

HISPANIC CRIME AND VICTIMIZATION IN NORTH CAROLINA

This report presents demographical and criminal information regarding the Hispanic and Latino populations in North Carolina. Basic population estimates and projections are presented in an effort to document the current, and projected, growth of this population at both the national and state levels. Currently crime, arrest, and correctional data are not being compiled by ethnicity on a statewide basis, and consequently the information presented within this report was compiled by surveying members of the criminal justice system and Hispanic/Latino service providers.

A brief 15 item exploratory phone survey was administered to 18 separate law enforcement agencies, six juvenile chief court counselors, seven county probation/parole agencies, and two agencies which provide services for the Hispanic/Latino communities. These agencies were selected to maximize statewide geographical representation and also on the number of Hispanics/Latinos within the county. Counties with high, medium, and low Hispanic/Latino populations were included in order to develop a more representative profile of the state. Information on jail and detention center populations was obtained by adding several questions to another survey which was concurrently administered during the same time as this study. Responses were obtained from 41 separate county jail and detention facilities.

Information was requested in three primary areas. Questions were asked to illuminate trends in the current and future criminal activity among members of the Hispanic/Latino communities and were directed at exploring victimization patterns of this ethnic group. Questions were also included which sought to elucidate the needs of the criminal justice system when responding to this special population.

Hispanic/Latino Population Estimates and Projections

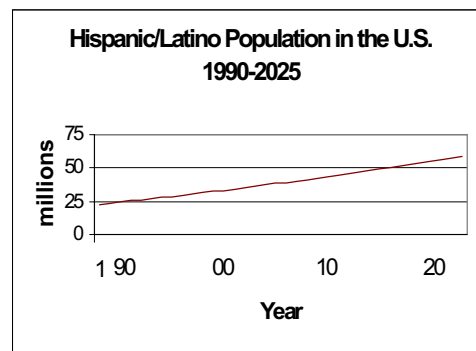


Figure 1

The chart above documents the projected growth in this population from 1990 to 2025. The 1990 Census estimated there were 22,549,000 Hispanics in the United States. By the year 2025 the Census Bureau estimates there will be 59,111,000 individuals who report an Hispanic/Latino ethnic background. If this estimate holds true this would represent a 162 percent increase in this population (United States Census Bureau, 1995).

The Census Bureau also estimates that by the year 2050 there could be 96,508,000 Hispanic/Latinos in the U.S. This would equate to a growth of 328 percent over the 1990 Census figures (United States Census Bureau, 1993).¹

¹ This population estimate reflects a mid range estimate. The Census Bureau also calculates low and high estimates which are 62,230,000 or 133,106,000 for the Hispanic population.

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In 1990 the Hispanic/Latino population accounted for nine percent of the U.S. population. By 2050 this ethnic group could account for between 22 and 25.5 percent of the U.S. population. Contrasted with the Caucasian and African American population estimates, the Hispanic/Latino population is by far the fastest growing of the three. The Caucasian population could grow from two to 82 percent between 1990 and 2050, while the African American population could grow from a conservative 45 percent to a high of 167 percent (United States Census Bureau, 1996).

The North Carolina Hispanic/Latino population has grown considerably since 1990. The number of people with Hispanic/Latino ethnic backgrounds grew from 77,547 in 1990 to 134,384 in 1996. This represents an increase of 73 percent. As Figure 2 illustrates, every county experienced an increase in its Hispanic/Latino population during this period.

The largest growth occurred in Currituck County (124%), Yancey County (114%), Brunswick County (110%), Pender County (108%), Stokes County (106%), Union and Wake Counties (103%) and Dare County (102%). The lowest growth occurred in Martin and Northampton Counties (31% and 23%) (United States Census Bureau, 1997).

As Figure 3 on the next page depicts, the highest concentration of Hispanic/Latino people can be found in Cumberland County (21,567), Mecklenburg County (12,844), Onslow County (11,697), Wake County (11,227), Guilford County (5,022), Forsyth County (3,717) and Durham County (3,466). The remaining counties had fewer than 3,000 Hispanic/Latinos as reported by the Census Bureau for 1996. Twelve counties recorded an Hispanic/Latino population of less than 100 individuals: Anson, Bertie, Camden, Clay, Gates, Graham, Hyde, Jones, Mitchell, Perquimans, Tyrrell, Washington (United States Census Bureau, 1997).

Figure 2

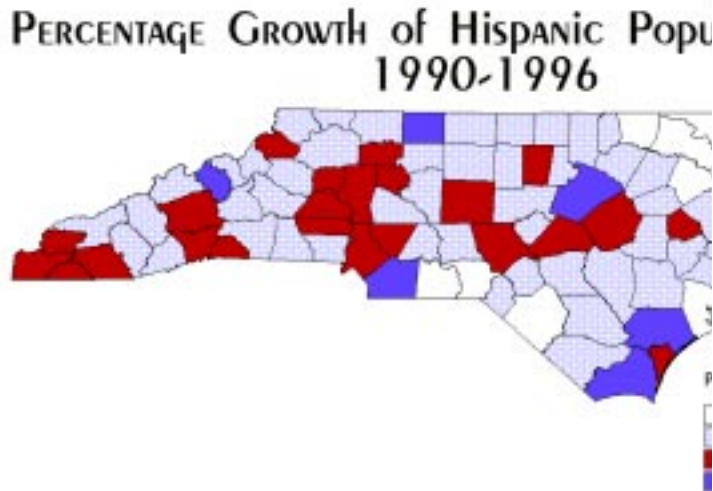
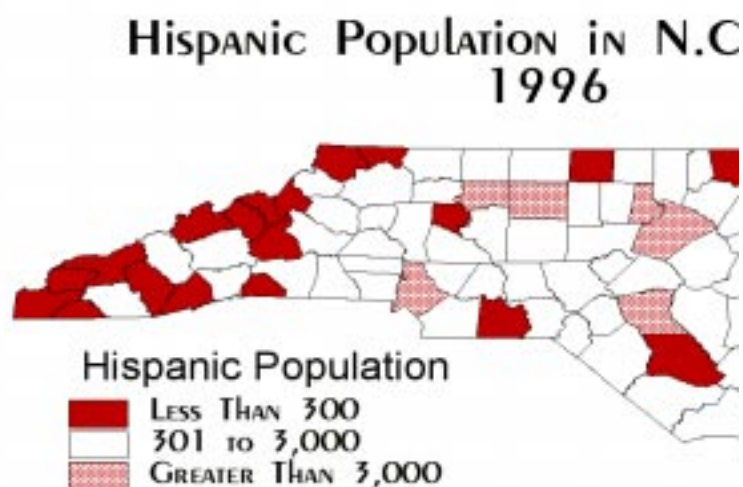


Figure 3



Census Bureau estimates suggest that the state's Hispanic/Latino population could swell to 210,000 by the year 2025. This would equate to an increase of 171 percent over the 1990 population and exceed the expected growth in the national Hispanic/Latino population. This projected growth is three times larger than the projected growth for the African American population (53%) and nearly five times greater than the projected growth within the Caucasian population (37%). Despite this projected growth the Hispanic/Latino population will still remain a relatively small minority group. In 1990 this group accounted for 1.2 % of the state's population and by 2025 Hispanic/Latinos will constitute 2.2 percent of the state's population (United States Census Bureau, 1995).

Note: The 1990 Census has received considerable criticism surrounding the underestimation of the Hispanic population at both the national and state levels. Some estimates suggest that the Hispanic population may actually be ten times greater, in some areas, than Census estimates (Schulman, 1998). This may be a result of not locating or counting illegal immigrants and also an inability to count transient populations, such as seasonal migrant workers, who frequently do not have permanent residences.

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Hispanic/Latino Victims

Twelve of the total 33 (36%) survey respondents reported a perception that crimes against members of the Hispanic/Latino population had increased within their respective jurisdictions. Respondents reported that crimes against this group had increased between 3% and 500% over the last five years. The average perceived increase was 65% over the last five years.

Aggravated assault, robbery, and burglary were the three most commonly reported offenses which are perpetrated against Hispanic/Latino individuals. Larceny, fraud, domestic violence, and simple assault were also noted as being offenses which have been committed against this group.

Robbery and burglary of Hispanic/Latino persons, and their homes, appear to be common offenses because many members of this population especially newly arrived immigrants and illegal aliens, carry large sums of money and/or retain large amounts within their homes. Conversations with members of the criminal justice system and Hispanic/Latino service providers indicate that a great number of Hispanic/Latino individuals do not understand the criminal justice system and the banking industry. These factors plus the common language barrier preclude many persons from establishing checking and savings accounts. Also, many individuals do not possess the required documentation, i.e. driver's license or social security card, to establish a bank account. Consequently, these people become far more vulnerable to robbery and are often considered easy and readily accessible targets for criminal victimization.

In addition to these factors Hispanic/Latino victims also differ from other victims in that there appears to be a more pronounced lack of trust in the criminal justice system. Many victims mistrust the police, of whom many were corrupt in their native lands, and consequently do not report their victimizations.

Hispanic/Latino Offenders

Sixty-four percent of the survey respondents reported that they have witnessed changes in crimes which are committed by Hispanic/Latino offenders. Of those respondents who reported an increase in the number of Hispanic/Latino offenders, 18% noted an increase of greater than 50%. The reported changes ranged from 2% to 250% with an average increase of 64% being observed within the last five years.

Larceny, D.W.I., and aggravated assault were the three most common crimes which were recorded as being prevalent among Hispanic/Latino offenders. Drug-related offenses, homicide, and simple assault were also reported as being common offenses which are committed by members of the Hispanic/Latino community.

The presence of a language barrier was the overwhelming factor that differentiates Hispanic/Latino offenders from other offenders. Nearly 50% reported this barrier, or an inability to effectively communicate, as the major obstacle when dealing with this group of offenders. A lack of background information, such as criminal history records and other identifying documents, was mentioned as a significant barrier to effectively identifying suspects and managing Hispanic/Latino offenders. Many of these offenders also do not understand our criminal justice and legal systems which further exacerbates the problem.

Respondents also reported that they do anticipate changes within the Hispanic/Latino population and criminal offending patterns over the next 10 years: 82% responded in the affirmative to this question.

Court data on the number of driving while impaired charges, which were filed statewide in fiscal year 1996/97, indicate that there were 84,766 total charges filed. Sixty-three percent of these involved Caucasian defendants (53,887), twenty-five percent involved African American defendants (21,054) and only four percent involved Hispanic/Latino defendants (3,007). While the Hispanic/Latino percentage seems small, an analysis of the rates paints a dramatically different picture. Charges were filed against Caucasian drivers at a rate of 992 per 100,000 Caucasians. Charges

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were filed against African Americans at a rate of 1,318 per 100,000 African Americans. The rate for the Hispanic defendants grossly exceeded the rates of the other two groups. Charges were filed against Hispanic/Latino impaired drivers at a rate of 3,007 per 100,000 (North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts, 1998).

Results from a survey of jail and detention officers indicate that the number of Hispanic/Latinos who are admitted to jail and detention facilities has increased. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents indicated they had witnessed more inmate admissions in which the person was of Hispanic/Latino origin. Driving while impaired is a common offense for which many Hispanic/Latinos are being detained. Fifty-six percent of the surveyed detention officers reported that D.W.I.s were common among their incarcerated Hispanic/Latino inmates. Domestic violence, alcohol related offenses, such as drunk and disruptive, and drug related charges were also commonplace among this detainee population.

Motor vehicle related offenses appear to be extremely common among Hispanic/Latino offenders. Besides D.W.I.s, many detainees are incarcerated for driving with no operator's license or driving while their license has been suspended or revoked. Fictitious licenses and tags and the lack of car insurance were also cited as common offenses. Sixty-three percent of the respondents reported that other traffic and driving charges, exclusive of D.W.I. offenses, were common among their Hispanic/Latino detainees.

Criminal Justice System Needs and Needs Among the Hispanic/Latino Community

Overcoming the language differences was the most urgent need among members of the criminal justice system. Numerous respondents reported a need for more Spanish-speaking officers. This could be accomplished by offering Spanish courses, either in basic training or as in-service training, and by recruiting more bilingual officers. In a similar vein the need for more and more readily accessible interpreters was suggested as a means of bridging this cultural difference.

Cultural diversity training was also suggested as a way for members of the criminal justice system to more effectively serve the Hispanic/Latino population. The lack of reliable and accurate criminal history and other background data was also noted as a problem that will have to be addressed in the future.

Language differences were also the most pressing need for members of the Hispanic/Latino community. More English courses were advocated as well as the need to offer more information in Spanish. Education appears to be a key need within this community. Educating the Hispanic/Latino population about our criminal justice and legal systems was suggested as one means of assisting members of this community. Educational programs are also needed that instruct individuals on topics such as opening and maintaining a bank account and on how to properly obtain a driver's license and maintain valid car registration and insurance. Crime prevention techniques and information about victims' services were also listed as viable needs for this community.

Jail and detention survey respondents noted very similar problems and needs of the Hispanic/Latino inmate population as discussed above. The language barrier, and the need to overcome it, was the most urgent need for this group of detainees. Survey respondents noted an inability to effectively communicate with Spanish speaking offenders and also expressed a need for Spanish and English classes, as well as the desire to find interpreters for their facilities.

Respondents were also queried about current programs and services which have been, or are currently, being offered by their agencies. Thirty-nine percent of the survey respondents were aware of programs which were specifically implemented with respect to the Hispanic/Latino population within their respective communities. In addition to offering Spanish and English language courses, a plethora of innovative programs and services were reported. The provision of Hispanic attorneys, an Hispanic hotline, Hispanic advisory groups, and Spanish public service announcements have all been implemented across the state.

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Despite the sizeable projected population increase that is predicted for North Carolina, and the fact that 82 percent of the respondents predicted an increase in the number of Hispanic/Latinos and their offending patterns, only 30% of those surveyed reported that they had future plans to either begin, or increase, programs and services for this ethnic group.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As we began conducting our survey with the various agencies throughout the state, it became clear that there are several things the criminal justice system can do to better accommodate the Hispanic population. The major problem that was apparent across the state was the language barrier. Because so many Hispanic victims and offenders do not speak English, this places a heavy burden on our criminal justice system. Bilingual education, both for Hispanics and for state and local employees who come in contact with Hispanics, would be very helpful. Bilingual education would also greatly enhance the Hispanic population's ability to make the transition into our society. The provision of qualified interpreters would also serve as a means of alleviating these linguistic differences.

There is also a tremendous need in the Hispanic population to become educated on how the criminal justice system works and crime prevention techniques. Because the criminal justice system is so different in other countries, Hispanics are very susceptible to crime. In many other countries, the criminal justice system is very corrupt and people don't trust law enforcement officials. Many people in foreign countries also don't trust banks; therefore they carry large sums of money on them. This makes Hispanics prime targets for robberies and other types of crime. As immigrants begin to migrate into our country, they bring many of these ideas along with them. We must put in place some type of system that is designated to educate these people on our type of criminal justice system and convey techniques that may help them fight crime. Lastly, cultural diversity and sensitivity training should be implemented in many criminal justice agencies. Because so many officials come in contact with Hispanics and don't realize many of the issues outlined earlier, they are often insensitive to the

cultural differences. Our societies are in fact very different; therefore we have a great need to put in place a tool that will educate one on the differences and how we can better accommodate others into our society.

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