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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses whether the rapidly growing Hispanic segment of the United States population will speak one language or two. A review of statistics on this population group notes that it is comprised of many subgroups; that more than half of the Hispanic population has lived in the United States for 12 years or more; and that in the areas of education, income, and employment, the Hispanic population compares less favorably to the total population. This section also opens the discussion of language by looking at patterns of acculturation and assimilation and suggests that the Hispanic American population is becoming acculturated but not assimilated. This section argues that many immigrants come to the United States primarily for the higher standard of living and not from a more idealized admiration of its culture. A review and discussion of the research on language use and cultural preferences among Hispanic Americans and of mass media usage note that many retain their usage of Spanish language and high rates of watching and listening to Spanish language television and radio exist. The paper concludes that the Hispanic population is not assimilating rapidly into mainstream society, preferring to remain acculturated and retain their own cultural patterns and use of the Spanish language. Contains 20 references and 7 tables. (JB)

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# Hispanic America One Language or Two?

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## **Hispanic America: One Language or Two?**

Consider the following statistics: between 1980 and 1990, the U.S. Hispanic population grew by 71 percent, versus 7 percent growth of the total population. During the next ten years, Hispanics will account for 40 percent of this country's population growth. And by the year 2000, the Hispanic children's population will grow by 43 percent, compared to the non-Hispanic segment which will decrease by 7 percent. All of these statistics are giving sociologists, economists, politicians and marketers significant pause for thought. For this rapidly growing and influential minority group, which presently represents 9 percent of the total population, is predicted to be 15 percent by the 2020. There is no doubt that Hispanics are going to have a major impact on American society.

That impact, however, will not be felt in the same way that other immigrant groups have affected this country. For unlike the Irish, Polish, Italian, or Jewish populations who arrived here 100 years ago, and immediately strove to blend in to the "melting pot" of America, adopting American ways and learning to speak English, the Hispanic community is developing on its own, outside of the mainstream. There are more and more cities from coast to coast where Spanish speakers are becoming the majority. As that happens, the question that needs to be asked is which language should be used to communicate with this segment of the population -- English or Spanish? Is Hispanic America developing with one language or two?

### **Who Are They?**

Although the term Hispanic is used as a generic classification of all Spanish-speaking individuals, it actually encompasses a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. Almost 60

percent of U.S. Hispanics come from Mexico, 13.5 percent from Cuba, 10 percent from Puerto Rico, almost 7 percent from South America, and the remainder from Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Yet despite the disparate origins, two-thirds (66 percent) are living in three states (California, Texas, and New York). In certain U.S. cities, Hispanics already constitute the majority, accounting for more than half the total population of Miami and close to 30 percent of Los Angeles. It is worth noting here that the United States now has the fifth largest Hispanic population in the world, after Mexico, Spain, Colombia, and Argentina (Schick and Schick, 1991).

Hispanic population growth in the past decade (1980-1991) is attributed both to immigration and births, with the former accounting for 63 percent of the increase and the latter, the remaining 37 percent. There are two types of immigration, however. The documented arrivals constitute just 17 percent of new arrivals, while undocumented immigrants are believed to represent the remaining 46 percent. Indeed, the actual Hispanic population of this country may be as high as 30 million, if all Hispanics could be counted.

Although one-third (35 percent) of all immigrants to the United States between 1981 and 1989 came from Latin America, suggesting that this is a fairly new ethnic group in this country, more than half of the Hispanic population has lived in the U.S. for 12 years or more. The average length of residence is slightly more than 15 years. The rapid population growth also comes from the expansion of the resident Hispanic population. During the past ten years, more than one-third (37 percent) of U.S. Hispanic population growth has been from births. That is attributable, in part to the fact that the Hispanic market is considerably younger than the U.S. as a whole, with a median age of 26, compared to 32.8 years. Fully one-third of the Hispanic population is between the ages of 18 and 34, while only 11 percent are 55 or older. This compares to total U.S. figures of

28 and 21 percent, respectively. The numbers for the children's population are even more starkly contrasted. Children 2-11 represent 24 percent of all Hispanics but only 15 percent of all the U.S. It comes as no surprise, therefore, to see that Hispanic households tend to be larger than non-Hispanic homes, with an average of 4 members per household versus 2.5 (Strategy Research Corporation, 1991).

In the areas of education, income and employment, the Hispanic population compares less favorably to the total population. About 10 percent of Hispanics have completed four or more years of college, compared to 21 percent nationally. More and more Hispanics are graduating college, however, up 51 percent from 1984-1988. Their increased education is leading to improvements in employment status, with the proportion of Hispanic males in managerial positions increasing 42 percent and Hispanic females up 61 percent during this time period. As far as income is concerned, the average household income among Hispanics is about \$24,000, while for the country overall it stands at \$30,000.

A key distinction that needs to be drawn when considering Hispanic America is those Hispanics who are *assimilated* and those who are *acculturated* into mainstream society. Assimilation may be thought of as a one-way process whereby the new culture is incorporated into an existing one. In contrast, acculturation involves movement in two directions, with both cultures being influenced by the other. In the case of Hispanics, those who are assimilated have truly become Americanized, speaking English as their primary language and acting as part of their local, Anglo community. They share the aspirations and attitudes of other Americans around them.

Unlike previous immigrant groups to this country, however, relatively few Hispanics may

be said to be truly assimilated. In contrast, far more of them, particularly the younger generation born here, are willing and eager to become acculturated. By becoming part of the American culture these Hispanic Americans will purchase American brand names or use American media, and may even adopt certain American values such as individualism. When it comes to language preference, however, they will tend to continue speaking Spanish as their first language (Lee and Tse, 1991). And for both groups, cultural ties to their homeland remain very strong. Family and community, educational achievement, Catholicism, history and heritage are all extremely important to the Hispanic community. Moreover, the values that they hold have been shown to be significantly different from those held by non-Hispanics (Valencia, 1989).

Typically, measures such as length of residence, use of language, and mass media usage have been used to determine the degree to which a group is or is not acculturated. An examination of the U.S. Hispanic population with respect to these areas suggests that, indeed, they are an acculturated, rather than assimilated group.

There has been considerable research on the acculturation of immigrant groups to the U.S. Much of the early work, which examined how the early immigrants adjusted to life in this country, assumed that the newcomers would eagerly abandon their original way of life and adopt U.S. culture. It was assumed that pressures from the majority population would force them to do so. However, more recent studies suggest that this is not necessarily the case. One study of Anglos, Mexican-Americans and Mexicans, for example, found that the Mexican-Americans have formed their own unique cultural patterns, taking segments from each culture and blending them into their own, hybrid version. Thus the Mexican-Americans were found to consume more poultry, high-sugar cereals, coffee and regular soft drinks than either Anglos or Mexicans (Wallendorf and Reilly, 1983).

Part of the reason behind this new pattern of acculturation could well be that today's immigrants have different motivations for coming to the U.S. That act used to be taken in order to pursue the "American dream", leaving a life of poverty and political repression for one of affluence and freedom. Now, it is more commonly driven solely by economics. Today's immigrants do not necessarily perceive America as an idyll, but rather just as somewhere they can earn more money. So for many Hispanics immigration to the U.S. has become an act of choice rather than an act of avoidance or escape (Lee and Tse, 1991). It is certainly true that many Central Americans fled countries such as Guatemala or Nicaragua in the 1980's for political reasons, but Mexicans nowadays head to "El Norte" to earn more money and enjoy a better way of life. The motivations for immigration affect the kind of adjustment that takes place in the new country. Those arriving here for political reasons probably have a greater desire to "become" an American than others who move to the U.S. to join family or friends in a well-established Hispanic community.

### Length of Residence

Another important distinction when considering Hispanic Americans is the difference between first and second-generation immigrants. Attitudes towards preserving culture and tradition for example, tend to change over time. The newcomers will usually want to maintain ties to their home country; their offspring frequently reject many aspects of their parents' culture, trying to blend in more with the mainstream. As they get older, however, or start their own family, they are more likely to want to return to their ethnic origins.

Language use and cultural preference also change over generations. It is estimated that three-quarters of Hispanics speak English regularly after residing in the U.S. for 15 years

or more. Indeed, recent research that compared foreign versus U.S.-born Hispanics found that 78 percent of foreign-born Hispanics speak Spanish predominantly at home compared to just 20 percent of those born in the U.S. At work, the situation is similar, with 21 percent of foreign-born Hispanics speaking mostly Spanish and 6 percent of Hispanic-Americans doing so. When respondents were asked which aspects of life they considered important to preserve, 62 percent of foreign-born Hispanics felt a commitment to family was vital, compared to 56 percent of first-generation U.S. Hispanics and only 42 percent among second-generation Hispanic-Americans. Differences were also seen depending upon length of time in this country. In almost all cases, those who had lived in the U.S. for 20 or more years considered Hispanic culture more worthy of preservation than those who had been here for 5 years or fewer.

Age is an important factor in the acculturation/assimilation process. Younger immigrants adjust more quickly and accept new ideas more readily. As people get older, however, they tend to return to the values of their childhood. Generational differences are defined not simply by generic age; they also encompass the decade into which someone is born. Thus people born in the 1960's share a distinctly different outlook on life than those born ten years later. The effects of social, economic, political, and cultural events in both the home country and the adopted one are going to impact how the minority group blends in with the larger society.

#### Language Use and Cultural Preferences

There has been mixed research on language use among Hispanics. The Hispanic research company, Strategy Research Corporation (SRC), reports that 87 percent of Hispanics are more comfortable speaking Spanish, but this finding has been critiqued by others who note that SRC conducts its surveys in high-density Hispanic areas so is more likely to contact



the less assimilated Spanish-speakers. Rincon cites numerous studies which asked about language use as a peripheral question where responses indicated far fewer Hispanics had a Spanish-language preference. Thus, for example, when the Southwest Research Voter Institute Exit Poll was conducted in November 1988 in California, Texas, and New Mexico, only 20 percent of Hispanics in Texas and New Mexico chose the Spanish ballot, while even fewer, a mere 10 percent of Californian Hispanics opted for ballots in that language (Rincon, 1990).

In addition, it has been found that immigrants may behave differently depending on the situation (Rohit, Deshpande and Hoyer, 1989). Hispanics may read an English magazine at work, but a Spanish one at home. Indeed, in studies of language use among Hispanics it has been found that 78 percent said they prefer to speak Spanish at home while only 66 percent will use Spanish on social occasions, and just 42 percent converse in their native language at work.

Another way of comparing assimilated and acculturated immigrants is to look at those who identify strongly with their ethnicity ("strong identifiers") as opposed to the ones who may be classified as "weak identifiers". This kind of comparison has revealed that strong Hispanic identifiers are much more likely to use Spanish, hold positive attitudes towards government institutions and more negative attitudes to business institutions, and be more positive towards advertising (Stayman and Deshpande, 1985; Deshpande, Hoyer and Donthu, 1986).

#### Mass Media Usage

Hispanics tend to be heavier viewers of television than the general population. This may be partly explained by their lower education levels, which diminish the amount of reading that

is done. It is also attributable to the fact that there are two major Spanish-language television networks available. Univision and Telemundo each have about 30 affiliates in all the major Hispanic markets across the country. Univision reaches about 89 percent of all Hispanic households, while Telemundo can be seen in 79 percent of Hispanic homes. Although both networks import programming from Mexico and South America, they are producing more and more of their own, original shows (over 40 percent of each network's fare is U.S.-produced).

Until recently, it was difficult to know how much Hispanics were viewing Spanish-language television because of disagreements with and criticism of the research methods used to estimate this. Nielsen Media Research, the primary service for Anglo television viewing figures, collected Hispanic TV viewing data via diaries, which are known to undercount viewing and were believed to seriously underestimate Hispanic viewing because of the bias towards a more literate sample. On the other hand, Strategy Research Corp., a company that focuses exclusively on Hispanics, was felt to greatly overstate Hispanic TV viewing by sampling only in high-density Hispanic areas where there were more likely to be fewer assimilated, English-speaking Hispanics.

This fall, however, sees the official start of Nielsen's new Hispanic Television Index, or NHTI, which will use people meter technology to record individual-level viewing data among a sample of 800 Hispanic households across the country that are nationally representative of the U.S. Hispanic population. From the 2-year test of the system in Los Angeles, it has been found that almost 7 out of 10 (68 percent) of Hispanic homes are watching television during the prime time hours of 7pm-11pm; previously, the diary method had reported a Households Using Television figure of 60.7 percent (Nielsen Media

Research, 1992).

The Nielsen study also provides a useful benchmark on language use because it includes a nationally representative, statistically reliable sample. Nielsen reports that 47 percent of the sample speak only or mostly Spanish, 14 percent say they speak both Spanish and English equally well, and 37 percent prefer to speak mostly or only English. This latter portion might be considered assimilated, while the remaining 61 percent are more or less acculturated into American society. These figures compare to SRC's estimates of 15 percent of Hispanics being highly assimilated, 45 percent partially assimilated, and a high 40 percent being relatively unassimilated into the mainstream (Strategy Research Corp, 1991).

Hispanics also spend time listening to Spanish-language radio. Today there are more than 250 Hispanic stations. Some studies indicate that Hispanics spend one-quarter of their time (26 percent) with Spanish radio, compared to just 14 percent listening to the English alternatives. In certain Spanish-dominated cities, such as Houston, almost half of all listening by Hispanics is to Hispanic stations. The diversity of formats that is found on Anglo radio is mirrored by a wide variety of Spanish-language options. These include formats to appeal to specific ethnic populations, such as *Ranchera* and *Tex Mex* for Mexicans, *Salsa* and *Merengue* for Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, and *Cumbia* for Central and South Americans (Katz Hispanic Radio Sales, 1991).

As far as magazines and newspapers are concerned, the picture is mixed. There are 87 daily and community Spanish newspapers available, while several English papers have introduced special Spanish-language sections or copies. The Miami Herald developed El Nuevo Herald as a section of its main paper, while the Los Angeles Times produces

Nuestro Tempo as a supplement twice a month. The biggest Spanish newspaper is La Opinion, which reaches close to 100,000 people each week ("Spanish Papers," 1990). For those Hispanics who are more assimilated, there is the English-language newspaper supplement, Vista. It is now carried by 28 newspapers, reaching more of the second-generation Hispanics who have chosen English as their primary language (Adelson, 1989).

Another very important medium for the Hispanic community, and one that differentiates it further from the Anglo population, is the festival or fair. Most of these are focused around a particular Hispanic group, such as the Puerto Rican Parade Day in New York City, or the Mexican Fiestas Patronales in Chicago. These events both reflect and reinforce a strong sense of community among the Hispanic population, allowing them to exhibit pride in their cultural heritage.

### Ethnic Differences

Just as there are many differences between various groups within the Anglo population, so are there among Hispanics. Four main groups can be identified: Mexicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Central and South Americans. The Mexican population is the oldest and most established group, with some people able to trace their ancestry in the U.S. back several hundred years. It still constitutes the bulk of Hispanic newcomers today, however, accounting for 48 percent of Latin American arrivals in the U.S. from 1981-1989. Because of its longevity, the Mexican-Americans can be found in almost all states in the union, with the largest numbers living in California, Texas, and New Mexico.

The Cuban population grew and developed in the post-Castro years. Most of those fleeing that regime were middle class and affluent, and those characteristics remain dominant

today. The vast majority of Cuban Hispanics are still situated in Florida. Puerto Ricans, the third largest Hispanic group, are considered by many to be Americans already because their island is a territory of the U.S. But this ethnic group retains its distinctive cultural and social practices. It is one of the poorest Hispanic segments, located predominantly in New York state. Finally, the newest Hispanic immigrant group, Central and South Americans, may be found along the eastern seaboard, particularly in New York and Washington D.C. Large numbers of Hispanics fled political problems in their home countries, such as Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, and many have remained here through political asylum.

Demographic differences between these segments point up the uniqueness of each ethnic group. Thus Mexicans tend to be younger and Cubans are older; Mexicans are the least well educated; Cubans and Central and South Americans have the largest proportion of people living below the poverty level, but one-quarter of the Cuban population enjoys a household income of \$50,000 or more. Indeed, comparisons of median household income reveal that Cubans enjoy relative affluence, with an annual income of \$31,400. This compares to a Mexican family's \$23,200, and a Puerto Rican annual income of just \$18,000. Nearly half of the more established Mexican and Cuban groups own their own home (Strategy Research Corp, 1991).

Language use varies between the four main Hispanic groups too. Thus 14 percent of Mexicans speak mostly English, whereas 25 percent of Cubans and Central and South Americans can be classified this way. There are also significant differences in lifestyle and buying behavior between the groups. Hispanics living in New York (mostly Puerto Ricans) are big baseball fans, whereas those in California (mostly Mexicans) prefer soccer. Californian Hispanics are more likely to shop twice a week or more, while the Cubans in

Miami tend to go to the store just once each week. Moreover, Hispanics living in Central and Southwestern regions of the country (mostly Mexicans) are more likely to shop with children than those residing in the Northeast (Puerto Ricans) (Minority Markets Alert, 1989). Some of these differences of course reflect in part demographic differences in age and household size.

Food preferences are also evident within the Hispanic population. A simple staple like canned soup is purchased regularly by about 70 percent of total Hispanics, but only 58 percent of those living in the Northeast and 82 percent of Central region Hispanics. Tortillas, which many consider a defining Hispanic food, are bought by 62 percent of all Hispanics, but only 26 percent of those in the Southeast (i.e., Cubans) and 79 percent of Hispanics living in the Southwest (Mexicans). In contrast, olive oil tends to be purchased mostly by Hispanics in the Southeast (84.5 percent) but by fewer than half (47 percent) of Southwestern residents (Strategy Research Corp., 1991).

### Marketing to Hispanics

In recent years, more and more marketers have begun to turn their attention to the Hispanic market. This is due, in part, to the fact that the total market is estimated to be worth \$172 billion, and has risen by 80 percent during the past 6 years. It is also worth noting that although Hispanics earn less than non-Hispanics, they actually spend a greater proportion of their income, due mostly to their lower tax burden ("Hispanic Consumer Market Report," 1992).

Nonetheless, only \$584 million was spent advertising to Hispanics in 1989, compared to more than \$100 billion in the general market (Advertising Age, February 12, 1990). A survey of more than 200 companies who have Hispanic marketing efforts revealed that

those firms spent about 1 percent of their marketing dollars against this ethnic group (Goodson and Shaver, 1990). One of the reasons frequently cited for this low level of spending is that they can already reach Hispanics through their general market efforts. In addition, they are able to purchase more media time and space, proportionately, in the Hispanic market because it is priced lower.

There are numerous examples of how companies have made special efforts to reach either the total Hispanic population or specific ethnic groups. Vons Supermarkets, in California, has opened 8 Tianguis stores that cater specifically to the Mexican population there, offering a wide selection of Mexican fruits and vegetables, the cuts of meat that are preferred, and a tortillera for fresh tortillas. They also have wider aisles to allow room for larger carts and more people on a shopping trip. When the first such store opened in 1987 it had sales of \$23 million; by 1990 the 8 stores took in \$140 million (Burros, 1990).

Other companies that have made specific efforts to target Hispanics include Johnson & Johnson, CPC, Kraft General Foods, and Anheuser-Busch. In each of these cases, it was not simply a case of throwing in a few Spanish-language ads, but rather of developing a clear understanding of the culture and buying habits of Hispanic consumers. Johnson & Johnson more than doubled its market share for Tylenol among Hispanics from 19 percent to 50 percent and is now the leading pain reliever in that market. CPC's Mazola Corn Oil now spends more on its advertising to Hispanics than it does in the general market, after realizing that Spanish families use the product three to four times more than Anglos do; Hispanic sales now represent more than one-fifth of total Mazola sales. Similarly, Kraft promotes its salad dressings to the Hispanic community and enjoys a 44 percent brand share, compared to its 36 percent share among non-Hispanics ("Hispanic Marketing

Guide," 1991). Anheuser-Busch has made considerable effort to get involved with the Hispanic market, setting up the National Hispanic Scholarship Fund, which is now the leading Hispanic scholarship fund in the country. Over the past 15 years it has given \$8.2 million to 11,000 students. Partly as a result of this involvement, Anheuser-Busch enjoys a 51 percent share of the beer market among Hispanics, compared to a 41 percent market share overall.

There is still considerable debate on whether Hispanics are more brand loyal than non-Hispanics. Traditional "wisdom" suggested that they were, based largely on survey responses about brand switching and preferences. However, more recent research indicates that Hispanics in fact respond in the same way to advertised information: "the more consumers know and are informed about a category and brand, the less likely they are to exhibit brand loyal behavior" (Adams-Esquivel, 1990). So when Hispanics are exposed to ads that target them specifically (either Spanish or English, but using specific cultural appeals), they are as likely to switch brands as non-Hispanic consumers.

### Summary and Conclusion

The continuing growth of the Hispanic market in the U.S. is going to have a major impact on the demographics, lifestyle, and buying behavior of this country for the next few decades. The Hispanic community -- made up of Mexicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Central and South Americans -- is younger, less educated, and poorer than the total population, but is growing at a faster rate, with larger families and more children. Unlike previous immigrants to America, Hispanics are not assimilating as rapidly into mainstream society, preferring instead to remain acculturated to American mores and customs, but retaining their own unique cultural patterns, sometimes creating hybrid versions that allow them to bridge two worlds. This is evidenced by several key indicators of acculturation



patterns: length of residence, language use, and mass media usage. In each case, Hispanics tend to prefer sticking to Spanish and/or Hispanic customs. Marketers who have acknowledged this and directed their advertising efforts specifically to Hispanics have seen dramatic results in the marketplace. It is also important to acknowledge that, just as the U.S. is not a monolithic, monocultural society, neither is Hispanic America. There are key demographic and buying behavior differences between the major ethnic subsegments that need to be taken into account. Language use also varies, driven in part by length of residence and demographics.

Whereas earlier immigrants to this country chose English as their primary language within a matter of years of arriving here, today's immigrant groups (and not only Hispanics) are more reluctant to give up their mother tongue. It may take several generations of Hispanic-Americans before English is equally acceptable to that community. Or it may be that, given the growth and size of this ethnic group, the country could become bilingual in many towns and cities where there is a sizable Hispanic population. At this point, it is difficult to predict exactly what will happen, leaving one to conclude that to reach and communicate with Hispanics, two languages will probably be needed for the years to come. Among the minority who have assimilated, English will be readily accepted, but for the larger proportion who remain outside of the mainstream, Spanish will continue to be the language of choice.

**Table 1**  
**Country of Origin of Hispanic-Americans**

Country of Origin	
Mexico	58.9%
Cuba	6.2%
Puerto Rico	10.2%
Central/South America	20.3%
Other	4.4%

**Table 2**  
**Sources of Hispanic Population Growth**

Population Growth	
Immigration	63%
<i>Documented</i>	17%
<i>Undocumented</i>	46%
Births	37%

**Table 3**  
**Demographics of Hispanic Population**

	Hispanic	Total U.S.
Median Age	24	33
Age 18-34	33%	28%
Age 55+	11%	21%
Children 2-11	24%	15%
Household Size	4.0	2.5
4+ Years College	10%	21%
Average HH Income	\$24,000	\$30,000

**Table 4**  
**Language Preferences: Foreign vs. U.S. Born Hispanics**

	Foreign-Born	U.S. Born
Spanish at Home	78%	20%
Spanish at Work	21%	6%

**Table 5**  
**Cultural Preference: Foreign vs. U.S. Born Hispanics**

	Foreign-Born	U.S. Born	
		1st Generation	2d Generation
Commitment to Family	62%	56%	42%

**Table 6**  
**Language Use**

	Nielsen	SRC
Speak only/mostly Spanish	47%	40%
Speak both	14%	45%
Speak only/mostly English	37%	15%

**Table 7**  
**Ethnic Differences Among Hispanics**

	Mexicans	Cubans	Puerto Ricans	Central/ S. Americans
Under 18	39%	17%	35%	26%
4+ High School	44%	71%	59%	66%
4+ College	6%	21%	13%	22%
Median HHI	\$27,500	\$36,300	\$20,900	\$29,100
HHI \$50,000+	10%	25%	11%	17%
Own Home	47%	44%	24%	31%
Watch baseball	20%	33%	41%	30%
Watch soccer	6%	8%	14%	12%
Shop twice a week or more	24%	12%	18%	18%
Shop once a week	31%	48%	44%	40%
Shop with children	54%	43%	32%	43%
Canned soup	83%	60%	58%	70%
Tortillas	95%	26%	43%	62%
Olive oil	57%	85%	71%	66%

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