



Latino Attitudes about Women and Society

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The Center for American Progress, in conjunction with A Woman's Nation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and *TIME* magazine, conducted a landmark study in the summer of 2009 into public attitudes about women, society, and the workplace. Women are approaching the historic milestone of constituting half of the workforce, and the study sought to determine how Americans felt about a range of changes in the nature of modern family life and work.

The study found striking consistency in men and women's attitudes about many formerly contentious issues of gender relations and the working status of women. The study overall found strong majorities of men and women agreeing that the rise of women in the workforce is a positive development for society—a belief that crossed partisan, ideological, racial and ethnic, and even generational lines.

The survey of 3,413 adults, conducted by Abt SRBI, included an oversample of Latinos, allowing us to dive somewhat deeper into the beliefs of this important and growing group, and to compare their attitudes with those of the population at large.¹ This survey was not designed as a comprehensive examination of Latino attitudes and subgroups, but the results provide interesting and useful attitudinal trends that will be worth pursuing in more detail in future studies.

It is important to note upfront that Latino attitudes were basically in line with those of other groups on nearly every indicator in the survey. Some minor differences did emerge in terms of the intensity of these beliefs and the degree of consensus about an issue. But, as was found with the overall population, Latinos accept and welcome the rising status of women in American life and report many of the same needs as others in terms of balancing work and family life.

Some of the more interesting findings that emerged from our analysis include:

Latino attitudes about the rise of women in the workforce are as positive as any group in America

We asked Americans to evaluate the fact that women today constitute about one-half of all workers compared to 40 years ago when women made up one-third of all workers. More than three-quarters of Americans (77 percent) overall viewed this development positively, with less than one-fifth (19 percent) viewing this change negatively. Positive views about the rise of women in the economy cut across nearly every demographic and ideological group.

But Latinos were among the most favorable groups in the survey, with 87 percent of Latino women and 82 percent of Latino men viewing this change positively—7 to 10 points higher than men and women overall (Figure 1).

Latinos are more focused on having a fulfilling job and are much more likely to want their daughters to have an interesting career

Latinos express a strong desire for better and more fulfilling job opportunities in life. The rank ordering of life goals is roughly similar between Latinos and the overall population, but larger percentages of Latino men and women rate “having a fulfilling job” as a very important life goal (Figure 2).

When asked to rank order a series of three possible life outcomes for their daughters, Latino

FIGURE 1

Latinos overwhelmingly view the rise of women in workforce as good for society

Q: Forty years ago, just one-third of all workers were women. Today, about one-half of all workers are women. Do you think this change has been positive or negative for American society (split sample with “the American economy”)?

Groups by total percent positive (for combined samples)

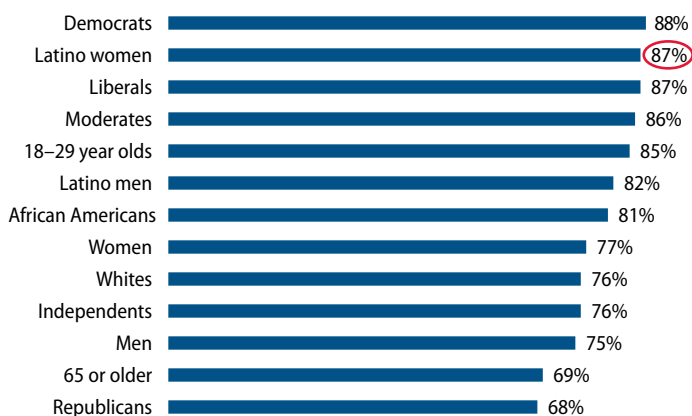


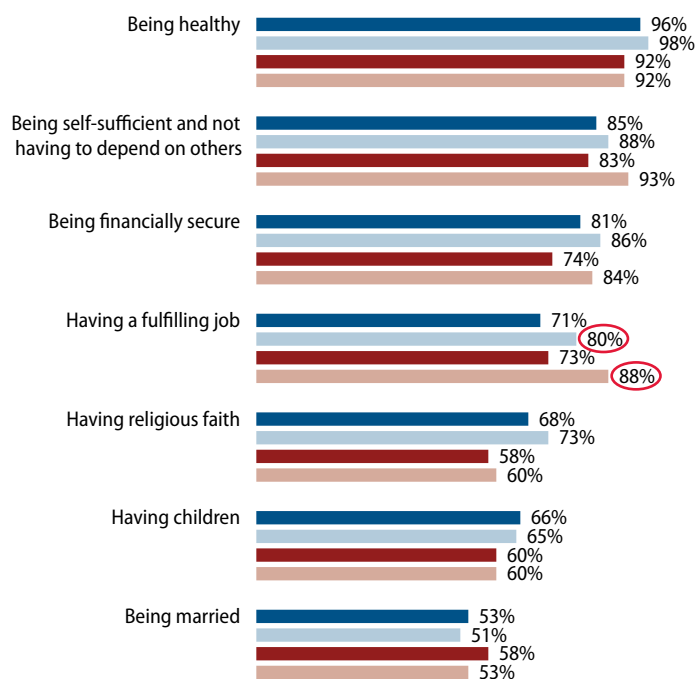
FIGURE 2

Latinos more focused on having a fulfilling job

Q: I'm going to read you a list of some things that different people value. Some people say these things are very important to them. Other people say they are not so important. Please tell me how important each thing is to you personally.

■ Women ■ Latino women ■ Men ■ Latino men

Percent saying “very important”



men and women were also far more likely to rank “an interesting career” first in their list of desires for their daughters compared to the population at large. Forty-two percent of Latino women and 32 percent of Latino men ranked an interesting career as the top goal for their daughters compared to 23 percent of women and 17 percent of men overall (Figure 3).

Latino men and women were consequently far less likely to rank “a happy marriage and children” as the top life goals for their daughters. Majorities of men and women overall ranked marriage and children first on the list compared to only 35 percent of Latino women and 44 percent of Latino men (Figure 3).

Majorities of Latinos favor a traditional family structure, but they are less concerned than other groups about children growing up without a stay-at-home parent

Fifty-five percent of Latino men and women agree that it is better for a family if the father works outside the home and the mother takes care of children, a trend fairly consistent with the population at large. But Latino men, and Latino women in particular, express far less concern than the overall population about the negative consequences of children growing up in a household without a stay-at-home parent.

Less than half of Latino women (49 percent) say the demise of the percentage of children growing up with a parent at home is a negative development for society compared to 61 percent of women overall (Figure 4).

FIGURE 3

Latinos more focused on daughters finding interesting careers in life

Q: [For those with daughters or stepdaughters] Everyone naturally wants the best of all things for their children, but I'd like to know how you would rank these three things in importance. For a daughter of yours, which would you most want her to have?

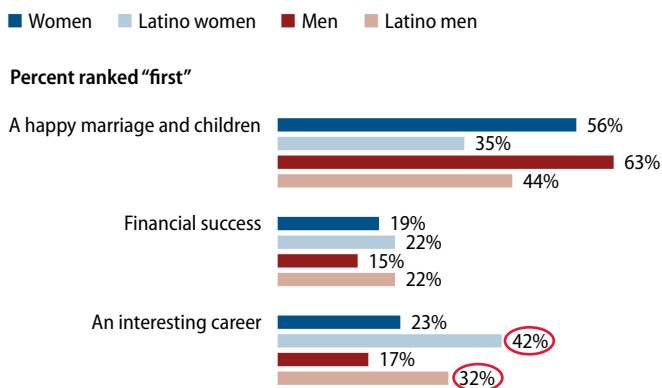
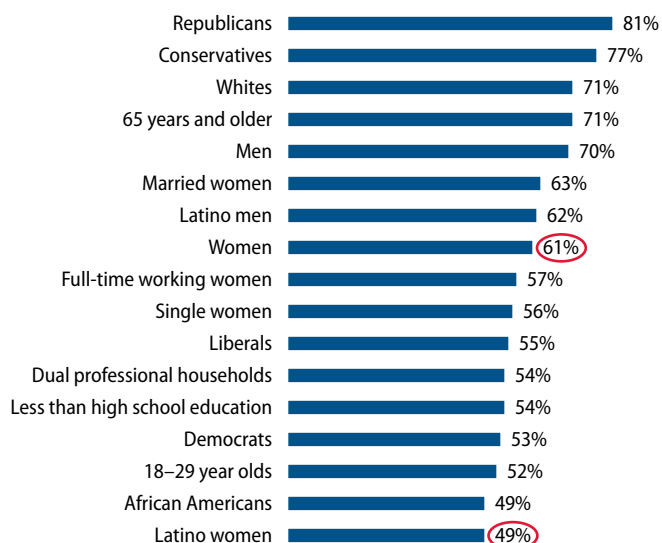


FIGURE 4

Latino women less worried about children growing up without a stay-at-home parent

Q: In the mid-1970s, a majority of children grew up in a family with a stay-at-home parent. Today about 30 percent of children grow up in a family with a stay-at-home parent. Do you think this change has been very positive, somewhat positive, somewhat negative, or very negative for American society?

Groups by total percent negative



Latinos are more likely than others to look to one another in their relationships for financial support and household decision making

Latino men, perhaps reflecting the overall status of Latinos in the workforce, are twice as likely as men overall to say that it is very important to them for their romantic partners to provide financial support—32 percent versus 15 percent, respectively. Forty-one percent of Latino women report similar sentiments compared to 30 percent of women overall (Figure 5).

Latino men report much higher rates of primary responsibility for child care than men overall but much greater difficulty getting time off for work to care for their children

When asked to identify who is mostly responsible for taking care of their children, 13 percent of men overall report that they themselves are mostly responsible for child care. The self-reported figure among Latino men is 32 percent—more than double the overall number. Interestingly, Latino women and women overall are much more consistent with one another in terms of self-reported behavior about child rearing.

It is debatable whether this reflects actual or perceived differences on the home front, but the perception among Latino men about their role in child care clearly extends to the workplace, as well. Thirty-six percent of men overall reported having difficulty getting time off from work to care for kids compared to 51 percent of Latino men (Figure 6). And both

FIGURE 5
Latinos more likely to turn to one another for decision making and financial support

Q: Whether or not you have a romantic partner in your life right now, please tell me how important you feel it is for you personally to have that person do the following.

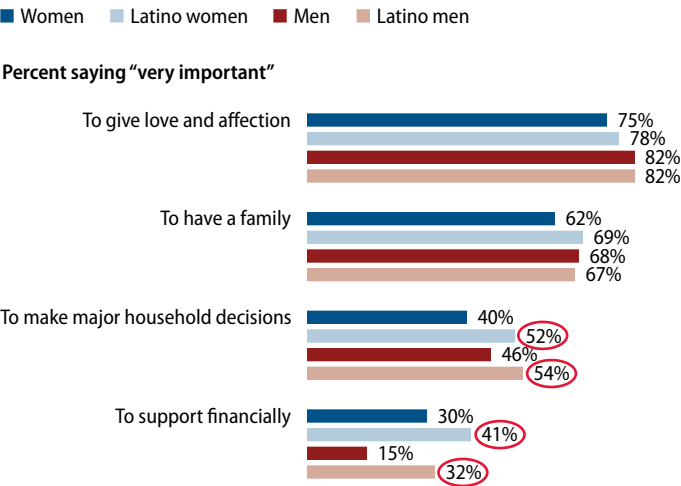
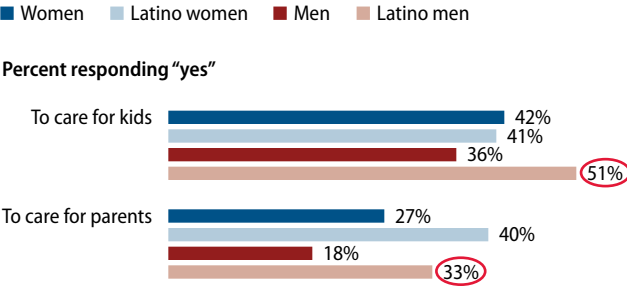


FIGURE 6
Latino men have more trouble getting time off from work

Q: Has there ever been a time when you wanted to take time off from work to care for (your child/your elderly parent), but you were unable to do so?



Latino men and women report much higher rates of having difficulty taking time off to care for an elderly parent compared to the population at large.

Latinos hold more progressive attitudes than the population at large in terms of the role of women in politics

Larger percentages of Latino men and women, compared to men and women overall, agree that the contemporary women’s movement considers the needs of men and families in addition to those of women. Three quarters of Latino men agree with this notion compared to less than 6 in 10 men overall.

More Latino men and women also agree—by roughly a 10-point margin when compared to the overall population—that there would be fewer problems in the world if women had a more equal position in government and business (Figure 7).

Latinos are among the strongest proponents of new policies to improve work-life balance

Latinos express some of the highest levels of support for changes to governmental and business policies to better equip people to handle the burdens of modern life—from increased workplace flexibility to paid family and medical leave to increased child care support (Figure 8).

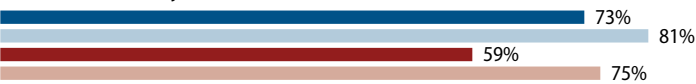
FIGURE 7
Latinos express progressive attitudes about women and politics

Q: For each statement, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree.

■ Women ■ Latino women ■ Men ■ Latino men

Total percent agree

Today’s women’s movement is a movement that considers the needs of men and families too, not just women.



There would be fewer problems in the world if women had a more equal position in government and business.

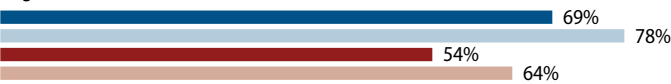


FIGURE 8
Latino men and women strongly support policy changes to improve work-life balance

Latino women ■ Strongly agree ■ Total agree Latino men ■ Strongly agree ■ Total agree

Government/businesses should provide their employees with more child care benefits.



Businesses should be required to provide paid family and medical leave for every worker that needs it.



Businesses that fail to adapt to the needs of modern families risk losing good workers.



Employers should be required to give workers more flexibility in their work schedules.



Conclusion

More extensive research would be needed to fully understand the range of opinions among Latino subgroups, but we can say with some confidence that Latinos express consensus and common perspectives—among themselves and in relation to the overall population—about the expanded role of women in society and the economy. Both Latino men and women welcome the increased participation of women in business and public life, particularly among parents thinking about the future careers of their own daughters. And they understand the need for greater cooperation and stronger public policies to help negotiate the difficulties of modern family life.

Endnotes

- 1 The sample includes a total of 383 Latino interviews with an overall margin of error of +/- 6 points.