

# Country Mexicans

## Research on Mexican American country music fans

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<https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/country-mexicans>

Country Mexicans  
Sounding Mexican American Life, Love, and Belonging in Country Music



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### Abstract

The research project I'm in is called "Country Mexicans." Our research is about studying the interactions and perspectives of fans of American country music who are Mexican American. The director of the research is Nadine Hubbs, professor of Women's Studies and Music in the University of Michigan. Professor Hubbs has been collecting data by interviewing Mexican Americans living in Texas and California, using survey method, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews.

This year we made a project website and linked to relevant articles, books, and media produced by the researchers. Using the EndNote program, I also created a bibliography with resources such as journal articles and books for "Country Mexicans" research.

### Purpose

Our team expects to change knowledge and stereotypes around both American country music and Mexican Americans. Mexican Americans are often viewed as foreigners in this country, but they are actually the largest Latinx subgroup in the United States. Mexican American also make up a fast-growing fan group in American country music—a music that has often been viewed as low class, white, and even racist.

### Method and Observation

My research team's director, Dean (Nadine) Hubbs, professor of Women's Studies, Music, and American Culture in University of Michigan, has been conducting historical and musicological research in this realm, and empirical research including interviews, focus groups, and bar and dance club observations.

### -Observations from a country dance club, "Hillbilly's", located in McAllen, Texas-

Professor Hubbs visited the Texas Borderlands and collected data among Mexican American country music fans from a country dance club in McAllen metro area, called "Hillbilly's."

The McAllen metro area has a majority of Latinx community big community ranging from 92 to 100 percent of the local population.



The crowd inside the club were nearly all wearing boots, even in the triple-digit heat. They bore greater resemblance to the southwestern cowboy that replaced the "hillbilly" in country music in the 1930s to 1940s.

### -From focus group, which participants from the university town of Edinburg-

A couple of days after visiting "Hillbilly's," professor Hubbs led a focus group in the nearby university town of Edinburg. The group consisted of millennial Mexican American country fans.

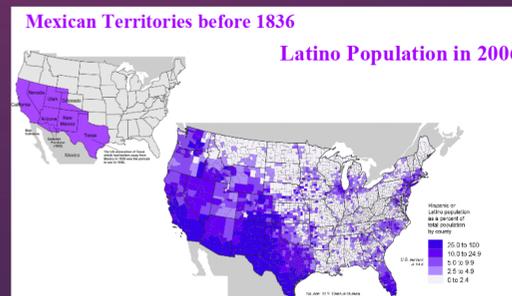
Professor Hubbs collected their responses concerning what they liked about country music. This question related very much with what Americanness meant to them. The result was quite a surprise. The participants described country music as uniquely relatable to their lives, feelings, and "Mexican values" of family, faith, hard work, morality, and patriotism.

The fans in the focus groups heard country music in terms of working-class life and felt attached to this aspect of the music, even as they pursued middle- and upper-class careers and lives. Whereas country music has often served as a manner of white working-class status, among Mexican American fans it may serve today as a music of class mobility, of middle-class status or transition up and out of the working class. Some participants invoked a country-music mantra, "Remember where you came from," to reconcile the delicate issues of rising out of the social class of one's family and childhood.

### -Looking at Mexican American country music fans in historical context-

"We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us!"

Country music is a means for Mexican American belonging. As fans suggest, country music and its culture also belong to Mexican Americans. Ranch, rodeo, buckaroo, cowboy boots and hats all come from Mexico—as do Texas, Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and part of Colorado.



### -Musicological aspects of the resemblance between country music and its Mexican American fans-



Mexican American country music fans cite the relatability of culture, value, and emotions in country music. There also is a possible similarity between *corrido*, a narrative ballad form originating in Northern Mexico in the late nineteenth century (and still thriving today), and country music. Discussing the appeal of country music to Mexican American listeners, focus group participants praised country lyrics and instrumentals. *Corrido* is a traditional Mexican music that tells stories. There is some similarity of instrumentation between *corrido* and country music. The instrumentation of *corrido* usually consists of fiddle, guitar, percussion, and brass instruments, typically trumpet.

"Coco" (Pixar Animation Studios and Walt Disney), is one of the most familiar sources of *corrido* to the U.S. public. Throughout the film, there is a lot of *corrido* music, and when *corrido* is played, audiences often see the appearance of the cowboy.



### Conclusion/Future research

Right now, we don't have a final conclusion. Our team is still on process of researching Mexican American country music fans. However, we have arrived to a point to ask people to rethink the notion of "belonging," especially in these days. These days, a lot of people make barriers to each other or certain groups. Immigration has been a sensitive issue being debated in the political field. However, Mexican American country music fans stand as important roles to break the stereotypes and barriers people build against each other when the others don't seem similar to them. As Mexican American country music fans suggested, American country music belongs to its Mexican American fans. Of course, all popular music belongs to its fans; that's always been a crucial fact of music fandom. But these Borderlands country lovers, millennials well educated in Chicana history, were suggesting something more than that.