. Nearly six-in-ten (58%) young immigrant Latinos say this. In contrast, 51% of young second-generation Latinos and 48% of young third-generation Latinos say more unmarried women having children is bad for society.

A difference in viewpoint also exists by gender. Young Hispanic females overall are less likely than young Hispanic males to say that more unmarried women having children is bad for society—48% versus 58%.

