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Hispanic heritage and the Spanish language in the toponymy of the United States

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Abstract: This study demonstrates how the toponymy of the United States is a critical tool for understanding the extensive influence of the Spanish language and Hispanic heritage on U.S. culture. It analyzes Spanish place names at the state, county, and municipal levels, combining qualitative and quantitative methods (for state-level names and county- and municipal-level names, respectively) to create a visual sketch of what is already historically documented.

Although they have diverse origins, these place names reflect the deep roots of Hispanic history and the Spanish language in the U.S. The data demonstrate that histories of Hispanic colonization are often evidenced in the toponymy of the regions where they occur. The data also show that the legacy of Hispanic colonization has expanded beyond the areas where Spain had a major presence and has become an integral part of U.S. culture more broadly. One confirmation of this is the nation's toponymy.

Keywords: toponymy, Hispanic heritage, Spanish, Spain, legacy, culture, history

¹ This is an English translation, offered by the Observatorio, of the Spanish original submitted by the author (see 056-12/2019SP).

1. Introduction

There has been a rich and extensive Hispanic presence in the United States since Ponce de León arrived on the coast of Florida. Beginning in that moment, and continuing through Spain's sale of Florida in 1821 over three centuries later, a Hispanic legacy became deeply ingrained in what is now known as the United States.

This is clear from the use by many cities and states of symbols that harken back to their Hispanic legacy, both in cities founded by the Spaniards—such as St. Augustine, the oldest continuously inhabited city in the country—as well as due to Spain's many important expeditions in the territory, which created a network of roads and infrastructure that proved vital to the early development of many regions.

This broad Hispanic heritage is even clear in the names of many places. Toponymy is a critical tool for understanding the history and culture of any territory. Directly or indirectly, place names tell a story, given that “after their imposition at a given historical moment, they become fixed and offer an image of that place during a past period” (Molina, 2012).

Springboarding from that point, this study aims to analyze the names of states, counties, and municipalities in order to shed light on the profound Hispanic influence that has helped characterize the U.S.

Territories might acquire Spanish or Spanish-derived names for any number of reasons. An analysis could focus on names that are directly rooted in the colonial past of their corresponding locations, such as Los Angeles or San Francisco, but such an analysis would neglect towns like Estrella, Arizona, which was founded after Spain's withdrawal from U.S. territory but which, due to widespread colonial influence, still chose a Spanish name.

There is also a third category of Spanish place names: faux constructions designed to give an area the aura of colonial or Hispanic origins. These names were usually coined by non-Spanish speakers, and many contain grammatical errors or artificial constructions. In Florida, for example, there are numerous Spanish toponyms that are actually “artificial, incorrect, and even laughable names given by land developers in an effort to draw tourists from the north” (Hamilton, 1968, p. 431). One such ploy is the town of Los Gatos (“The Cats”), whose name actually comes from the English “The Gates.”

Given these diverse origins, it seems clear that analyzing Hispanic toponymy in the U.S. is no simple task. Further complicating matters are English-language place names that have Hispanic origins, but which were introduced through translation.

It is also worth acknowledging a category of toponyms that, despite the lack of an etymological connection, nevertheless have close cultural ties to the Hispanic lexicon: the cities and municipalities called *Columbia* and *Columbus*.

Clearly, localities with this name have a direct link to the man who “discovered” the Americas and whose history is inextricably tied to that of Spain.

Columbia was first adopted in the 18th century. A Latinization of *Columbus*—which is, in turn, an English translation of the Italian *Colombo*—it evokes the old Latin names of European territories, such as *Britannia* or *Gallia*, though, unlike in those examples, a noun (a name) is used to refer to a geographic region. As Higham (1990) explains: “Columbia was the invention of poets who wanted to refer to the young republic in language with all of the latinized dignity conveyed by ‘Britannia’” (p. 63). This term entailed a personification of the thirteen colonies. Many writers used the name to refer to what would later become the U.S., and it became popular in American society.

This study will consider the terms *Columbus* and *Columbia* as part of the U.S.'s "Hispanic" toponymy. Without the Spanish Crown's key decision to fund Columbus's voyage, the Genoese explorer would never have reached the Americas. It follows, then, that toponyms alluding to him would not have existed if Spain had not sponsored his expedition. Thus, I have included these place names in this analysis.

As this study does not aim to perform a conventional toponymic analysis, but rather to perform an x-ray of Hispanic toponymy in the U.S. and thereby highlight the country's significant Hispanic heritage, I have included: 1) all place names that relate to the country's Spanish colonial past; 2) all Spanish-language place names, regardless of their historic relationship with the Hispanosphere (such as Sierra Vista, California, which did not receive that name until 1961, after numerous changes); and 3) all those that, though they are in English, nevertheless have origins in the U.S.'s Hispanic cultural heritage.

For example, though a city or municipality's Spanish-language name may not have strictly Hispanic roots, I have nevertheless included that name in the study, as it, too, reflects the U.S.'s broader Hispanic legacy. The fact that certain places are given Spanish names—even if only for the sake of attracting tourists—still typifies the penetration of the Spanish language and the Hispanic legacy in the U.S.

To that end, this study analyzes the toponyms of all U.S. states, counties, and other incorporated places. These levels of analysis were selected in an attempt to achieve the greatest possible homogeneity, as the administrative disparity between some states can interfere with a proper comparison, especially on the municipal level.

2. The Hispanic Toponymy of the United States

Few are aware that at least 15% of the U.S.'s fifty state names were derived from the country's Hispanic past. That percentage could be even higher if we include states whose names are of uncertain origin, such as Arizona and Oregon, as some theories argue that these, too, have Spanish roots.

Below, we consider those states whose names are derived from Spanish, or from their territory's Hispanic heritage.

2.1 California

There has been a Hispanic presence in California since 1542, when the first European ship made landfall on the west coast of the present-day U.S. It was a Spanish ship known as the *San Salvador*, led by Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo (Kramer, 2018). He arrived in San Diego Bay, in Southern California, in September of that year, and claimed the territory for Spain upon his arrival.

However, Spain did not erect a stable settlement in the region until over 200 years later: California was far away and isolated, and the Crown's interest in occupying the territory waned. News that Russian traders were beginning to descend from the north finally expedited the process and prompted the "Sacred Expedition" to explore Alta California (of which 2019 is the 250th anniversary; Eldredge & De Ayala, 1909). This expedition, which was led by Gaspar de Portolà and in which the Franciscan Junípero Serra played a key role, would ultimately result in the founding of San Diego in 1769, and of many other missions throughout the territory (though not without some challenges). These outposts stabilized and strengthened the Spanish presence in the region.

In terms of the state's name, it is important to note that it was not only applied to the region that is now the State of California, but also to Baja California, in present-day Mexico. The most commonly accepted theory is that the name was taken from the novel *Las sergas de Esplandián* by Garcí Rodríguez de Montalvo, which was published in 1510. The book describes an imaginary, idyllic place called California, where riches were bountiful. Spanish explorers thought the region was quite close to Montalvo's description, and named it accordingly. In the novel, Rodríguez de Montalvo writes: "Known, that on the right hand of the Indies there is an island called California very close to the side of the Terrestrial Paradise" (cited in Turner, 2011, p. 84).²

A different, less popular account identifies a Hispanic origin for the name by associating the territory with the expeditions of Hernán Cortés, who described the region as "hot as an oven." Missionaries transformed the phrase into the Latin *calida fornax* (Niemann, 2002). This theory posits that the name would have gained traction with subsequent explorers; the first theory remains more popular.

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2.2 Colorado

Most historians believe that in 1539, the explorer Francisco de Ulloa "discovered" the mouth of the Colorado River on a sea voyage. Vázquez de Coronado's expedition was the first to reach the Grand Canyon by land; specifically, it was García López de Cárdenas who first encountered what they called "a big drop," down which they were ultimately unable to climb due to the steep terrain. From the top of canyon, they were able to see the Colorado River, which looked like a small stream from such a high altitude.

² Some sources affirm that this description of the state appears in a different novel by Rodríguez de Montalvo, *Amadis de Gaula* (1503). See, for example, Turner, 2011, p. 84.

At the same time, the navigator Hernando de Alarcón was sent to provide maritime support to Vázquez de Coronado's expedition. In doing so, he traveled a stretch of the Colorado River, which he called the *Buena Guía* (Trillo Lodeiro, 2019), though he did not succeed in connecting with the explorers from the land expedition.

All of this is relevant, as those expeditions ultimately established the name of the Colorado River, which was later applied to the state. The word *colorado* is clearly Spanish; it was used to describe the reddish color of the river itself. The early Spanish explorers of the Rocky Mountain region who encountered the river called it *tizón* or *colorado* because of the sediment the river dragged down from the mountains. Thus, with time, the name became established for both the river and the state thanks to the color of the water.

2.3 Florida

Since Ponce de León's "discovery" of present-day Florida in 1513, there has been an extensive Spanish presence in the region. A number of expeditions took place there, including those of Vázquez de Ayllón, Pánfilo de Narváez, Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, and Hernando de Soto, and attempts to establish settlements began with the earliest trips, though their efforts were hampered by the harsh climate and hostility from indigenous peoples.

One of the most important documents in the history of the U.S.'s Hispanic legacy was penned in 1565, when Pedro Menéndez de Avilés founded St. Augustine, in Florida. Today, as is widely known, St. Augustine is the U.S.'s oldest continuously inhabited city.

This long history is evidenced by many of Florida's symbols, including its flag, and many of its cities' coats of arms. The word *Florida*, too, is closely linked to this Hispanic heritage.

One theory posits that Ponce de León gave the territory its name due to the abundant and colorful vegetation, but the most widely accepted theory among historians is that the name is linked to the day Ponce de León “discovered” the region: Easter Sunday, or *Pascua Florida*.

2.4 Montana

Spanish presence in Montana was less relevant than it was in other sites across North America, but the Hispanic legacy is still discernible. For instance, the state’s motto, “Oro y Plata,” is Spanish; it appears on the state flag and state seal.

However, the clearest expression of Montana’s ties to Hispanic culture and heritage is its name, which is derived from the Spanish *montaña*. The earliest Spanish explorers in the mountainous region called it *Montaña del Norte* (Malone et al, 1991).

Ironically, the state would eventually be named after this early colonial designation, despite the fact that it has an average elevation of only 1,030 meters, the lowest of the Mountain States.

This was a point of some contention when it came time to choose a name for the state. In 1864, when Ohio Congressman James Ashley proposed a bill that would establish a temporary government for a new territory that was to be carved out of Idaho, he chose the name *Montana*. Representative Samuel Cox, also of Ohio, objected to the name, claiming that it was a misnomer, given that most of the territory was not mountainous. But Ashley’s bill ultimately prevailed, and the name was adopted.³

³ Information obtained from: Congressional Globe, House of Representatives, 38th Congress, 1st Session. U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774 – 1875.

2.5 Nevada

What would become a stable Spanish presence in Nevada was established in the mid-18th century, when Spanish explorers and Franciscans started conducting expeditions into the territory and settling there. The Franciscan missionary Francisco Garcés, born in Morata del Conde, Aragon, is believed to be the first European to set foot in the area.

Thus, present-day Nevada became part of the Viceroyalty of New Spain's Commandancy and General Captaincy of the Internal Provinces. Nevada joined the province of Alta California in 1804, when Alta California and Baja California were divided. It later became a part of Mexico—along with the rest of the Alta California region—after the Mexican War of Independence, in 1821.

The state's name refers to the abundance of snow in its mountains. It was the Spanish priest Pedro Font, who was part of Juan de Oñate's second expedition, who chose the name *Sierra Nevada* ("snowy range") for a mountain range located partially in present-day Nevada, though the bulk of the Sierra Nevada actually lies in California. That geographical feature's name later extended to the state.

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2.6 New Mexico

From the outset of Spain's exploration in North America, New Mexico had a vast Spanish presence. On his search for the Seven Cities of Gold, Vázquez de Coronado (mentioned above) was the first to lead an expedition through the region. The fictitious Seven Cities of Gold were imagined to be filled with riches, a fact that garnered significant interest among explorers. Early Spanish expeditions of the present-day U.S.'s Southwest region took special interest in the legend, as some explorers claimed to have seen the cities, prompting journeys such as Vázquez de Coronado's.

However, the explorer Francisco de Ibarra was the first to posit the name *Nuevo México* for the region, as he was already familiar with the Mexican territory, and the similarity in the terrain led him to describe what he saw as a “new Mexico” (Stewart, 2008). In fact, the area Ibarra described was to the south of present-day New Mexico, but the name became etched in the in the memory of future conquistadors. On the subsequent Chamuscado and Rodríguez Expedition, the region to the north of the Rio Grande was dubbed *San Felipe del Nuevo México*.

In 1598, it was Juan de Oñate who officially established the name *Nuevo México* upon being appointed the first governor of the newly founded Province of Nuevo México. The territory’s first permanent European settlement, the San Juan de los Caballeros colony, was established that same year.

The word *México* derives from Nahuatl and originally referred to the Valley of Mexico, near present-day Mexico City; we received the current word through a process of Castilianization. The country of Mexico did not have that name until it won its independence in 1821, prior to which *México* was used only to refer to the region described above.

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2.7 Texas

In 1528, Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca led first European expedition of Texas. Later, Alonso Álvarez de Pineda mapped the Texas coast. These events underscore how the history of Texas cannot be understood apart from its Hispanic legacy. Even so, the French were the first Europeans to consistently occupy and populate the territory, with Spain’s chapter of domination arriving later, from 1690 to 1821.

During the latter period, the Spanish empire established numerous settlements and missions that would grow into cities, including San Antonio. One of the most important milestones was the establishment of the Camino Real de los Tejas, a road

network that connected Spanish missions and populations, and which was critical to the settlement, development, and history of Texas.

The name *Texas* originated in the indigenous Caddo language of what is now east Texas. The Caddo used the word *taysha*, which meant “friends” or “allies.” The Spaniards Castilianized this expression, transforming it into *Texas* or *Tejas* (Bright, 2004), which had the same pronunciation in Old Castilian. Therefore, the modern English-language pronunciation of the word is etymologically incorrect in Spanish.

Although this is the most commonly accepted theory, there are also researchers who maintain that the toponym originates directly from the Spanish word *teja* (tile). According to this theory, the plural would have been used to describe the indigenous camps, and the term was later generalized to describe the entire territory.

2.8 Utah

As in Montana, the Spanish colonial presence in Utah was not as prominent as in other states analyzed here. Vázquez de Coronado’s expedition to find the Seven Cities of Gold was the first to penetrate the southern portion of the territory.

Over two centuries later, in 1776, Spanish priests Atanasio Domínguez and Silvestre Vélez de Escalante led a group out of Santa Fe, hoping to find a route to the California coast. The expedition reached the northern Utah Lake region, where they encountered indigenous populations. They did not consider the territory sufficiently interesting to establish the stable settlements and road networks they had built elsewhere, given the barren and arduous terrain.

The state name derives from the Apache *Yuttahih* or *Yuddah*, which means “higher up” or “those that are higher up.” Spanish explorers pronounced and wrote this word *Yuta*, which English speakers later transformed into *Utah*.

2.9 Arizona and Oregon

Although there is no single hypothesis regarding the origins of most of the state names analyzed above, there is a leading theory for each that closely links it to Spanish or a Hispanic legacy. In the cases of Arizona and Oregon, the consensus is not as strong, for which reason they are included here as a separate section.

In the case of Arizona, one theory posits that the name derives from the indigenous term *alī sonak*, which means “little spring” (McClintock, 1916). The early Spanish explorers of the territory would have Castilianized the expression, creating *Arizonac*, which, over time, became *Arizona*.

Others argue that a similar process took place, but that the original indigenous term was *Al Shon* (Saxton et al, 1983). Finally, Donald T. Garate (2005) believes that none of this ever took place and that the word *Arizonac* is simply a 20th-century etymological error unrelated to Hispanic influence or Castilianized indigenous terms, and that the name has a completely different origin: Basque. Most of the region’s early explorers had Basque roots and, given the abundance of oak trees in certain areas, some believe that the name *Arizona* may have stemmed from the Basque words *Aritz onak*, which literally means “good oaks” (Garate, 1999).

There are also diverse theories regarding the origins of *Oregon*, some of which associate the name with the state’s Hispanic heritage and the Spanish language.

However, the leading theory argues that the name comes from the French *ouragan* (hurricane or windstorm), which would have been based on Native American stories about the region’s powerful *Chinook* winds (Elliot, 1922).

The most widely accepted theory that also links the name to Spain suggests that *Oregon* came from *orejón* (rough, coarse), a term that may have described the

region's indigenous people or geographic features. There is also some speculation that the name may come from the Spanish *orégano*, as the herb grows in the southern portion of the region. Alternatively, the territory may have been named after some Spanish populations that bore the name *Oregón*, like the “Arroyo del Oregón” in Ciudad Real, Spain (Johnson, 1904).

Despite the lively debate surrounding the exact origin of the name, it is undeniable that Spanish presence in Oregon was not as extensive or intense as in other regions of the present-day U.S. Thus, it would not be a surprise if the true etymological origin were French, as the leading theory holds.

2.10 Other Territories

Aside from states, there are other U.S. territories whose toponymy is clearly marked by Hispanic influence, such as:

- Puerto Rico: Although the Europeans' first name for the island was *San Juan Bautista*, this was later changed to *Puerto Rico*, which refers to the island's abundant riches; the name is unequivocally Spanish, due to the Spanish presence on the island.
- Northern Mariana Islands: This archipelago was named after Mariana of Austria, who was queen of Spain in the 18th century. Explorers originally called them the “Islands of Thieves.”
- The Virgin Islands: The islands were given their name by Christopher Columbus, who dubbed them the “Islands of the Eleven Thousand Virgins” on his voyages. This was later shortened to the *Virgin Islands* and, today, they are officially the Virgin Islands of the United States (more commonly the U.S. Virgin Islands) to distinguish them from their British counterparts.
- The District of Columbia: As explained earlier, this name comes from a Latinization of the English version of Christopher Columbus's surname.

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3. Counties and Municipalities

The analysis in this section will be limited to U.S. counties and municipalities. It is important to note, though it will be explained in greater detail below, that in order to make a satisfactory comparison, I have attempted to homogenize these levels of government despite each state's unique characteristics.

In the analysis of state names, we focused on the colonial origins of place names, as most toponyms associated with the country's Hispanic roots were established during the colonial period. At the lower levels of government, however, we find place names with more mixed origins, including some localities with post-colonial Hispanic names and others with faux Spanish constructions.

As stated above, the analysis at this level is more generic and less etymological or historiographic. The goal is to find a didactic yet rigorous way to describe the reach of Hispanic heritage through place names, regardless of their origin.

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3.1 Counties

In the U.S., counties are the next form of administrative organization after states. Forty-eight of the fifty states are divided into counties, while Louisiana and Alaska are divided into other kinds of entities with the same function.

In Louisiana, these administrative units are known as parishes, owing to the major French and Spanish influence in the region since the arrival of Europeans in the 16th century. For over 200 years, local governments were based on ecclesiastical divisions such as parishes, or *paroisse* in French, which eventually turned into present-day parishes. They were established as the official administrative unit of Louisiana in the early 19th century, and the state is now divided into sixty-four of them. Alaska, on the other hand, uses boroughs. It is currently divided into nineteen organized

boroughs, though these do not cover the entirety of the state; the remaining territory is known as the Unorganized Borough. It is worth noting that the word *borough* derives from the Old English *burh*, which means “fortified settlement” (Lavelle, 2003).

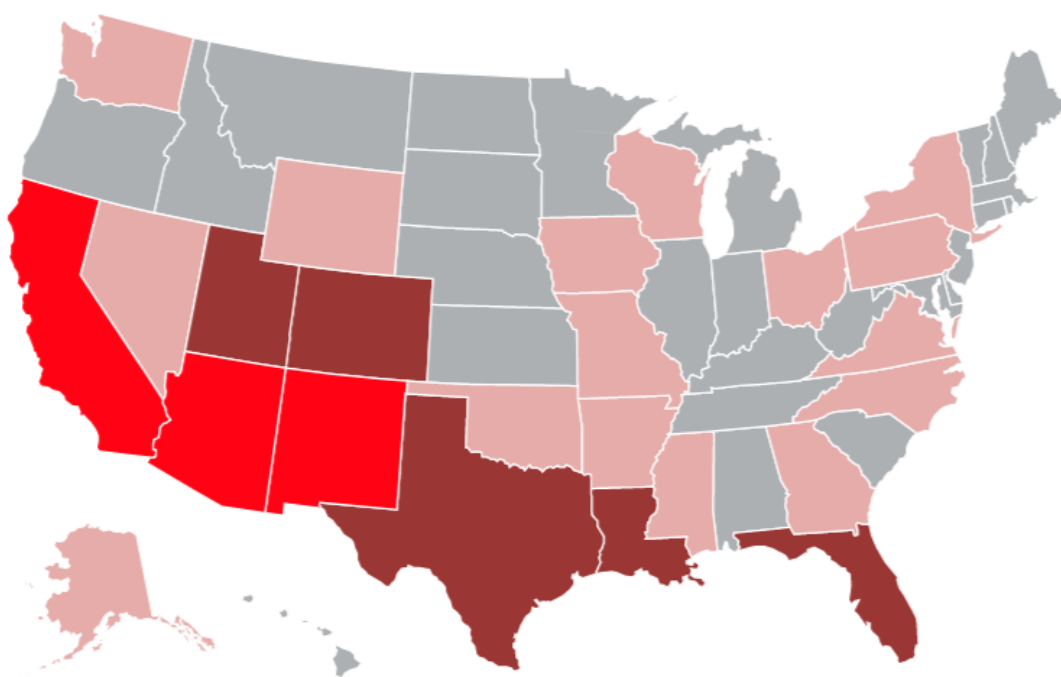
Additionally, there are some parts of the country that are designated as “county equivalents” (Census Office, 2010). This category includes localities that are comparable to counties, such as the District of Columbia, the boroughs and parishes, independent cities that do not belong to any county, and equivalent places in other U.S. territories.

Thus, there are 3,242 counties; this figure includes the 135 county equivalents in the states, as well as the District of Columbia and 100 county equivalents in other U.S. territories. Texas has the most counties (254), and Delaware has the fewest (three).

Map 1 shows the percentage of counties with Hispanic toponyms per state,⁴ divided into four categories: no counties with toponymic ties to Hispanic heritage or Spanish; up to 10% with such ties; from 10% to 50%; and more than 50%.

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⁴ Alaska’s unorganized borough includes a census designated place called Valdez-Cordova, whose name is linked to the expedition of Salvador Fidalgo in 1790.



MAP 1

	The names of over 50% of counties have some kind of relationship with Hispanic culture or the Spanish language.
	The names of 10%-50% of counties have some kind of relationship with Hispanic culture or the Spanish language.
	The names of 0.1%-10% of counties have some kind of relationship with Hispanic culture or the Spanish language.
	No counties have any kind of toponymic relationship with Hispanic culture or the Spanish language.

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As is clear from the map, the counties in the South and Southwest have the highest rate of toponyms related to Hispanic heritage or to Spanish. This certainly is not surprising, as Hispanic presence in these territories during and after the colonial era was much more notable than in the North.

It is important to note that if we were to consider the national percentage, we would find that 5% of counties have names related to the country's Hispanic legacy. This is not particularly useful as a reference, however, as there are more county-level divisions in the East than in the West or in much of the South. And, given that the West and the South are the regions with the strongest Hispanic influence, we must condition our total results. The differences between states are due to divergent population sizes and population densities, and to historical boundaries; there is no uniform approach to territorial division across all fifty states.

We believe it would be more useful to note that more than 10% of counties in 20% of states have Hispanic names and that, additionally, 50% of states have at least one county whose name is linked to Spanish or to Hispanic heritage.

Below, we will focus on those states with the highest percentages:

- California: Nearly 60% of the counties in California meet our study's toponymic criteria. While much of this is obviously due to Spain's major settlement and colonization efforts in the 18th century, subsequent Mexican control and the state's large Hispanic population are also key factors. Examples include the counties of Los Angeles, Plumas, Nevada, and San Francisco.
- Arizona: We have already discussed the importance of Arizona's past with Spain, which explains why the names of so many of its counties (such as La Paz and Santa Cruz) reflect a Spanish influence. In this case, it is important to specify that as many as five counties have names that originated in indigenous languages, but which were strongly influenced by Spanish presence in the region, resulting in the current version of those names. This is the case with Navajo, Apache, Gila, Maricopa, and Pima Counties.
- New Mexico: Here, too, there is a strong shared past with Spain, so most county names stem directly from colonial origins, either in Spanish or through Spanish influence on indigenous words. This accounts for over 50% of the counties.

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- Noteworthy among these is Valencia County, whose name is derived from the city in eastern Spain. Other examples include the counties of Guadalupe, Hidalgo, Río Arriba, and Socorro.
- Colorado: Around 30% of Colorado's county names can be linked to the state's Hispanic legacy or to the Spanish language. Most of these originated in the colonial era, although a substantial minority were named later. One example is San Miguel County, which emerged from the division of San Juan County; it was named after the San Miguel Mountains and San Miguel River, both of which were named during the colonial era.
 - Texas: Over 15% of Texan counties have names that are directly related to the state's Hispanic background. South Texas has the most, given its proximity to Mexico. Most of these names originated from the era of either Spanish or Mexican control. Especially noteworthy is Galveston County, which was named in honor of Bernardo de Gálvez, a hero of the American Revolutionary War. The counties of El Paso, Colorado, Blanco, and Bosque are good examples of Spanish-language toponyms that also reflect the state's Hispanic legacy.
 - Florida: Many of the faux Spanish county names described earlier are in Florida, thanks to its strong tourism sector. But given the penetration of Hispanic culture in the region, which began in 1513 and continues in the present day, it is not surprising that over 10% of counties have Spanish-derived names, such as León and Santa Rosa. The state is also home to two counties named after the Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto: DeSoto County and Hernando County.
 - Utah: As we described in the explanation of this state name, Spanish presence in Utah was more limited than it was elsewhere. Even so, at least 10% of the state's counties have names tied the Hispanosphere, including Utah County and San Juan County.
 - Louisiana: Though the state name is French, Louisiana was under Spanish control for an extended length of time, a legacy that is reflected in at least 10% of its counties. Of these, two were named in honor of Bernardo de Gálvez's wife

and another is linked to Hernando de Soto. Interestingly, one parish is named Iberia, after the Iberian Peninsula.

3.2 Municipalities

Municipalities are local governments established to provide general governance over a set area that generally aligns with a population, as opposed to counties, which encompass more than one municipality.

Our analysis of municipalities will include “incorporated places,” which fulfill the function of a municipal government. According to the Census Office (2010), these are a type of governmental unit incorporated under state law that has legally prescribed limits, powers, and functions. Municipalities can vary significantly in terms of size, as is reflected in the diversity of municipal governments in different areas.

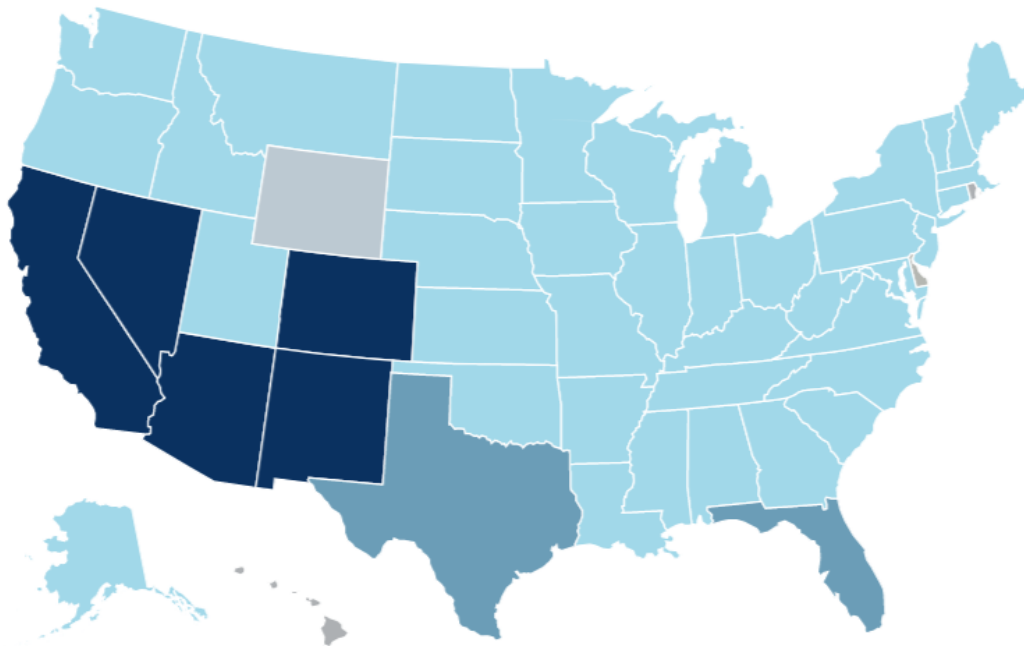
Depending on the state, the categories of incorporated places listed may be different: some only include cities and towns, while others, for example, may include independent villages or cities. The Census Office offers one example of a such a disparity (2010): in eleven states this category includes only cities, while the others states use various combinations to name incorporated places.

Local government in the U.S. also includes unincorporated areas. These typically refer to part of a county that does not belong to any municipality. Although these places may have Hispanic toponyms, they are not included in this analysis.

Given this diversity, for the purposes of comparison, we have chosen to analyze all localities that the Census Office designates as incorporated places. As with counties, there is a clear disparity in the number of municipalities in each state: for example, Illinois has 1,200 such places, while Delaware has only 57.

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Map 2, below, shows the percentage of municipalities per state with Spanish or culturally Hispanic names in four categories: no municipality with toponymic ties to Hispanic heritage or Spanish; up to 5% with such ties; from 5% to 10%; and more than 10%.



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MAP 2

	The names of over 10% of municipalities have some kind of relationship with Hispanic culture or the Spanish language.
	The names of 5%-10% of municipalities have some kind of relationship with Hispanic culture or the Spanish language.
	The names of 0.1%-5% of municipalities have some kind of relationship with Hispanic culture or the Spanish language.
	No municipalities have any kind of toponymic relationship with Hispanic culture or the Spanish language.

Again, we see that the southwestern states possess the most municipalities whose names have identifiable traces of Hispanic heritage or that somehow include the Spanish language.

However, the number of municipalities with names that meet these criteria, both relative to the size of each state's population and in general across the country, is lower than the equivalent figure for counties. Once again, this is due to an uneven population density and a higher number of urban hubs, and therefore municipalities, in regions where the Spanish colonial presence was less pronounced.

Additionally, the demographic explosion of the 19th and 20th centuries that resulted in the creation of new municipalities in many places across the country took place without a Spanish presence, and was carried out in large part by English speakers, meaning that the names given to new municipalities were mostly devoid of any links to Spanish or to those regions' Hispanic heritage.

Nevertheless, it is notable that all but four states have at least one municipality whose name is related to Hispanic heritage or the Spanish language. The figures here are lower than in the county-level analysis; only five states exceed 10%, while in Florida and Texas they are greater than 5%. The states with the highest figures are:

- New Mexico: Similar to at the county-level, this state has a high rate of municipalities with Spanish or culturally Hispanic names (40%). One interesting example is the city of Albuquerque, which was named after Francisco Fernández de la Cueva, the tenth Duke of Albuquerque, who was Viceroy of New Spain from 1702 to 1711 (Hixson, 1996).
- California: At 30%, California has the second highest rate of municipalities that meet our criteria. Notable among these is the city of Alhambra, named after the famous palace in Granada.
- Arizona: The names of 15% of Arizona's municipalities are from the Spanish language or have Hispanic roots, including Guadalupe, Casa Grande, and Nogales. As on the state and county levels, it is at the top of the list thanks to its history and geographic proximity to Mexico.

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- Nevada: Peculiarly, Nevada has a higher percentage of municipalities than counties with Spanish or culturally Hispanic names, as it has a very small number of municipalities relative to other states and, of this limited number, many (15%) have Hispanic names. These include Las Vegas, which was named following an 1829 expedition during which Antonio Armijo, a trader from Santa Fe, led a group of sixty to Los Angeles. His men included Rafael Rivera, a young Mexican explorer who left the group in search of a shortcut through the desert. He traveled west of the Colorado River and encountered what is now known as the Las Vegas Valley. After two weeks, Rivera was reunited with the rest of the expedition and led his companions there. Armijo's group noted the unusual fertility of the grasslands and meadows, and so the area was named *Las Vegas* ("The Meadows"), which would eventually become the name of the famed Nevadan city.
- Colorado: This Rocky Mountain state also exceeds 10%. Its counties have all kinds of Hispanic names, including faux constructions—such as the town of Campo, which was named in 1950—and colonial-era names. Notable are the towns of Durango and Granada, which were named after Spanish cities.
- Texas: This state does not quite reach 10% and, once again, as with county names, most of Texas's municipalities that have Spanish or culturally Hispanic names are located in the southern part of the state. These include De León, De Soto, Galveston, and Laredo, which illustrate the region's Hispanic legacy.
- Florida: Once again, Florida—around 10% of whose municipalities have Spanish or culturally Hispanic names—leads the pack in faux constructions, such as Los Gatos and Floranada. It is also home to Ebro and Oviedo, which directly reference the state's Spanish legacy, and which exist alongside many other municipalities whose names bear no trace of Florida's Hispanic heritage.

4. Conclusions

Toponymy is one of the many elements that help us assess Hispanic influence in the U.S., as well as the extensive legacy that the Hispanosphere and the country share. From this analysis, we can draw some conclusions that highlight the significance of Hispanic heritage in U.S. place names.

First, it is clear that Hispanic influence on toponymy is greatest in the southwestern states, followed by the southern and southeastern states. In fact, Arizona, California, Colorado, and New Mexico are ahead of the other states at every level of government analyzed here. They are followed by Texas, Florida, Nevada, Utah, and Louisiana in all categories.

This is directly related to the over 300-year-old legacy of Spanish presence in the territory. If we compare Maps 1 and 2 with a map of Spanish activity in the territory from the 16th to the 19th centuries, we find that the states with the most Spanish or culturally Hispanic place names fall within areas that were once controlled by Spain.

Furthermore, the states in the center, north, and east of the country have far fewer such place names, due to significantly reduced Spanish influence in those areas. It is worth noting, however, that practically all of these states have at least one municipality with a Spanish or culturally Hispanic name; furthermore, 50% of states have at least one county whose name meets these characteristics.

Many of the place names analyzed here also speak to the cultural exchange between the Hispanic world and indigenous populations. The Castilianization of native words reflects the connections that were formed between Spanish explorers and the region's native peoples.

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Additionally, many places throughout the country have taken the names of Spanish explorers, such as Hernando de Soto and Ponce de León, in remembrance of their exploits. Most of these names were bestowed in the post-colonial era and demonstrate that U.S. citizens were the ones to commemorate the historic legacy they share with the Hispanic world in general and Spain in particular. One clear example is *Hernando de Soto*, which appears in eight different place names. This same phenomenon can be observed in many cities' and states' symbols, which, centuries after the Spaniards' withdrawal, still recall the feats and leading figures of Spain's history in U.S. territory.

It is also worth highlighting the large number of U.S. municipalities and counties that share names with Spanish cities. In U.S. geography we find: Seville, Grenada, Salamanca, Madrid, Laredo, Durango, Valencia, Leon, Andalusia, Aragon, Oviedo, Ebro, Toledo, Corunna, and Navarre. Many of these cities are English translations from the Spanish, such as Seville for *Sevilla*, Andalusia for *Andalucía*, Navarre for *Navarra*, Corunna for *Coruña*, and Grenada for *Granada*. Others, like *Madrid*, have undergone small changes, as in the county of New Madrid. Many of these names—including Madrid, Granada, and Cadiz—are repeated throughout the U.S., including in states where there was never a significant Spanish presence, such as Iowa.

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The same is true of names originating in Central and South American cities and countries: throughout the U.S., there are toponyms based on countries such as Peru, Cuba, and Panama, and cities such as Bogota, Lima, and La Paz, reflecting the importance and heritage of the broader Ibero-American world. This is without even touching on the unincorporated areas, census tracts, neighborhoods and other territorial elements whose names also harken back to Hispanic heritage.

Hispanic legacy has always been a fundamental part of U.S. history. This study uses a toponymic analysis to offer a didactic view of the country's deep Hispanic roots. As it has demonstrated, there is a correlation between areas controlled by Spain during

the colonial era (with greater geographic and cultural closeness to Hispanic countries) and areas with more Hispanic toponyms. That heritage is not limited to those areas, however, as such names appear even in regions where there was never a Spanish presence.

Despite the diverse origins of U.S. place names—and even of their Hispanic toponymy—the data examined in this toponymic analysis prove the country’s undeniably Hispanic legacy and the major presence of Hispanic heritage and the Spanish language in U.S. history.

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