Chapter 24
The Politics of Aging in a Majority-Minority Nation

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Introduction

As Chap. 1 shows, the United States is aging and becoming more diverse, and these demographic trends are increasingly ensconced in mainstream discussion about the needs of older persons and how to respond to elders, their families and their caregivers. In particular, the emerging Latino population and the increased life expectancy of Hispanics (i.e., Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Central Americans) in the United States is of paramount importance, because these groups will collectively become the nation's largest minority group. The Aging in the Americas conference and the research agenda have made important contributions to understanding the physical health, mental health, long-term care and social conditions facing older Latinos in the U.S., Mexico and Latin America and provided directions for expanded research agendas in these important scholarly areas. Yet, as we examine the issues further, posing questions and offering programmatic and policy responses to these areas, we find that the mainstream debates increasingly have an overtly political overlay that may influence how the United States, and potentially Mexico, respond to the aging and growing diversity of their respective populations. Specifically, the "politics of aging of a majority-minority nation" may determine the political agenda and the public policy response to this demographic transformation and perhaps shape the narrative of how the public views these issues prior to its understanding of the facts, data and analyses that are currently underway by the impressive group of scholars in this volume.

This paper will explore the nuances and complexities of politics, aging, ethnicity and public policy within the prism of one subset of aging and diversity: Latino baby boomers. We ask: What are the questions and concerns that intertwine with aging, Latinization and politics? What does it mean that older persons are an influential segment of the electorate, and how do current controversies over entitlement

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reforms and budgetary politics influence the future aging of the Latino population? And what might a deeper examination of Latino baby boomers reveal vis-á-vis the politics of aging in a majority-minority nation? This chapter explores these issues and suggests directions for future policy research and legislative ideas for a more proactive response to the reality of a nation that is becoming majority-minority as it grows older. First, however, we briefly review the demographic trends discussed in the first section of this volume.

Demographic Overview

As Murdock describes in ample detail, two major demographic changes in the United States are anticipated to have a profound impact on the social, economic and political landscape in the next 40 years, as the nation becomes older and more diverse. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that the population of people aged 65 and older will more than double between 2010 and 2050, from 40.2 to 88.5 million (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). This significant numerical increase is due in large part to the aging of the baby boomers, a large cohort born between 1946 and 1964. The data presented in the Murdock chapter shows that the boomers will have their maximum impact—culturally, economically, politically—between 2012 and 2035. The end point in 2060 creates another milestone question: who replaces elderly boomers? What trends lead us to a new politics of aging?

Several trends are operating simultaneously: the aging of the baby boomer cohort, the increasing share of the elderly population, and increased life expectancy. While these trends are well known, together they create a complex demographic mosaic of a nation experiencing the full effects of longevity and a population where older persons will dominate.

Yet, there is another demographic change that will add a new variable, further complicating this profile: diversity and the increase in minority, ethnic and immigrant populations. Between 2012 and 2060, we can expect minority populations such as blacks, Asians and Latinos to account for a larger proportion of the U.S. population in general and to be represented as an increased share of the U.S. older population. Again, this is not a surprise; demographers and the mainstream media are increasingly aware that the United States is both older and more diverse. A new phenomenon is the juxtaposition of these two key trends—aging and diversity—and what it signifies in terms of the next 20–40 years of a nation undergoing a demographic transformation.

If this was not enough of a challenge, one more key variable will come into play, a trend that has not fully inserted itself into the national debates about how best to respond to a nation of more older persons and more ethnic/immigrant groups: replacement rates and changing fertility patterns. How might the basic question, "Who is having the babies?" illuminate the "politics of aging in a majority-minority nation," and what might this say about demographics of aging in the Americas?

The total fertility rate (TFR) refers to the average number of children born to a woman who is in her childbearing years (OECD Family Database 2011). Assuming there are no migration flows and that mortality rates remain unchanged, a TFR of 2.1 children per woman insures that a population remains stable: the number of deaths equals the number of births. This can also be called a replacement fertility rate (RFR), and this chapter will refer to both terms. Throughout modern history, and in nations that are more agrarian and developing toward first-world nationhood, replacement rates have remained above 2.1. Thus, many nations, and the world in general, have witnessed increased populations. That all began to change in the latter part of the twentieth century. With increased global aging and increased economic prosperity for many nations, women have chosen to have fewer children. In key parts of the world, such as Europe (1.6) and East Asia (1.5), the TFR is less than 2.1. North and Central America (2.2) and South America (2.2.) are closer to that magic mark (New York Times Magazine 2008; National Geographic 2011). Low TFR appears to be a global trend, although certain regions, such as Africa (4.7) and Western Asia (3.1) continue to have high fertility rates. The United States and Mexico, however, are not in that first category.

In 2010, for the first time, the Hispanic replacement rate (2.4) exceeded that of whites, blacks and Asians and remained above the requisite 2.1. Moreover, the answer to "who is having the babies" can be visually answered in many K-12 public school playgrounds throughout the Southwest, Great Lakes, East Coast and Florida, where Latino kids comprise the majority of public school children. Even in formerly black neighborhoods, like Watts and South Central Los Angeles, the majority of children are Hispanic. In a recent conversation (at a Milken Global Institute event in 2014) with this co-author, Ron Brownstein made a prescient commentary: that the high school graduating class of 2014 will be the last such group to be majority white! Of course, acculturation of Hispanic immigrants may change and represent a lower TFR, and evidence abounds that Latina women, with education and professional opportunities, will choose to have fewer than 2.1 children (New York Times 2013). But for the present and into the next two decades, Latinos/Hispanics and immigrants will account for the net population growth in the United States. Even Mexico, a nation long considered youthful, is undergoing similar trends albeit a generation or two behind the U.S. For example, life expectancy at birth for Mexicans increased from 36 to 74 years between 1950 and 2000. In the same period, its fertility level decreased from 7.0 in 1960 to 2.4 in 2000. And it continues to decline. Mexico will soon face a dramatic increase in its older adult population while its youthful population decreases. In fact, by 2013 it was reported that Mexico's fertility rate had reached 2.1. What might this ultimately mean?

It demonstrates that the nation is becoming not just older but also more diverse. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that the Hispanic population is set to more than double from 53.5 million in 2012 to 128.8 million in 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau 2012). This means that, in 2012, one in six U.S. residents was Hispanic. But by 2060, one in three residents will be Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau 2012). Populations of other ethnic groups, such as African Americans and Asians, are also projected to increase in the United States between 2012 and 2060. The Asian popula-

tion is projected to more than double, from 15.9 to 34.4 million; and the African American population is expected to increase from 41.2 to 61.8 million (U.S Census Bureau 2012).

The U.S., then, is projected to become a majority-minority nation for the first time in 2043, meaning that, while the non-Hispanic white population will remain the largest group, not one ethnic group will be the majority (U.S. Census Bureau 2012). Overall, the minority population is set to more than double from 116.2 million in 2012 to 241.3 million in 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau 2012).

This new demographic reality will engender a mix of uncertainty, surprises and discomfort. For the first time in this country's history, we must respond to three concurrent demographic trends: growing diversity, continued immigration—legal and illegal—and increasing longevity. In some ways, this is not a completely new experience. The United States has a 300-year history of successfully responding to constant waves of immigration and majority-minority changes. Although often fraught with conflicts, divisions and even tragedies (e.g., race riots, incarceration of Japanese Americans, violence against Native Americans and blacks, deportations of Mexicans), the United States has survived these crises and become a stronger and more united political entity, in large part because of its political institutions (democracy), its founding documents (Bill of Rights, U.S. Constitution, Declaration of Independence) and its historic willingness to socialize all newcomers with the common identity of "American." What is unprecedented is that this constant wave of immigration and shifting majority-minority populations is occurring while people in this country (like those in much of the world) are living longer, with an elderly population that is increasing in numbers. This new reality, which is unique to the twenty first century, must now account for a politics of aging: the inordinate influence of older persons in the electorate, while emerging Hispanic and other ethnic populations seek political empowerment. What new realities does this create for an aging nation while it becomes majority-minority?

Politics of Aging

With the twin phenomena of longevity and diversity, we can surmise that the political institutions of the United States and the electorate that is composed of older persons and ethnic groups/immigrants will have an impact on registration, voting, electoral politics, public policy (at the local, state and federal levels), and the ongoing debates about national priorities (e.g., public budgeting) and social policy (e.g., immigration reform). For example, the literature is replete with research and analyses of the political participation and voting behavior of older persons. There is also a growing body of articles and studies about political participation and voting behavior of ethnic groups, particularly the emerging Hispanic population (Logan et al. 2012).

The literature and surveys demonstrate that, on average, as one gets older, he or she is more likely to be registered to vote. In most voting cycles, then, especially

in primary elections and state and local elections, persons over 65 years of age, particularly retirees, are more likely to vote than younger groups and thus have inordinate influence in electoral politics (Campbell and Binstock 2011; Binstock and Day 1996; Day 1990). But do they vote as a block? And how influential might they be in public policy? Our understanding of the politics of aging is heavily influenced by a leading scholar in this area: Robert Binstock. He was a pioneer in asking, "Why do older persons vote more often than younger groups?" Do they constitute a voting block? Is their electoral and political influence disproportionate to their numbers? In his seminal article, "Older People and Voting Participation" (2000), Binstock explores their voting behavior and concludes that, in large part, they have not proven to be a cohesive block and that the inherent differences within the older voter cohort mitigates against age as the predominant variable. On the other hand, Binstock et al. (2012) do suggest the possibility that an age cohort particularly, aging baby boomers, may coalesce around issues of self-interest, especially if this cohort perceives a direct and personal stake in policy and political debates. And herein lies the potential for a politics of aging that coalesces the baby boomer voting cohorts around issues of self-interest and perceived threats to their priorities.

Brownstein suggests a potential generational and ethnic/racial divide in his prescient article, "Brown Versus Gray" (National Journal 2011). In this and other essays (2012), he describes the growing intergenerational and interethnic divide in American politics with an electorate that is increasingly dividing by age, race and ethnicity. For the next 20 years, for example, the over-50 electorate will be primarily white and English-speaking, while the under-50 population segments will become increasingly minority, immigrant, ethnic, and younger. This age-race-ethnicity stratification has led to voting behavior based on different public priorities, with older whites focused on fewer taxes, less government intervention and greater public safety and younger, more ethnically diverse voters focused on enhanced public benefits and investments in jobs, employment and health care. One can see this divide in places like Arizona, with white retirees enjoying the "snowbird" life while relying on Hispanic workers for cooking, house cleaning, car washing and other low-wage services while supporting laws to restrict immigration. This may be an overly dramatic view of the "Brown Versus Gray," but it points out a change in the politics of aging in a majority-minority nation: the growing role of age and ethnicity in voting behavior and in the allocation of public benefits.

There is, however, a public policy issue that may highlight a potential age-based block of voters and also serve as a potential intergenerational and interethnic common agenda: the reliance on entitlement programs for retirement and health security. Social Security and Medicare are the bedrock of subsistence for older persons, particularly Tea Party conservative retirees. They depend heavily on these two programs for a modicum of security in their old age. Minorities, particularly Hispanics, depend on Social Security and Medicaid and expect that Medicare will provide their health security as they experience greater longevity (Brownstein 2012, 2013).

What might this mean for a better understanding of aging in the Americas and the future policy implications of a nation that is becoming older and more diverse? What might be the analytical and research directions for scholars in the politics

of aging and ethnicity? And how might the subgroup of Latino boomers give us insights into these issues?

Several themes emerge that may serve as roadmaps for further exploration on these matters. First, the contemporary policy debates about national budgets, entitlement reform and immigration reform are occurring now and will be pressing political concerns for the foreseeable future. Thus, attention to mitigating any potential divide between the emerging Hispanic population, a younger workforce and the current cohort of older persons and retirees is needed. Promoting intergenerational coalitions benefits a diverse population in an aging society. Reframing the debates and narratives about intergenerational and interethnic tensions becomes imperative. And in this vein, focusing on the "canary in the mine shaft" gives us important clues for future directions in policy analysis and research.

Intergenerational Coalitions

This politics of aging in a majority-minority nation reveals an opportunity instead of potential conflict for intergenerational coalitions (Binstock 2010). Older adults and younger, more diverse populations share the same need for security and thus may come to depend on one another. As the older population increases, the solvency of entitlement programs such as Social Security and Medicare are being questioned. Younger, more diverse populations can keep entitlement programs such as Social Security and Medicare solvent by working and paying into the system. A recent study in *Health Affairs* by Harvard Medical School researchers states that immigrants may be "disproportionately subsidizing the Medicare Trust Fund" and shows how immigrants have contributed a surplus of $ 115.2 billion to the fund between 2002 and 2009 (Zallman et al. 2013). This research illustrates the need for an intergenerational coalition by demonstrating that the younger, more diverse generations that account for the majority of the workforce can give older adults the financial security they may need.

There is evidence of a potential bipartisan agreement on these divisive matters. Three notable conservative Republicans have spoken about the stake that older Americans have in immigration reform. Senators John McCain and Charles Schumer argue that "immigration reform would stimulate economic growth and create jobs" and improve the solvency of Social Security and Medicare (AARP Bulletin 2013). Congressman Paul Ryan, a notable Tea Party leader, also argues that immigration reform can lift the economy (Cook 2013). These conservative supporters of immigration reform lend credence to a potential ideological agreement on the most complex issue of aging in a majority-minority society.

Alexis de Tocqueville (1945) provides another reframing context: "self-interest rightly understood." In his seminal visit to the United States in 1831, he noted how Americans of that era would support government actions and their new nation's federal directives even if they disagreed or felt it was against their personal interests. They had, as he noted, a sense of the common good, and that what was done for all

would eventually benefit an entire society, including those who might not support a particular action. This "self-interest rightly understood" would add resonance to Binstock and Schulz's reframing and allow, perhaps, for such controversial legislation as the Dream Act, as well as comprehensive immigrant reform, given the growth of a diverse workforce and taxpayer base that is replacing the declining number of non-Hispanic whites in the United States.

At the same time, the younger, more diverse population is in need of employment for its own security and well-being. Research by the Latino Economic Security (LES) shows that Latinos will comprise 20% of the workforce by 2030 but are the least likely demographic to have a high school or college degree, which may imply lower wealth and incomes (Gassoumis et al. 2011). Gassoumis et al. (2011) describe how investing in the education of young Latinos will have a positive impact on the older adult population due to the generation of much higher tax revenues. Latinos will need the education and employment to maintain their own security and overall well-being. In addition, research shows that Latinos rely on entitlement programs more than the overall U.S. population (Haliwell et al. 2007). This further illustrates the need for an interdependent relationship among older adults and the growing Latino workforce.

The Need to Reframe

With these findings, there is a need to reframe and show that an intergenerational coalition would be beneficial to the country as a whole, regardless of age, race or ethnicity. Scholars have suggested ways to reframe and adopt a more opportunistic view. Binstock and Schulz (2006) propose a "we're all in this together" approach, in which the frame does not pit old against young but instead highlights the benefits that can be reaped by all generations, regardless of age. In order to do this, Binstock and Schulz suggest constructing a scenario that would show what life would be like without Social Security and Medicare not just for baby boomers but also for their families (Binstock and Schulz 2006). By reframing these old-age issues into "family issues" that will affect the "daily lives of persons of all ages," there would be the potential for intergenerational coalitions that would, in effect, garner more widespread political support (Binstock and Schulz 2006).

Latino Baby Boomers: The Canary in the Mine Shaft

Into the vortex of aging, diversity and a nation that is undergoing demographic transformation lies a group that may serve as both a prism of future changes and as a "canary in the mine shaft" for what to do and not to do, given these trends. The Latino baby boomer population can help assess the future of a nation that is growing older and more diverse. With the growth of the Latino and older populations in America, Latino baby boomers mark the convergence of both groups. This subset shows the nexus of aging and diversity, and for this reason, Latino baby boom-

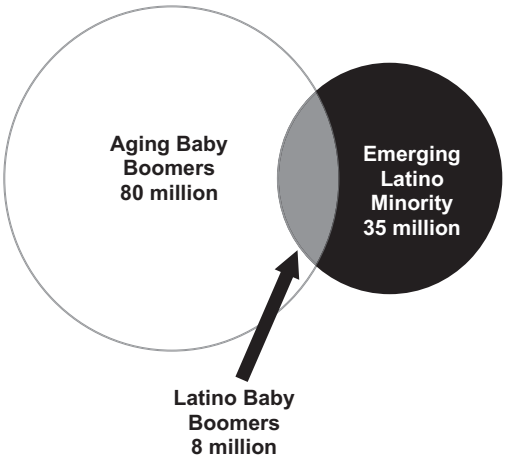

Fig. 24.1 According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the aging baby boomer population is estimated at 76.4 million http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb12-243.html. The data provided by Gassoumis et al. used in this figure incorporated additional immigrants (minus deaths in that cohort) making the aging baby boom population rise to 80 million. (Source: Gassoumis et al. (2008). "Latino Baby Boomers: A Hidden Population.")

ers can be seen as the "canary in the mine shaft." Latino baby boomers show that the baby boomer generation is composed not just of older white adults but also of an increasingly diverse group of people. Because of this, lessons can be learned from this relatively unknown population. Latino boomers comprise the cusp of the next generation of Latino elders but also came of age during the civic and political empowerment of the 1960s and 1970s (civil rights advances, Chicano movement, farmworker organizing) and now represent the political, economic and social leadership of an increasingly influential Hispanic population.

As seen in Fig. 24.1, Latinos account for 8 million people, or 10% of the baby boomer population (Gassoumis et al. 2008). This statistic emphasizes the need for policymakers to consider the social, economic and political implications of a nation that is not just growing older but also more diverse.

One implication policymakers should recognize is that Latino baby boomers are not as prepared for retirement as non-Latino elders. One reason is that, as a group, Latino baby boomers have lower incomes. In addition, research shows that, compared with the U.S. population as a whole, Latinos are less likely to have savings and retirement accounts (Ibarra and Rodriguez 2006; Orszag and Rodriguez 2005). It is important for policymakers to be aware of this research when forming new policies now and in the future, as the Latino and older adult populations continue to escalate.

Latino baby boomers as "the canary in the mine shaft" also give clues about immigration reform. The discussion on immigration reform and whether citizenship should be granted for 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States is high on the political agenda. To the extent that the politics of immigration continue to motivate Hispanic voters, it may influence the outcome of national and state elections.

Implications and Future Directions

Where then might we go with all that we understand about longevity, diversity, an emerging Latino population and the reality of a majority-minority nation. And how do these issues inform the future directions of "Aging in the Americas?" Firstly, we choose to view this demographic transformation as a set of opportunities for research, for policy analysis, for advocacy and public policy. As importantly, we believe that these issues and the conference series on Aging in the Americas provides a forum for enhancing bilateral relationships between the United States, Mexico and Latin America. The chapters in this series related to Mexico, Chile and other Latin American nations illustrate the varied and divergent paths individual nations are taking as they respond to the universal reality of populations growing older and declining replacement rates. Future directions for bilateral partnerships can include forums throughout Latin America bringing together scholars and policy researchers as well as government officials to learn from and to share divergent experiences and best practices. Perhaps the next such forum could occur in Mexico City, a location representing these demographic phenomena, but also a geographic case study of a local governmental entity providing a basic social safety net for elderly residents (e.g., a minimum pension). This conference has served to bring together the experts in gerontology and geriatrics from throughout Latin America and thus provides an opening for future collaborations on a topic that engender goodwill and a common agenda.

The Aging in the Americas series of conferences and the related volumes and papers also give insights into the methodological, analytical and substantive areas for future research. Data gathering and the creation and availability of comparative data sets is a crucial first step in understanding the complexity and scope of demographic challenges facing the U.S., Mexico and Latin America. Hereto, the availability of data, information and benchmarks for measuring progress and outcomes as each nation grapples with its aging population varies and a common Latin American forum on aging can provide a "sharing tool" for creating universal benchmarks of data points for understanding and responding to demographic challenges. Supporting the training and education of professionals in gerontology and geriatrics and expanding a trained workforce supporting the needs of elders throughout Latin America becomes the next important step in this effort. As such, the development of governmental institutions focused on gerontology and geriatrics (as we see in the United States and Mexico), provides the public policy ability for agenda-setting and public sector responses to the needs of an aging population. These suggested responses have short term, interim and long –term implications for analyzing the impacts of various legislative, regulatory and political actions at all levels of government and public and private sectors. In this regard, the role of elders, families and caregivers raises the spectrum of potential politics of aging throughout the Americas. Granted, this level of civic engagement and empowerment rests on the nature of the polity of each nation but we believe that in time, older persons themselves, merit a level of engagement, influence and control over their destinies as elders in their respective societies.

The measure of our response to aging and its affect on the emerging Latino populations throughout the hemisphere will be the level of dignity and quality of life provided to the elderly, their families and caregivers. The real test and outcomes of the analyses and recommendations throughout this volume may not be known for several decades; the demographic transformations are just beginning. Yet, we hope that the efforts of the scholars and researchers making important contributions to the "Aging in the Americas" scientific conferences and the products from these efforts, will be the seminal starting point for the dramatic and exciting realities of aging and longevity.

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