

# Latino Job Loss in the Last Few Months of the Covid-19 Pandemic

NALCAB Guest Blog by Rogelio Sáenz, Ph.D. | May 27, 2020

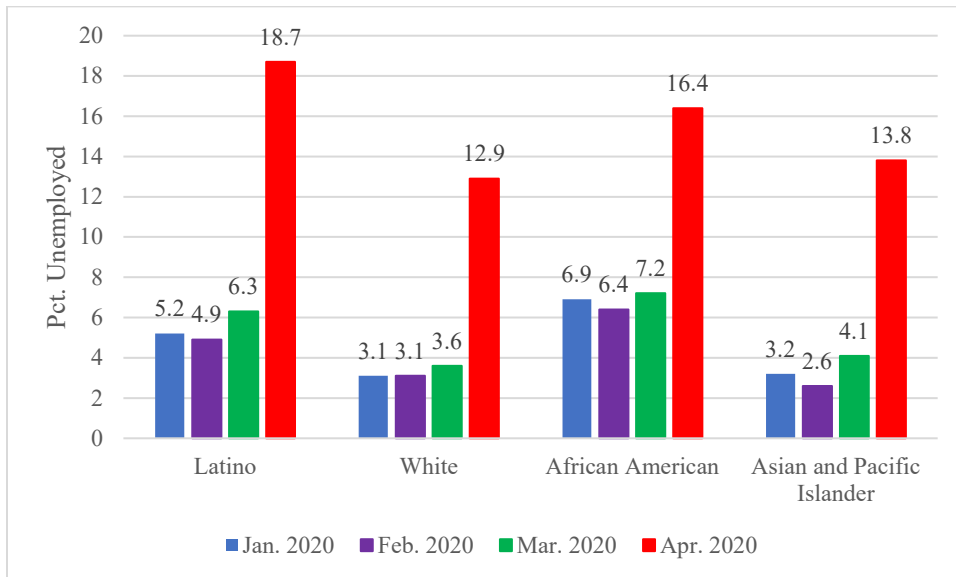
The past several months, I have highlighted the many ways in which Latinos have steered the U.S. economy over the last couple of decades. Even with a significant decline of Mexican immigrants over the last decade,<sup>1</sup> Latinos have been disproportionately responsible for the growth of new businesses,<sup>2</sup> job growth,<sup>3</sup> home purchases,<sup>4</sup> and enrollments in higher education.<sup>5</sup> It is clear that, with an aging white population alongside relatively slow population growth, the nation would have been fairly stagnant without its youthful and increasingly prosperous Latino population. Many in our community are expressing worry about the threat of the COVID-19 virus on the advancements that Latinos have made during the last few decades, especially in the last ten years.

The newly released data from the April 2020 Current Population Survey (CPS) demonstrates yet another way in which the pandemic has hurt many Latinos and their families. Below I provide an overview of the employment trends over the first four months of the year.<sup>6</sup>

## Soaring Unemployment, but Especially High among Latinos

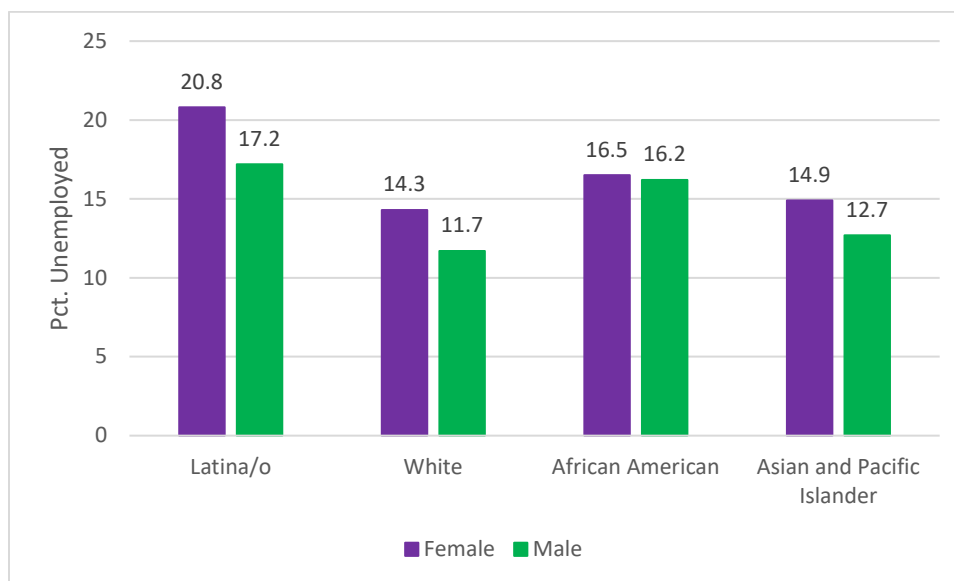
While March unemployment rates rose over those of the previous months with the arrival of the COVID-19 virus, they skyrocketed in April. All racial and ethnic groups experienced climbing jobless rates at this time (Figure 1), but the ascent was strongest among Latinos. The Latino unemployment rate stood at the highest level at approximately 19%, a rise of 12.4 percentage points since March.

Figure 1. Monthly Unemployment Rates by Race/Ethnic Group, 2020<sup>6</sup>



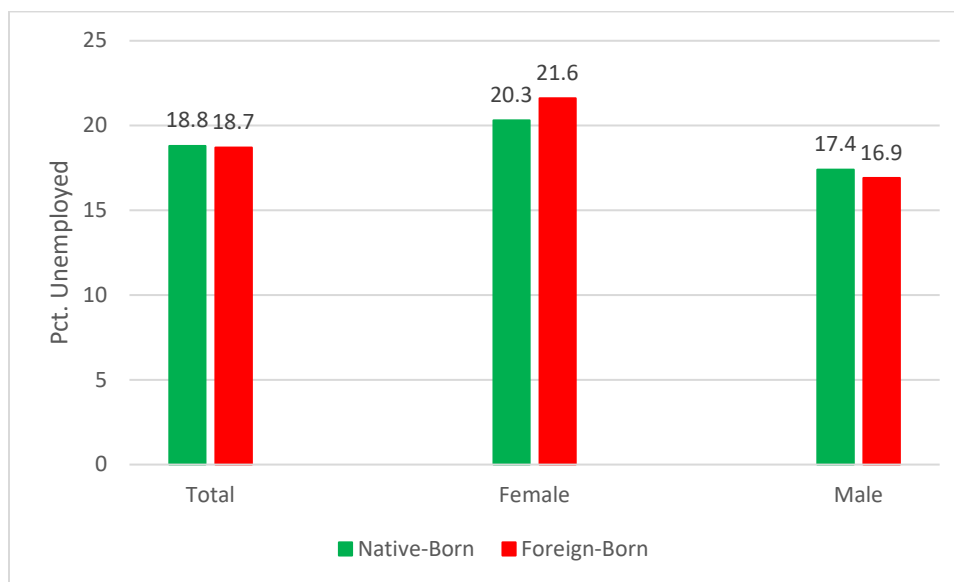
The high jobless levels of Latinos cut across gender. Indeed, Latinos and Latinas have the highest unemployment rates in comparison to their counterparts from the other three racial groups (Figure 2). However, the unemployment rate is particularly high among Latinas with slightly more than one in five being out of work.

**Figure 2. Unemployment Rate in April 2020 by Race/Ethnic Group and Gender<sup>6</sup>**



Unemployment rates are fairly similar across native-born and foreign-born Latinos as a whole (Figure 3). Still, immigrant women fare slightly worse than U.S.-born Latinas while immigrant men are a bit better off than their native-born Latinos. Nearly 22% of Latina immigrants were without a job last month.

**Figure 3. Unemployment Rate in April 2020 among Latinos by Gender and Nativity<sup>6</sup>**

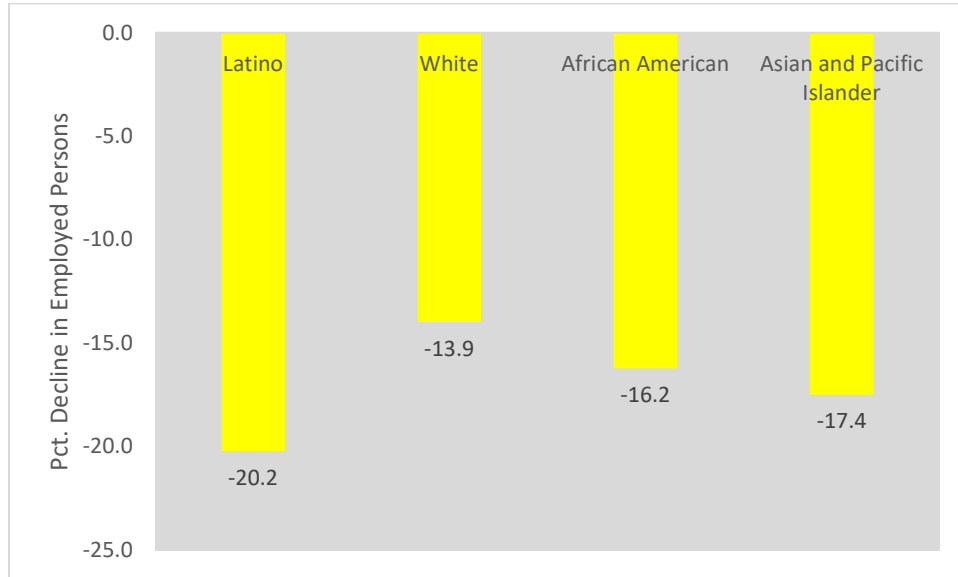


### Plunging Numbers of Workers, Especially among Latinos

The rising unemployment rates reflect the major drop in the volume of employed individuals over the last month. While all groups have experienced tremendous declines in their workforce, the descent is particularly sharp among Latinos whose workforce fell by one-fifth between February and April (Figure

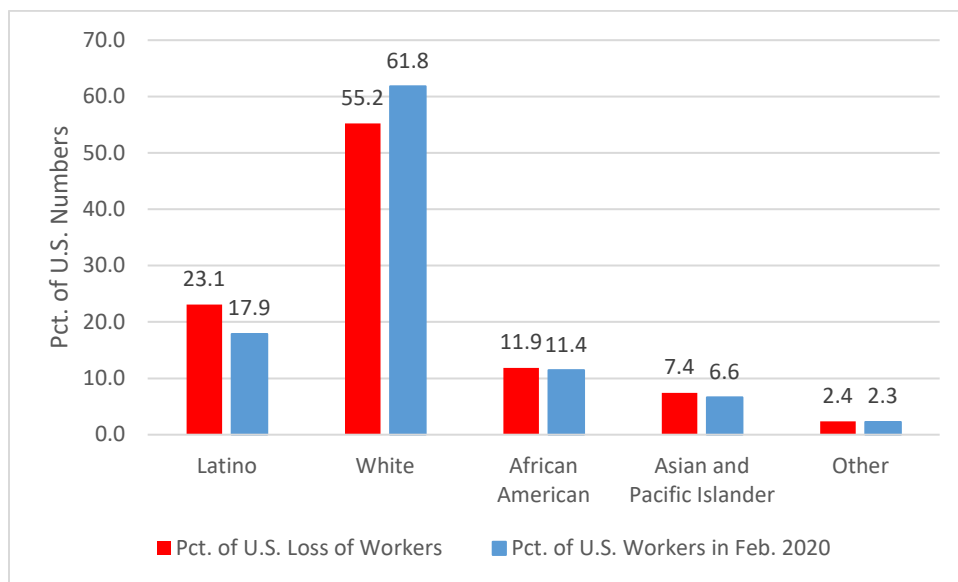
4). There were 5.7 million fewer Latino workers in April than there were in February. On the other hand, whites experienced the lowest level of decline (-13.9%).

**Figure 4. Percentage Decline in Number of Workers Between February 2020 and April 2020 by Race/Ethnic Group<sup>6</sup>**



Overall, the country sustained a loss of 24.7 million workers between February and April. Latinos account for 23% of this overall loss of workers, a percentage share that tops the 18% of the U.S. workers who were Latino in February 2020 (Figure 5). In contrast, whites are disproportionately underrepresented among the decline of the workforce while the other groups are only slightly overrepresented.

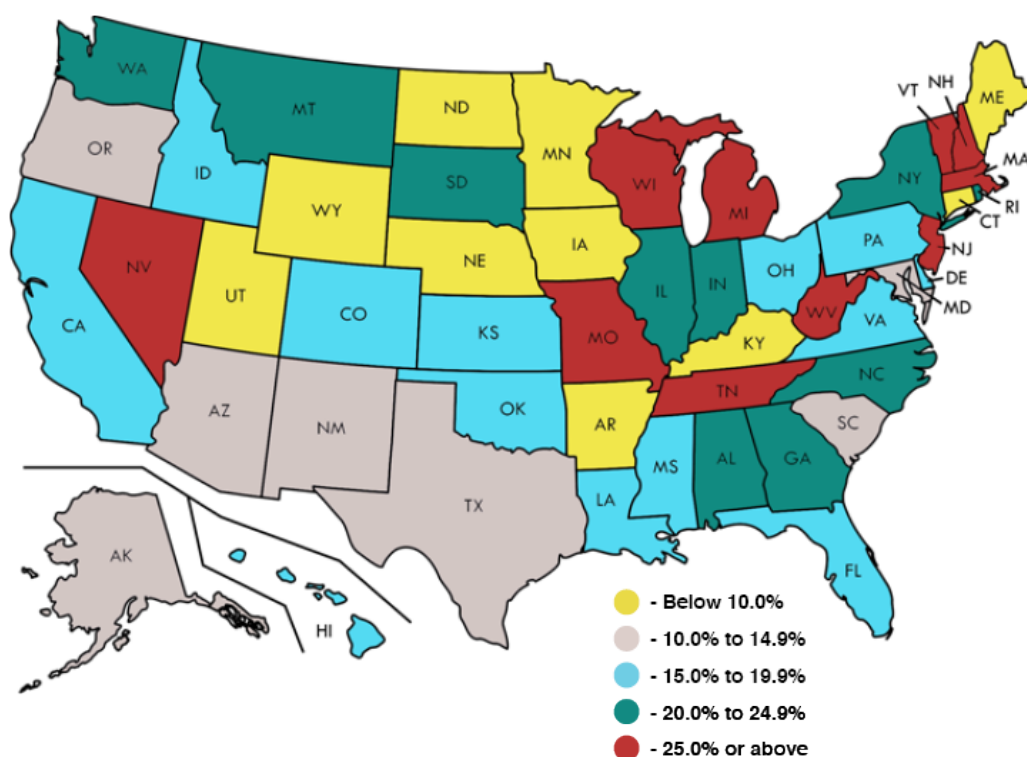
**Figure 5. Percentage Distribution of the U.S. Reduction of Workers Between February 2020 and April 2020 by Race/Ethnic Group<sup>6</sup>**



## The View of Latino Unemployment from the States

The Latino unemployment rates in April 2020 vary greatly across the states and the District of Columbia. Ten states have Latino unemployment rates that are below 10%, including North Dakota (3.3%), Nebraska (3.4%), Iowa (4.7%), Maine (4.7%), and Wyoming (5.2%) with rates below 6%. This group of states includes areas with a heavy presence of Latinos in meatpacking operations, an industry that has been a hotspot of Covid-19 infections and deaths.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, ten other states have Latino jobless rates of 25% or higher. Nevada, with its large dependence on the gaming and tourism industries, is at the top with nearly 41% of its Latino labor force without a job in April 2020. The other states with the more than one-fourth of their labor force who are jobless are Tennessee (39.1%), West Virginia (33.3%), Massachusetts (32.8%), New Hampshire (32.1%), New Jersey (32.0%), Vermont (31.1%), Wisconsin (26.3%), Missouri (25.8%), and Michigan (25.1%).

**Figure 6. Five Categories of States on the Basis of the Latino Unemployment Rate in April 2020<sup>6</sup>**



Across the nation many Latinos are losing their jobs, a major reversal from the upticks on Latino fortunes taking place over the last couple of decades.

## The Challenges

It is certainly clear that the pandemic has been particularly devastating to Latinos. As seen here, many Latinos have lost their jobs or are, at best, temporarily laid off with great uncertainty about their future.

While the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act stimulus one-time check in the maximum amount of \$1,200 that many people received along with expanded unemployment benefits have provided welcome relieve, many people—some 20 million to be exact—are still waiting for their checks with the window to receive the check closing fast<sup>8</sup> and others, not only unauthorized workers but also, with a cruel twist of fate, their U.S.-citizen spouses barred from receiving the stimulus check.<sup>9</sup>

To make matters worse, many newly unemployed stand to lose their health insurance coverage, as the greatest portion of workers have coverage through their employer or that of their spouse.<sup>10</sup> Particularly difficult will be the situation of people losing their jobs living in one of the 15 states that have not adopted the expansion of Medicaid (including Nebraska which adopted it, but has not implemented it),<sup>11</sup> thus blocking many of the recently unemployed from gaining insurance benefits through Obamacare. Texas is one of the states that has not expanded Medicaid. The Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that about one-fourth of Texans who have lost their jobs and health insurance, approximately 410,000, will not be able to qualify for Obamacare.<sup>12</sup>

## The Future

Over the last several decades, Latinos have represented the engine propelling the U.S. economy. Despite being hurt significantly in the Great Recession of the 2008, Latinos recuperated relatively well to be the major drivers of the economy over the last dozen years. Yet, the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to have a longer lasting impact than the economic downturn associated with the Great Recession of the previous decade. While people throughout the country suffer from the massive assault of the pandemic, Latinos are disproportionately impacted, facing high levels of job loss over the last couple of months. We need to make sure that we direct resources to help individuals in our community, regardless of citizenship status, survive this major threat. As is true in the recent past, the U.S. recovery from major devastations—the Great Recession alongside numerous natural catastrophes—has depended very heavily on Latinos. The same will ultimately be true with this one.

*Rogelio Sáenz is professor in the Department of Demography at the University of Texas at San Antonio. He is co-author of the book “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](mailto:rogelio.saenz@utsa.edu) and on Twitter at @RogelioSaenz42.*

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Rogelio Sáenz, “Far fewer Mexicans are coming to the US—and those who do are more educated,” *The Conversation* (Sept. 29, 2019), <https://theconversation.com/far-fewer-mexican-immigrants-are-coming-to-the-us-and-those-who-do-are-more-educated-122524>

<sup>2</sup> Rogelio Sáenz, “Latino entrepreneurship growth,” *NALCAB Newsroom* (Dec. 6, 2019), <https://nalcab.org/latino-entrepreneurship-growth/>.

<sup>3</sup> Rogelio Sáenz, “Latina surge in the U.S. workforce,” *NALCAB Newsroom* (Jan. 3, 2020), <https://nalcab.org/latina-surge-in-the-u-s-workforce/>.

<sup>4</sup> Rogelio Sáenz, “Latinos leading the way in homeownership growth,” *NALCAB Newsroom* (Feb. 6, 2020), <https://nalcab.org/latinos-leading-the-way-in-homeownership-growth/>.

- <sup>5</sup> Rogelio Sáenz, “Rising number of Latino college students in the midst of major U.S. enrollment declines,” *NALCAB Newsroom* (March 12, 2020), <https://nalcab.org/rising-number-of-latino-college-students-in-midst-of-major-u-s-enrollment-declines/>.
- <sup>6</sup> Sarah Flood, Miriam King, Renae Rodgers, Steven Ruggles and J. Robert Warren, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 7.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020. <https://cps.ipums.org/cps/>.
- <sup>7</sup> Oliver Laugland and Amanda Holpuch, “‘We’re modern slaves’: How meat plant workers became the new frontline in Covid-19 war,” *The Guardian* (April 20, 2020), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/02/meat-plant-workers-us-coronavirus-war>.
- <sup>8</sup> Dominique Mosbergen, “Millions of Americans still haven’t received their stimulus check,” *HuffPost* (May 12, 2020), [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/irs-stimulus-checks-get-my-payment\\_n\\_5eba49e7c5b68f80c04c6eaf?ncid=engmodushpmg00000006](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/irs-stimulus-checks-get-my-payment_n_5eba49e7c5b68f80c04c6eaf?ncid=engmodushpmg00000006).
- <sup>9</sup> Jennie Jarvie, “These U.S. citizens won’t get coronavirus stimulus checks—because their spouses are immigrants,” *Los Angeles Times* (April 20, 2020), <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-04-20/u-s-citizens-coronavirus-stimulus-checks-spouses-immigrants>.
- <sup>10</sup> Anuj Gangopadhyaya and Bowen Garrett, *Unemployment, Health Insurance, and the COVID-19 Recession*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute, April 2020. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/101946/unemployment-health-insurance-and-the-covid-19-recession.pdf>.
- <sup>11</sup> Robin Rudowitz and Elizabeth Hilton, *Early Look at Medicaid Spending and Enrollment Trends Amid COVID-19*. San Francisco: Kaiser Family Foundation, May 15, 2020. <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/early-look-at-medicaid-spending-and-enrollment-trends-amid-covid-19/#>.
- <sup>12</sup> Gwendolyn Wu, “Texas’ uninsured rise with job losses,” *San Antonio Express-News* (May 20, 2020). <https://digital.olivesoftware.com/olive/ODN/SanAntonioExpressNews/shared/ShowArticle.aspx?doc=SAEN%2F2020%2F05%2F20&entity=Ar01901&sk=D0862C8D&mode=text&fbclid=IwAR0-hgYZYqZgwpUOsY5wkBjyptPczGjvcuval6tc3n2-XBTQWjSXnCwsq8>.