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BY JASON VILLALBA | AUG 17, 2021

Texas must wake up to the fact that Hispanics will soon become the majority

U.S. Census figures show the Hispanic and white populations are about the same size.



Growing up in the suburbs of Dallas in the 1980s, I had so many places to explore with my pals in our provincial, middle-class neighborhood. There was Kirby Creek, where we could fish for crawdads until the sun set over Warrior Trail. There was an old wooded thicket where the remains of "Posey's" house still stood – many said it was haunted, but upon closer inspection, my sister and I learned it was just a settler's house from the late 1800s.

And there was a grand and mysterious temple that stood in the fancy part of our neighborhood at the far end. The immaculately landscaped building had a beautiful pool, an elegant vestibule entrance and, most importantly, a PGA-designed golf course that spanned the breadth of our entire neighborhood.

Of course, I never actually got to play golf on that splendidly appointed course, as my family could not afford to be members of the Wood Crest Country Club. But on a full-moon night, when no one else was paying attention, some friends of mine and I not only did a little putting on those manicured greens, but we might have even hopped the big fences and taken a late-evening skinny dip in the pool.

As my friends and I rode our bikes around the neighborhood surrounding the golf course, we couldn't help but notice the snappily dressed locals playing golf. Always playing in perfect form and almost always white. I never forgot those moments because it was so clear to me how different we were from the folks on the course.

When I was much older, as one of only four Hispanic Republican members of the Texas Legislature,

I thought it might be informative to visit different regions of Texas so that I might better understand the Hispanic experience for Texans around the state.

I will never forget my first foray into the Rio Grande Valley, which has the highest concentration of Hispanics in Texas. I was to give a talk at the local country club that evening, and I was driven to the main dining room in a black SUV. As I approached the clubhouse, I passed the 18th green of the golf course. On that immaculately manicured green was an extremely well-dressed Hispanic family of four enjoying a round of golf.

It was a beautiful sight, and something I had never before witnessed, certainly not at our local country club back in North Texas.

As a boy, I never expected there would come a day when I would see Hispanics playing golf on a beautiful country club course, and that it would not be all that uncommon. Yet, there I was, witnessing it with my own eyes.

I was reminded of that moment earlier this week when new U.S. Census data were released. What the data revealed was remarkable. Texas is now 39.7% white and 39.3% Hispanic. Had the former president not discouraged counting undocumented residents, Hispanics would have likely registered as the top ethnic group in Texas. Even accepting a possible undercount, Hispanics will comprise over 40% of the population of Texas within the next 36 months and become the majority by the end of the decade.

To be clear, these are not undocumented residents, or "illegals," as the former president and his supporters often characterize them. These are born-in-the-USA American citizens who are or soon will be eligible to vote.

Based solely on these numbers, in just a few short years, these U.S.-citizen, Hispanic Texans could well determine the outcome of nearly every election in Texas. They will control purchasing power at all levels and drive the Texas economy. Hispanics will sit more regularly on our school boards, county commissions and city councils, and they will more frequently occupy our state and federal elected positions. Texas Hispanics are now in the position to shape every political policy in Texas.

Yet, among our state and local leaders in government, business and the media, few are taking the actions necessary to respond to this consistent and exponential growth of Hispanic influence in our communities.

The population of Dallas County is well over 40% Hispanic, yet only a handful of Hispanics sit on the boards of directors or occupy the C-suites of Dallas' largest companies. Likewise, with respect to Dallas' influential Citizens Council and Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Hispanic representation on the boards and as officers doesn't reflect the population of Dallas, and that is both striking and disappointing.

Further, take a few moments this morning to inspect the websites of Dallas' most prestigious law firms, accounting firms and marketing firms to see how many equity partners or top-level directors are Hispanic. There is much discussion about commitment to D&I (diversity and inclusion) within these organizations, but with respect to Hispanic representation at the top levels, the representation is spotty.

I was born in Dallas, raised a family in Dallas, represented Dallas in the Texas Legislature, and even ran for mayor of this great city. Dallas is a vibrant, sophisticated and growing city. But Dallas is also less than egalitarian when it comes to the engagement and elevation of its Hispanic population.

Now that we are confronted with the official census data for the last decade, I am hopeful that today marks a new beginning for Dallas to cultivate and support its growing Hispanic population.

Jason Villalba is chairman of the Texas Hispanic Policy Foundation. He wrote this column for The Dallas Morning News.