



Latina Surge in the U.S. Workforce

**Guest Blog by Rogelio Sáenz, Ph.D.
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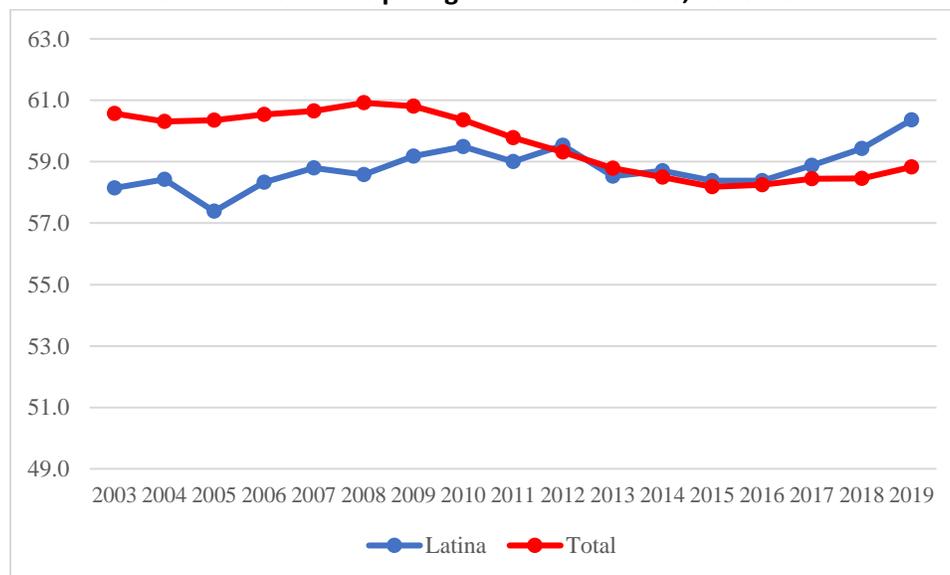
Major newsflash last month: “Latinas Emerge as a Powerful Force in U.S. Job Market.”¹

Using data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Craig Torres, Viviana Hurtado, and Alexander Tanzi showed that Latina women 20 and older have higher labor force participation rates than U.S. women overall. ² This is quite significant given that for long, Latinas consistently have had low rates of activity in the labor force.

Latina labor force trend not new

It actually turns out that this trend has been afoot already for several years. Additional data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics show that Latina women were less likely to be part of the labor force (i.e., they were either employed or not working but actively seeking employment) between 2003 and 2013 (Figure 1). However, from 2014 to 2019, Latina women have been more likely to be part of the labor force than women overall in the country with the gap become pretty apparent only in the last couple of years. By 2019, the average annual percentage of Latina women who were part of the labor force reached 60.4% compared to 58.8% for all women.

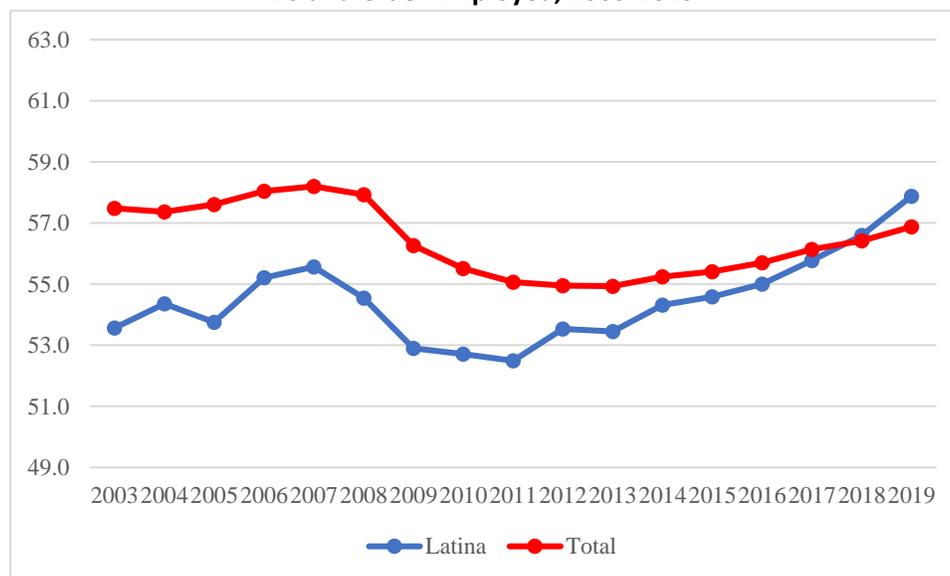
**Figure 1. Average Annual Percentage of U.S. Latina and Total Women
20 and Older Participating in the Labor Force, 2003-2019³**



Latina employment also higher

Furthermore, not only are Latinas more likely to be part of the labor force than is the case with all women in the country, but Latinas recently are also more likely to be employed. In 2003, U.S. women 20 and older had an advantage of nearly 4% points in the percentage that were working compared to Latinas (Figure 2). That is no longer the case since 2018. By 2019, 57.9% of Latinas 20 and older were employed compared to 56.9% of all women.

Figure 2. Average Annual Percentage of U.S. Latina and Total Women 20 and Older Employed, 2003-2019³



These are tremendous shifts that clearly demonstrate the increasing importance of Latinas in the U.S. workforce. Craig Torres and his colleagues, the authors of the “Latinas Emerge as a Powerful Force in U.S. Labor Market” article, point to particular Latinas who exemplify the rising activities of Latinas in varying sectors of the economy. How much actually have Latinas changed over the last several decades in key factors associated with work?

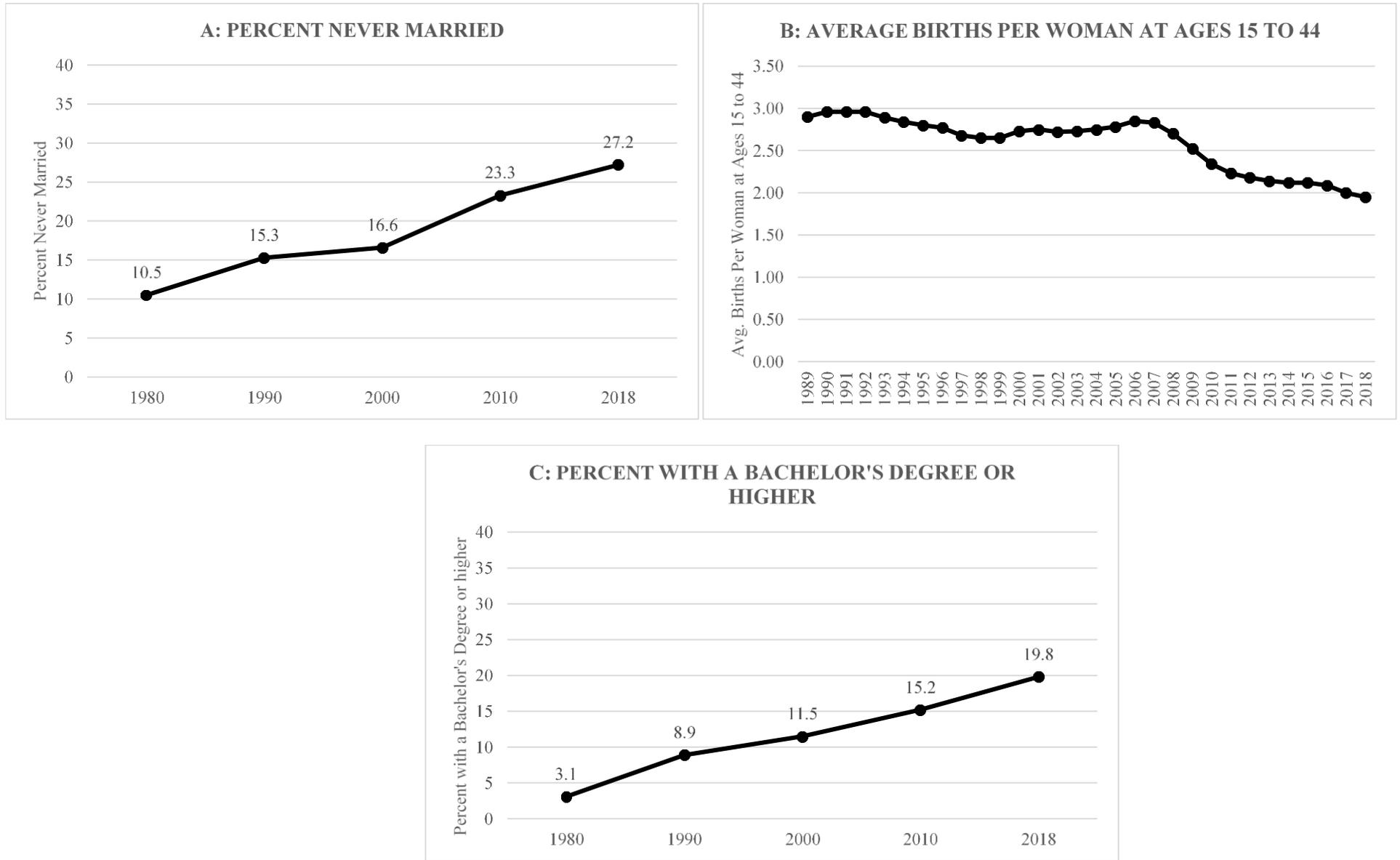
The Changing Latina

Latinas today differ significantly from their mothers and their grandmothers in many respects related to marriage, family, and education. Traditionally, women with lower levels of education who are married with a relatively large number of children tend to be the least likely to take part in the formal workforce. In the case of Latinas, this was the case several decades ago. It is less the case today. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau and from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention allow us to examine the percentage of Latinas who have never married, the Latina total fertility rate (or the average number of births),⁴ and the percentage of Latinas who have a bachelor’s degree or higher. In the case of marriage and education, we focus on women in the experienced labor force (25 to 64 years of age), while the basis of the analysis of births concerns women of childbearing ages (15 to 44 years of age).

Figure 3 illustrates trends related to marriage, births, and education among Latinos from 1980 to 2018. While the majority of Latinas continue to marry, there is a rising trend for foregoing marriage (Figure 3, Panel A). Only about 11% of Latinas 25 to 64 years of age were not married in 1980 with the percentage rising to 17% in 2000 and to 27% in 2018.

Latinas have historically had higher fertility rates compared to other women in the U.S. Latina fertility peaked between 1990 and 1992 when they had an average number of births of 2.96 with a second peak at 2.85 in 2006. Since 2006, Latina fertility has declined every year to a low of 1.95 in 2018, a drop of 32% since 2006 (Figure 3, Panel B). Latina women's fertility has fallen below the replacement level (2.1 births per woman) since 2016.

Figure 3. Marriage, Births, and Educational Attainment Trends among U.S. Latinas 25 to 64 Years of Age by Year⁵



Latina women are also more likely to be college graduates today than in the past. The percentage of women 25 to 64 with a bachelor's degree or higher has risen from 3% in 1980, increasing to about 12% in 2000 and to approximately 20% in 2018 (Figure 3, Panel C).

Conclusion

As Latinas have experienced changes related to marriage, childbirth, and education, they have become more likely to be employed. Latina women are opening doors for themselves and for future generations of Latinas in higher education and the workplace. They are increasingly contributing to the nation's workforce and its economy.

Endnotes

¹ The full article can be accessed at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-12-11/as-fed-runs-economy-hot-latinas-emerge-as-powerful-labor-force>.

² As used here, the labor force participation rate refers to the percentage of women 20 and older who are in the labor force, i.e., they are either employed or not working but actively seeking employment.

³ The data used in Figures 1 and 2 can be accessed at: <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsatabs.htm>.

⁴ The total fertility rate (TFR) is the average number of births that women in a given year would have if they went through their childbearing years (15 to 44) subject to the existing age-specific fertility rates.

⁵ The data used in the panels of Figure 3 are obtained from: Panels A and C (<https://usa.ipums.org/usa/index.shtm>); and Panel B (<https://wonder.cdc.gov/Natality.html> and https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr52/nvsr52_10.pdf).

*Rogelio Sáenz is professor in the Department of Demography at the University of Texas at San Antonio. He is co-author of the book titled *Latinos in the United States: Diversity and Change*. Sáenz is a regular contributor of op-ed essays to newspapers throughout the country. He can be reached at rogelio.saenz@utsa.edu and on Twitter at [@RogelioSaenz42](https://twitter.com/RogelioSaenz42).*