

Hispanics believed to be largest group in Texas now

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A new estimate by the U.S. Census Bureau asserts Hispanics make up a larger segment of the Texas population than any other group—a demographic reality particularly significant to Texas Baptists.

[The Texas Tribune](#) reported new population figures, based on the American Community Survey, revealing Hispanics made up 40.2 percent of the Texas population in 2021, while Anglos made up 39.4 percent.

Abe Jaquez, president of Baptist University of the Americas, compares the exponential growth of Hispanics to a tsunami.

“Tsunamis literally transform the landscape that they affect. With the winds of a continued population shift, organizations will need to consider how they will address the coming tsunami that is the growing Hispanic/Latino population,” Jaquez said.

One Texas Baptist church in five is Hispanic

Those organizations include Baptist churches, as well as the educational institutions they support. Currently, of the 5,302 churches affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas, 1,066—20 percent—are Hispanic-majority congregations.



Abe Jaquez

Membership figures are more difficult to obtain, since not all churches complete the Annual Church Profile. However, the total membership of Hispanic Texas Baptist churches is estimated at about 135,000—7 percent of the 1.9 million in all BGCT-affiliated churches.

Historically, BUA and its predecessor institutions have trained 7 out of 10 pastors who served Hispanic Texas Baptist congregations.

“BUA is not the only solution, but it is a big part of the equation in responding to the tsunami that already has arrived,” Jaquez said.

One piece of the puzzle is representation. Currently, 14 Hispanic individuals serve on the BGCT Executive Board, and 16 percent of the staff employed by the BGCT is Hispanic. The newly elected Executive Board chair for 2023 is Bobby Contreras from Alamo Heights Baptist Church in San Antonio, and Julio Guarneri from Calvary Baptist Church in McAllen is first vice president of the BGCT.

The BGCT reports more than 200 Hispanic churches have affiliated with Texas Baptists in the past 10 years. Since 2011, Texas Baptists have helped start 185 Hispanic churches and 237 multi-cultural congregations.

Need to reach multiple generations



Josue Valerio

Josue Valerio, director of Texas Baptists' Center for Missional Engagement, noted the census estimates indicate "Texas may have passed a long-awaited milestone."

"These new estimates are the first to reflect the foreseeable culmination of decades of demographic shifts steadily transforming the state," Valerio said.

Texas Baptists' Center for Missional Engagement seeks to develop programs, initiatives and ministries to help churches reach newly arrived Spanish-speaking immigrants, as well as first-, second- and third-generation Hispanics, Valerio said.

That reflects a change in approach from earlier decades, since Baptists in Texas historically focused on starting churches to reach first-generation Spanish-speaking Hispanics, said Jesse Rincones, executive director of the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas.



Jesse Rincones

“These churches were never taught, trained or exhorted to minister to, retain and incorporate the second- and third-generation English-speaking Hispanics,” Rincones said.

“I’ve seen this scenario play out in rural communities and evolving urban areas. The predominantly Anglo First Baptist Church has the language, staff and other resources to minister to second generations. However, they haven’t historically made intentional efforts to reach them and continue to have a cultural disconnect with the group.

“The Hispanic congregation on the other side of town—almost always literally—has the cultural connection but has not developed ministries in English that minister to and retain the English-speaking children and grandchildren. They also don’t often incorporate the next generation into service or leadership positions.”

When that happens, English-speaking Hispanics who are assimilated into what has been the dominant culture in Texas “fall through the cracks of Baptist outreach,” he observed.

Effective strategies and approaches

Victor Rodriguez, Texas Baptists’ Hispanic evangelism director and discipleship specialist, said the BGCT is seeking to make an impact through Hispanic churches by emphasizing local, strategic evangelism and

discipleship training.

“Since many of these Hispanic churches are surrounded by different communities, this yearlong training approach comes with a demographic study, selecting the best outreach effort, developing an evangelism community event and monthly coaching,” Rodriguez said.

From the Convención perspective, Rincones points to strategies he considers effective in reaching Texas Hispanics with the gospel.

“One strategy that seems to be effective is the shift from having Hispanic churches isolated as mission churches to becoming holistically integrated ministries of the English-speaking church,” he said. “These ‘en Español’ models put the Spanish pastor on par with the rest of the church staff. The Spanish ministry is in the general budget and shares all the support systems in the church.

“The first-generation Spanish speakers have a ministry 100 percent in their language, while their children and grandchildren can be ministered to by the existing nursery, children’s and youth ministries of the congregation.

“A similar effective strategy is for Hispanic congregations to offer both Spanish and English services and ministries. These are less common but can be equally effective.”

New approaches for the BGCT “Texas Baptists en Español” initiative include regional training centers, developing a personal growth plan for pastors and helping the 200-plus Hispanic churches that are without pastors to move through the search process.

Church health vitally important

Rincones believes church health among Hispanic congregations is crucial for Baptists in Texas to respond to demographic changes.

“I’ve always told our Hispanic congregations that I don’t get that excited about Hispanics becoming the majority in Texas. Sure, we bring our culture, food and many strengths. And we also bring our challenges. That requires, more than ever, for Hispanic congregations to be healthy and vibrant,” he said.

“Whether you are collecting taxes or tithes in Texas, we need the Hispanic majority in Texas to know Jesus and to be educated. Baptists in Texas are capable of meeting that challenge.”

Texas Baptists launched a Hispanic Education Initiative about a dozen years ago to reduce the Hispanic high school dropout rate and make higher education more accessible to Hispanic students.

Next year, Texas Baptists are planning a church revitalization training event in Spanish that not only will involve Spanish-speaking pastors from across Texas, but also pastors of churches in Latin American countries where the BGCT works. Its stated purpose is “to train pastors in principles and strategies of church health, so that they may return to their communities, implement those concepts and train other local pastors in their local context.”

Shape the future of Texas

Valerio believes Texas Baptists should view demographic change as a prime opportunity to influence the state’s future.

“We, as Texas Baptists, have a unique opportunity to shape what the future of Texas and the U.S. will look like,” Valerio said. “We need to continue to practice the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. We need to continue to do a better job in the development of missional leaders who will multiply and start new churches and new ministries.

“We are currently working with college students, their parents and other workers who are Hispanic immigrants and are serving God in missions and church planting in every major city in Texas.

“Immigrants that we are reaching today will come to know Christ, and their children will attend our universities and respond to the Great Commission by going to serve in missions in our state, the U.S. and the world.”