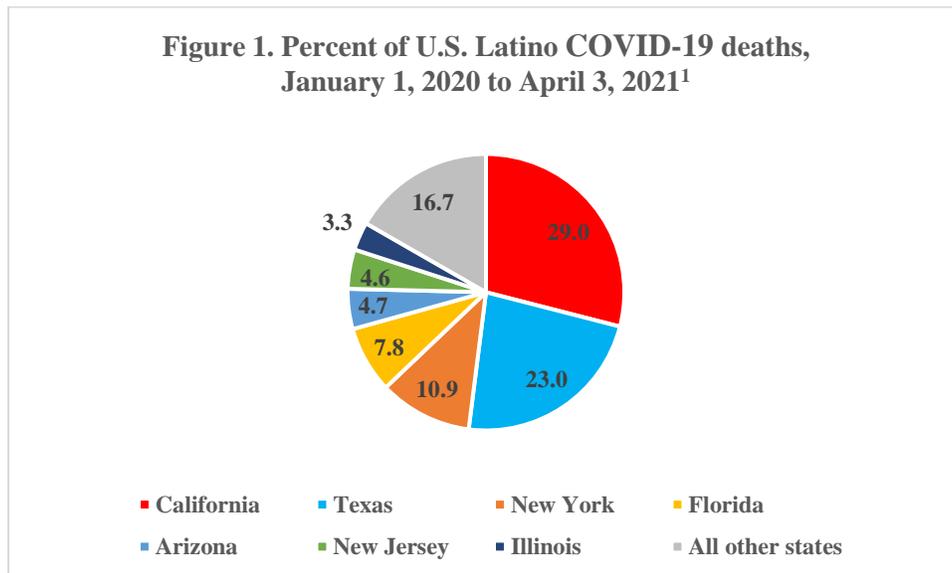


Milestone of Misery

Rogelio Sáenz, PhD

More than 100,000 Latinos have now lost their lives to COVID-19. This past week we went over this lamentable threshold. It took about ten months for 50,000 Latinos to die from the pandemic, but it only took four months to add another 50,000.¹

While Latinos have died from COVID-19 in every state except in Vermont where very few Latinos live, a little more than half of the 100,000 Latino deaths have occurred in California and Texas. More than 29,000 Latinos have died in California and more than 23,000 in Texas. In fact, more Latinos than whites have died from the pandemic in these two states. The numbers are also quite large in five other states including New York with nearly 11,000 deaths, Florida with nearly 7,900, Arizona with more than 4,700, New Jersey with a little more than 4,600, and Illinois with close to 3,400 deaths. These five states along with California and Texas account for more than four of five Latinos who have lost their lives to COVID-19 (Figure 1).

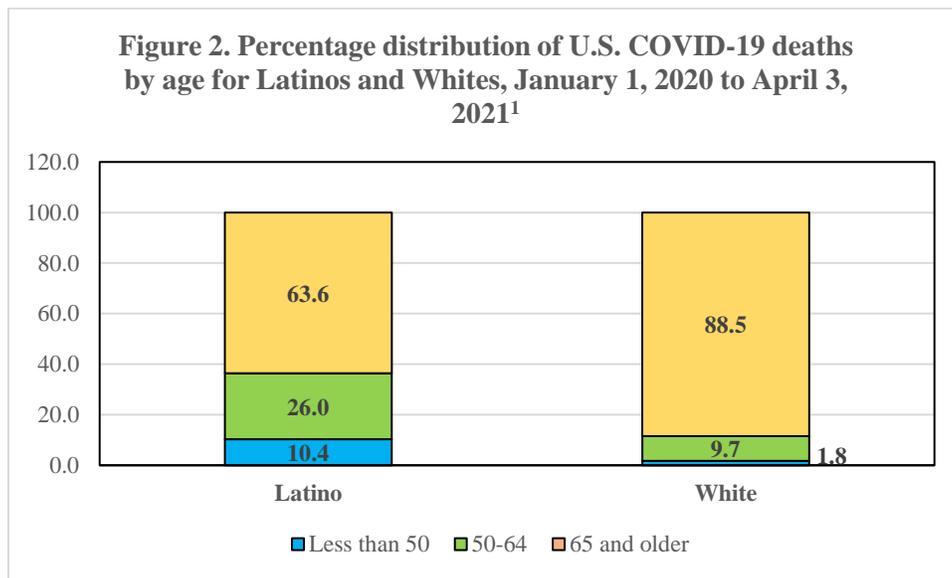


I have been tracking the impact of the pandemic on Latinos since back in late March.² With more than 100,000 Latinos succumbing to COVID-19, it is time to reflect about what has taken place during the pandemic.

One thing that is clear is that while the Latino numbers are quite devastating, they hide the horror that has befallen the Latino community. At first glance, it appears that the pandemic has taken Latino and white lives evenly. There are 3.3 times as many whites as Latinos in the country and among people who have died from COVID-19. However, Latinos with a median age of 30 are a much more youthful population compared to whites whose median age is 44. More than one in five whites are 65 or older compared to one of 13 Latinos. As such, whites are much more concentrated in ages where the risk of dying from COVID-19 is particularly high.

Once we adjust for these age differences, Latinos thus far have died at a rate that is 2.4 times higher than whites. The situation is much worse in California where Latinos are dying from the pandemic at a rate that is 3.5 times higher than whites.

The demography of COVID-19 fatalities is quite revealing. Nationally, nearly nine of ten whites who have died from the pandemic were 65 or older compared to fewer than two of three Latinos. Among the Latino dead, 26 percent were 50 to 64 years of age compared to 10 percent of whites. And more than 9 percent of Latino deceased were less than 50 years of age compared to fewer than 2 percent of whites. These major variations reflect the disproportionate presence of Latinos on the frontlines where they do not have the luxury of being able to work from home.



Latinos who have died from COVID-19 have been much younger than whites with their lives cut very short, losing large numbers of years of life that they had in front of them were it not for the pandemic. Back in December, as part of a Dallas Morning News report, I estimated that Latinos who had died from COVID-19 in Texas between February and early December had an average life expectancy of an additional 20 years of life.³ My analysis also showed that Latinos accounted for three-fifths of the estimated more than 405,000 person-years lost to COVID-19 in Texas at that time.

There are other little-known facts that remain hidden from the public when it comes to the devastation of the pandemic on Latinos. Latinos have the highest age-adjusted COVID-19 death rates in 19 states, more states than any other racial or ethnic group. Yet, it is in our nation’s capital where Latinos are succumbing to the pandemic at the highest level than anywhere else in the country with 461 Latinos per 100,000 losing their lives to COVID-19, dying at an astonishing rate of 5.2 times higher than whites. Latinos are also perishing at significant levels slightly below that of Washington, DC in New York (421 deaths per 100,000), New Jersey (414), Arizona (403), Texas (378), California (336), Oklahoma (329), Nevada (325), and Illinois (311).

One can wonder about the national priority and calamity that would result if whites were perishing from the pandemic at rates much higher than Latinos and other people of color. Unfortunately, there are no alarms being set out nationally and locally about the major cataclysm that the pandemic has levelled against Latino communities throughout our nation. We cannot simply overlook this major milestone that thus far has gone unnoticed—100,000 dead and rising.

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Notes

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Death Involving Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) by Race and Hispanic Origin Group and by State (Updated April 7, 2021). <https://data.cdc.gov/NCHS/Deaths-involving-coronavirus-disease-2019-COVID-19/ks3g-spdg>.

² Rogelio Sáenz, “What do we know about COVID-19 cases and deaths among Latinos?” *Latino Decisions Blog* (May 4, 2020). <https://latinodecisions.com/blog/what-do-we-know-about-covid-19-infections-and-deaths-among-latinos/>.

³ Anna Kuchment, Holly K. Hacker, and Dianne Solís, “COVID’S ‘untold story’: Texas Blacks and Latinos are dying in the prime of their lives” (December 19, 2020). <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/2020/12/19/covids-untold-story-texas-blacks-and-latinos-are-dying-in-the-prime-of-their-lives/>.