

Immigrants and their children are more likely to be profiled for citizenship

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Law enforcement officials are most likely to ask first- or second-generation Latinos for papers proving their right to be in the US. This is according to a study published in Springer's journal *Race and Social Problems*. Lead author, Maria Cristina Morales of the University of Texas at El Paso in the US, says the findings are important given that US law enforcement officers are increasingly required to make distinctions between citizens and non-citizens living along the border with Mexico.

Research has shown that despite often living in poorer communities, Latino immigrants are less likely to be involved in criminal activity than African-Americans, whites or US citizens of Latin descent. However, the activities of US [law enforcement](#) officials are often guided by specific racial profiles and ideas, which has been exacerbated in recent years by stricter immigration policing and legislation.

Morales and her colleagues investigated so-called [citizenship](#) profiling by law officials. Their conclusions were drawn from interviews in 2014 with 563 people living in 46 neighborhoods in El Paso County in the state of Texas, which shares a border with Mexico.

"Race or ethnicity may be the initial indicator that [law enforcement officers](#) use when deciding whether to stop or search a person, but cultural characteristics associated with 'foreignness' such as English language fluency, accents, certain types of clothing, and a lack of understanding of mainstream norms in the US also play a role," explains Morales. "Citizenship profiling therefore describes the perceptions of

who may be undocumented or not a legal resident."

The study found that first- and second-generation Latinos were more likely to be questioned about their citizenship status than those who had been living in the US for longer, irrespective of their sex, age or the neighborhood they live in. According to the researchers, the findings imply that first- and second-generation people Latinos are more often put under surveillance and that their freedom is more constricted than others.

"Particularly telling are second-generation Latinos who are disproportionately questioned about citizenship by law enforcement despite being US citizens," says Morales.

The socio-economic status of a neighborhood did not influence the likelihood of its residents being questioned about their citizenship paperwork. Interestingly, citizenship profiling occurred in communities with medium population density of Latinos rather than those from overwhelmingly Latino neighborhoods.

Studies have shown that this is because residents of mixed [neighborhoods](#) are more mobile and socially integrated than residents of segregated immigration enclaves. They move around more within the city at large, and therefore their chances are higher that they come into contact with [law enforcement officials](#).

The researchers emphasize that police procedures and the types of identification accepted and considered legal must be evaluated. This is important given that even minor traffic infringements are known to be sufficient reason to have someone deported.

More information: Maria Cristina Morales et al, Variations in Citizenship Profiling by Generational Status: Individual and

Neighborhood Characteristics of Latina/os Questioned by Law Enforcement About Their Legal Status, *Race and Social Problems* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s12552-018-9235-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12552-018-9235-3)

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