

Latin American and Middle Eastern Discrimination in America:

Shared Discrimination Following Changes to Government

Topic Assigned: Latin Americans and Middle Eastern Americans

Description: This issue brief discusses an intersection that conjoins Latin Americans and Middle Eastern Americans who have experienced advanced discrimination in the United States as a result of drastic events that have altered the government and the public's perspective on these ethnic groups. In terms of the Latin American community, discrimination escalated following the intensification of the debate on immigration, which spawned the strict immigration law in Arizona: S.B. 1070; in terms of Middle Eastern peoples, discrimination escalated following the attack on the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001.

Key Words: Discrimination, Racial profiling, Terrorism, National Security, Stereotype

Key Points: Italicized in brief

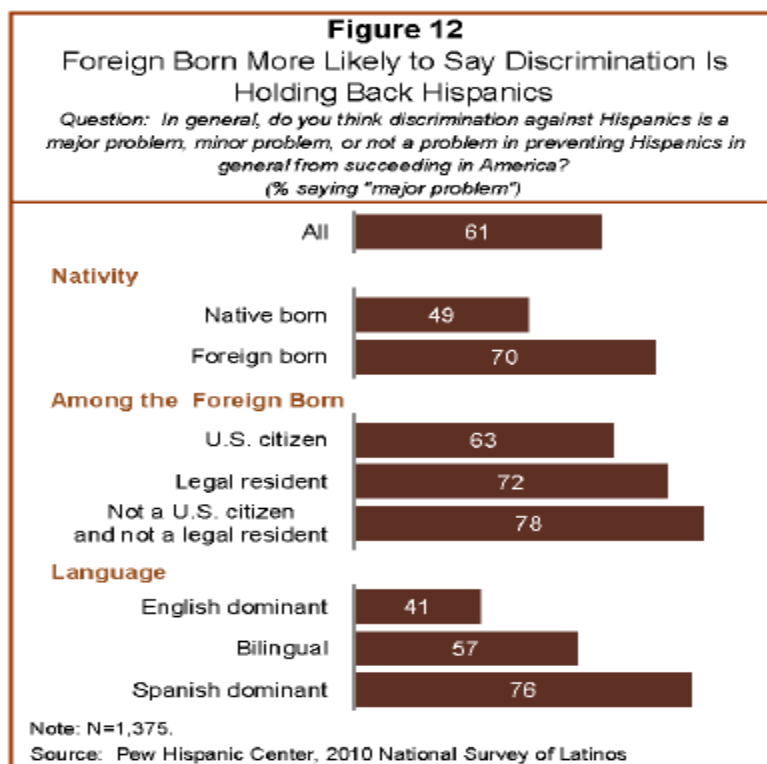
Middle Eastern Americans and Latin Americans, historically, have been victims of discrimination in the United States in the same manner as other non-white ethnicities. Many individuals of both groups are able to assimilate, but others are deemed too different or not of proper skin tone to be considered acceptable to white society. The illegal immigration problem

regarding Latin Americans, as well as the tragedy of 9/11 regarding Middle Eastern Americans has only heightened an appearance-based discrimination against these two groups. Middle Eastern Americans who wear clothes specific to their cultures, or Latin Americans who speak Spanish, may be stereotyped as threats to society even though most members of these groups are not responsible for the recent issues.

On April 23, 2010, Arizona passed what is arguably the harshest immigration law to date, targeting illegal aliens in the state. This law is extremely controversial because many argue that it promotes discrimination and racial profiling by police officials. *The law, S.B.1070, states in one of its articles "A Law Enforcement Officer, without a warrant, may arrest a person if the officer has probable cause to believe that the person has committed any public offense that*



makes the person removable from the United States” (1). The problem with this article is that the “probable cause” element of determining whether or not a person has permitted a public offense is solely up to the judgment of the police officer. It can be contended that law enforcement officials have the capacity to make these judgments, however the general public is not wholly in agreement with that level of assigned authority. Such authority allows for the possibility of prejudice without probable cause. Many people express that S.B. 1070 focuses on Mexicans, given the large influx of Mexican immigrants and thus the increased likelihood that not all are documented. Studies show 12.7 million Mexican immigrants lived in the United States since 2008, seventeen times the amount in 1970. *Estimates show over half of the Mexican immigrants in the United States are unauthorized, but the total estimated number of illegal immigrants is 11.9 million.* Nonetheless this is only an estimate and is definitely subject to severe scrutiny. S.B. 1070 did not help to quench the fiery debate on immigration, as hate crimes continue to plague the nation, especially in California, Texas, and still, Arizona. *In a general sense, the debate has caused many people to assume that any Mexican or, in general, Latin American that they come across is an illegal immigrant.*

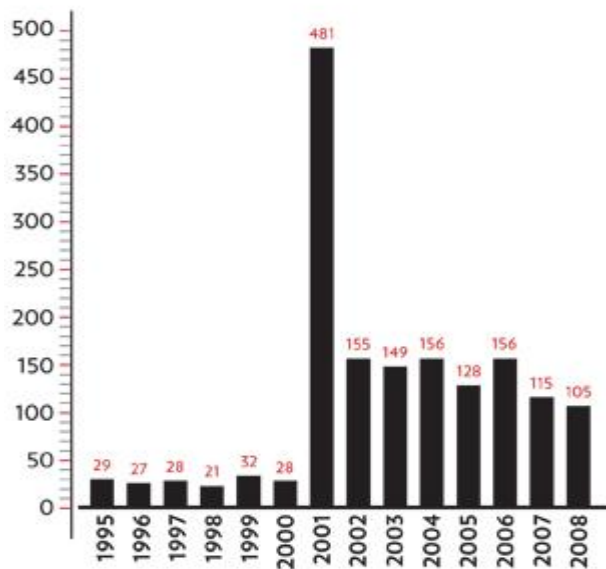


The 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers devastated the people of United States as well as their trust in national security. Government officials, under the direction of George W. Bush, implemented stricter regulations on security procedures, especially those having to do with travel systems, i.e. travel by airplane. *An unfortunate result of the ethnicity of the members involved in the attack was that it had a negative effect on the way in which people viewed the idea of terrorism, and terrorists.* Many Americans began to classify terrorists as having a certain “look.” This generally

translated into being from the Middle East. Although the Middle East's boundaries are still under dispute, countries such as Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan can be said to fall within the boundaries. Discrimination against Middle Eastern people in America has taken three forms: religious, language-based, and appearance-based; those who identify as adherents to a religion specific to the Middle Eastern culture, those who speak a language specific to the Middle Eastern regions, and those who physically identify with the expected appearance of an individual from the Middle East. After 9/11, out of a thousand Middle Eastern American New Yorkers surveyed, about 69%



Anti-Islamic Hate Crime Incidents
1995-2008



said they felt subjected to discrimination or harassment due to their ethnicity. This harassment took the form of verbal and physical assault; in some cases Muslim women had their hijabs pulled off and others were spat on. The controversy remains as security procedures continue to discriminate against Middle Eastern Americans and Latin Americans, and the government continues to find more intrusive ways to ensure national security. Such procedures threaten the privacy and security of legal immigrants already in the United States, who are bound to suffer.

IMAGE SOURCES

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