LATIN@S & CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Fact Sheet
By José Luis Morín

Below are some facts about Latina/os and criminal justice. For more information, see *Latinos and Criminal Justice: An Encyclopedia*, edited by José Luis Morín (Greenwood, 2016).

DEMOGRAPHICS

- Close to three-out-of-four (74%) of Latina/os are U.S. citizens.
- Only 37 percent of Latina/os were foreign-born in 2012.
- As the Latina/os population increased over the last several decades, crime dropped significantly throughout the United States. For example, the U.S. homicide rate diminished by almost half (49%), from 9.3 homicides per 100,000 U.S. residents in 1992 to 4.7 in 2011—the lowest level since 1963—according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

LATIN@ IMMIGRANTS AND CRIME

- Mexicans are not crossing the southern border en masse. The Pew Research Center reports that more Mexicans have been leaving the United States than coming into the United States—a trend that has been evident since 2009. Family reunification is a primary reason for the return migration.
- Immigrants to the United States, including Mexicans and other Latina/os have lower crime, arrest, and incarceration rates than those who are born in the United States. Research suggests that Mexicans and other Latina/os immigrants are less prone to criminal behavior than U.S. born.
- Research suggests that immigration helps stabilize communities, stimulating economic activity in neighborhoods and reducing criminality.
- States with greater immigration rates tend to have some of the lowest crime rates in the country, including states that border Mexico, such as Arizona.

MASS INCARCERATION

- With more than 60 percent of persons in prison being persons of color, Latina/os represented 21.6 percent of persons in state and federal prisons in 2013, even though they made up only 17 percent of the overall U.S. population.
- Although African American incarceration rates exceed that of Latina/os, Latino men are still 2.4 times more likely to be incarcerated than white men.
- One-in-six Latino men are likely to be imprisoned in their lifetime as compared to 1-in-17 white men and 1-in-3 African American men.
• Latinas are incarcerated at 1.4 times the rate of white women—71 per 100,000 as opposed to 51 per 100,000 for white women.

POLICING

• Tensions between the police and Latina/o communities have a long history in the United States. For instance, the Texas Rangers, as early as 1919, were known to engage in the use of excessive force, murder, and intimidation against Mexicans. In the 1940s, the LAPD targeted the zoot suiters, young Mexican Americans who dared to wear flamboyant garments as a form of self-expression and identity.

• In more recent years, Latina/os have continued to express low confidence in the police. A 1997 survey in New York City showed that 73 percent of Latina/os believed that police brutality was a severe.

• In a 2009 survey by Pew Hispanic Center, only 45 percent of Latina/os nationally believed that police treat their community fairly, compared to 74 percent of whites.

• In 2010, Latina/os were 28.6 percent of the population in New York City, but were 32% of those stopped by police in New York City. Whites, who were 33.3% of the city’s population, were stopped at a rate of only 10.3 percent over that same period.

• A federal court in 2013 held that the police were carrying out stops and frisks against Latina/os and African Americans in violation of the U.S. Constitution, based on practices that included encouraging officers to “target the right people.”

DRUGS

• In general, Latina/os use illegal drugs at a lesser rate than those of most other groups in the United States, and it is especially true when comparing Latinas/os with whites, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Data Archive.

• Data for 2013 for persons 12 years old or older show that the rate of previous-month illicit drug use by whites was 9.5 percent, and Latina/os' previous-month illegal drug use was 8.8 percent, according to U.S. States Department of Health and Human Services National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

• In 2013, for every category of substances—cigarettes, alcohol, cocaine, crack, hallucinogens, heroin, inhalants, marijuana, pain relievers, sedatives, stimulants, and tranquilizers—Latina/o use is lower than for whites.

• In fact, previous month illicit drug use data by race/ethnicity from 2002 through 2013 indicate that Latina/os, as a group, consistently use illegal drugs at lower rates than whites.

• In spite of the evidence that Latina/o drug use, generally, is lower than whites, Latina/os are arrested and incarcerated at greater rates than whites for drug offenses.

HATE CRIMES

• According to the FBI, hate crimes targeting Latina/os increased 40 percent in the United States from 2003 to 2007, coinciding with a surge in anti-immigrant propaganda by hate groups.

• The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that in 2012, Latina/os endured higher rates of violent hate crime than did whites and African Americans—2.0 victimizations per 1,000 residents for Latina/os, as compared to 0.8 per 1,000 for whites, and 1.1 per 1,000 for African Americans.

• From 2011 to 2012, hate crimes against Latina/os more than tripled, according the Bureau of Justice Statistics.
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• Data suggests that a greater percentage of LGBTQ Latinx populations are victimized by anti-LGBTQ hate violence than other racial and ethnic groups in cities with sizable numbers of Latinx populations, such as in Los Angeles and New York.

LATIN@S AND MEDIA

• Studies show that Latina/os and African Americans are most often disproportionately overrepresented as violent offenders on the evening news compared to actual crimes they commit, while whites are underrepresented as violent offenders in proportion to actual crimes they commit.

• Less than 1 percent of news stories are about Latina/os, with most of those stories concerning Latina/os and crime.

• Latina/o participation as news anchors or executive producers remains extremely low.

• Latina/o participation and visibility in the entertainment media remains extremely limited at every level.

• More Latina/os were being depicted as criminals on TV from 2012 to 2013 (24.2%) than in 1994 (6%).

• Gallop reported that in 2015, seven in 10 said there is more crime in the U.S. now than there was a year ago—up from 63% in 2014—even though government data show serious crime decreasing almost every year since 1994. Gallop’s study suggests that news media reports probably have a significant impact on U.S. perceptions of crime.

Bibliography


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For more information, see *Latinos and Criminal Justice: An Encyclopedia*, edited by José Luis Morín (Greenwood, 2016).

"This is a thoroughly researched, informative, and all-inclusive reference source for researchers looking for information in this area. It is recommended for most public libraries and will be a particularly important addition to academic libraries, especially those institutions with criminal-justice programs and courses."—Booklist