

## Perceptions and Ethnicity

National surveys from the CATO Institute and Pew Research Center reveal ethnic differences in public perceptions of local law enforcement and in how officers view their jobs. Understanding these differences is key to building trust in communities.

*How the public views law enforcement.* About the same share of **Hispanics** and non-Hispanic whites are highly satisfied with their own encounters with police (66% vs. 70%). However, a higher share of **Hispanics** report that police have used abusive language or profanity during these encounters (22% vs. 15%), and that they know someone who has been physically mistreated by police (27% vs. 18%).

A smaller share of **Hispanics** give police high ratings for enforcing the law (49% vs. 64%) and report that they are highly confident that their local police departments treat all racial groups equally (42% vs. 64%).<sup>1</sup>

*How officers view their jobs.* A similar share of **Hispanic** and non-Hispanic white officers report that the public understands the risks and challenges they face on the job “not well at all” (42% of both groups), and that relations between police and Hispanics in their community are “excellent” or “good” (71% vs. 76%).

When asked about their role in identifying undocumented immigrants, a higher share of **Hispanic officers** report it should be left mainly to federal authorities (60% vs. 41%) and a smaller share of **Hispanic officers** report that local police should take an active role in this process (38% vs. 59%). In dealing with the public, a higher share of **Hispanic officers** report that it is “very important” for officers to have detailed knowledge of the people and cultures within their communities (78% vs. 69%).<sup>5</sup>

**Hispanic definition used here:** An ethnicity that refers to those who identify themselves as “Spanish,” or “Hispanic origin,” or “Latino.” Hispanics may be of any race.

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### SOURCES FOR DATA CITED HERE :

<sup>1</sup> **CATO.** 2016. Policing in America: Understanding Public Attitudes Toward the Police. Results from a National Survey. Available at <https://www.cato.org/survey-reports/policing-america>.

<sup>2</sup> **US Census Bureau.** 2018 American Community Survey, Single-year Estimates. Data retrieved from [data.census.gov](https://data.census.gov).

<sup>3</sup> **US Bureau of Justice Statistics.** 2016. Local Police Departments, 2016: Personnel. NCJ 252835. Available at <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/lpd16p.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> **US Bureau of Justice Statistics.** 2016. Sheriffs' Offices, 2016: Personnel. NCJ 252834. Available at <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/so16p.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> **Pew Research Center.** 2017. Behind the Badge: Amid protests and calls for reform, how police view their jobs, key issues and recent fatal encounters between blacks and police. Available at <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2017/01/11/behind-the-badge/>.



The Idaho Commission on Hispanic Affairs is a non-partisan state agency that provides services to the Hispanic community and serves as a liaison between the community and government entities. The Commission researches problems and issues facing Idaho's Hispanic community and identifies solutions to recommend to the governor, legislature, and other organizations. [icha.idaho.gov](http://icha.idaho.gov)

## HISPANICS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT: TOOLS THAT BUILD TRUST

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### Highlights

National research, as well as anecdotal evidence from Idaho, indicates that local law enforcement agencies face challenges in building trust with Hispanic residents. These challenges include a shortage of Hispanic officers and support staff; language and cultural barriers; fear of police; and tensions around immigration enforcement.

These challenges have consequences for public safety. Nationwide, 78% of non-Hispanics say they would definitely report a crime they had witnessed, compared to only 57% of Hispanics.<sup>1</sup>

Here, we suggest tools that communities and law enforcement agencies can use to improve public safety by building relationships of trust. Success stories from around the country suggest promising strategies to improve police-community interactions:

- Reducing language barriers through interpreters, Spanish-speaking officers, and language training;
- Using education to help officers and Hispanic community members to understand each other better;
- Building relationships through outreach to community members and young people in particular; and
- Helping people better understand the role of local law enforcement, including responsibilities for immigration enforcement, if any.

### A Snapshot of Idaho Hispanics

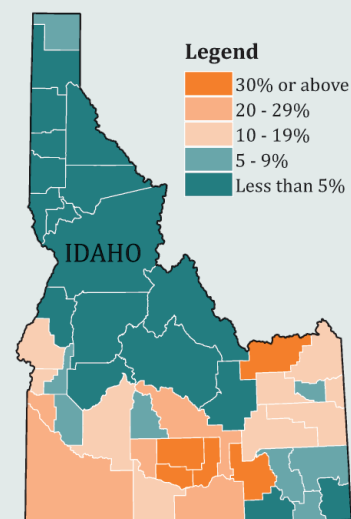
The Hispanic population in Idaho grew an average of 9% per year in the 1990s, 7% in the 2000s, and 3% from 2010-2018. Since 2010, the population growth rate of Idaho's Hispanics has been twice as high as that of non-Hispanics, and some rural counties would have lost population if not for Hispanic growth.

Hispanics are a young population, with a median age of 25 years compared to 39 years among non-Hispanics. Nine-in-ten of Idaho's roughly 223,000 Hispanics live in the southern half of the state.

Most of Idaho's Hispanics are US citizens, either because they were born here (71%) or became naturalized citizens (9%). Of Idaho's roughly 64,000 foreign-born Hispanics, 85% arrived before 2010.

About two-thirds of Idaho's Hispanics speak English only or speak English “very well.”<sup>2</sup>

### PERCENT HISPANIC 2018



SOURCE: US Census Bureau

TOOLS THAT BUILD TRUST

Reducing Language Barriers

Public safety depends on good communication. When officers and community members don’t speak the same language, their interactions can be confusing and sometimes frightening.

Ideally, agencies in communities with significant numbers of Hispanics would have employees who are bilingual. Particularly in small towns, however, recruiting and retaining bilingual staff can be difficult. People who are proficient in both English and Spanish are more likely to sign on with larger agencies that have the resources to pay incentives for their skills.

Strategies to reduce language barriers include hiring civilian or using volunteer interpreters; making language instruction part of the standard law enforcement training program; and offering “Survival Spanish” classes. Other strategies include developing Spanish language materials on important laws and ordinances, 911 and how to report a crime, Miranda warnings, booking and processing procedures, and domestic violence. Many communities use volunteer bilingual community liaisons to serve as translators and victim advocates.

In the longer term, law enforcement should encourage and work with community colleges and universities to train bilingual students in criminal justice and related fields.

Promoting Understanding through Education

One lesson learned from community policing efforts is that officers sometimes mistake unfamiliar cultural norms and behaviors for suspicious behavior. For example, an immigrant’s unwillingness to look an officer in the eyes may be interpreted as hiding something, when in fact doing so may be considered disrespectful in that immigrant’s culture. Cultural competency training can help officers reduce the potential for misunderstandings and thus, help them do their jobs more effectively.

Equally important is educating community members about criminal justice practices in the United States. A good example is Eagle County (Colorado) which has taken a multi-pronged approach to education that is tailored to the needs of Hispanics. Their Law Enforcement Immigration Alliance is made up of community leaders and the county’s five law enforcement agencies. In addition to offering an annual Latino Citizens Police Academy, the Alliance makes informal presentations to parishioners at Spanish-language masses; provides training to Spanish-speaking staff in hospitality businesses; and uses social media to dispel false rumors about immigration enforcement.

Law Enforcement Demographics

Many police departments across the country are trying to overcome language and cultural barriers by recruiting qualified officers from Hispanic communities. Unfortunately, no state agency in Idaho collects data on how many Hispanics work in law enforcement, so we know little about diversity in local agencies. At the national level, Hispanics make up 11% of the nation’s sheriff’s deputies and 13% of police officers, compared to 18% of the total population. Although the number of Hispanics in law enforcement has been increasing, they continue to be underrepresented in the nation’s smaller departments. <sup>3, 4</sup>

*“The bread and butter of policing is information. We need to be able to communicate.”*

- Nashville Police Chief

Youth Outreach

When interactions between youth and law enforcement occur only in the context of suspected illegal activities, distrust of each other is a likely outcome. To build more trusting relationships with youth in their communities, departments across the country have developed outreach programs through career exploration, mentorship, and sporting events.

Some offer Police Explorers programs, giving youth an opportunity to learn about law enforcement careers. Through rigorous course work and assisting police with community responsibilities like traffic control, young people gain skills and build lasting relationships with law enforcement officers.

Amigos en Azul, a city-county law enforcement partnership, hosts an annual soccer camp for boys and girls age 6-16 in Dane County, Wisconsin. Connecting through sports is one way Amigos en Azul carries out its mission to open lines of communication between the Latino community and the City of Madison Police Department, in partnership with Dane County-area law enforcement.

*“It doesn’t matter what the actual outreach event is; the most important thing is the relationship we build together.”*

- Madison Police Department Sergeant

Partnerships

Creating partnerships allows law enforcement and Hispanic community groups to identify important problems and work collaboratively to develop effective solutions. With its partners, the Idaho Commission on Hispanic Affairs (ICHA) hosts public information forums in towns around the state. The goals are to improve communication between local law enforcement and Hispanic community members, and to build understanding about laws, law enforcement, and services. ICHA accomplishes these goals by working with Catholic Charities, the Mexican Consulate, ACLU, and local law enforcement.

*“We are fortunate to be part of the Unity Alliance of Southern Idaho.”*

- Twin Falls Police Chief

Another partnership strategy is for local law enforcement to join alliances focused on healing divisions and finding common ground in communities through education and outreach. An example is the Unity Alliance of Southern Idaho, in which representatives from both city police and county sheriff’s offices serve on the board with other local leaders.

Transparency on Immigration Enforcement Policy

If crime victims believe they may be deported if they interact with any law enforcement officers, they are likely to avoid calling the police. To overcome this obstacle to protecting local residents, some local law enforcement agencies have developed policies to guide how they interact with federal immigration authorities, and clearly communicated this policy to the community.

Sources for information on tools discussed here:

- “Police-Latino Community Relations: Addressing Challenges in Rural Communities” *Missouri Extension, University of Missouri-Columbia, 2003*
- “Engaging Police in Immigrant Communities: Promising Practices from the Field” *Vera Institute of Justice, 2012*
- “Strengthening Relationships between Police and Immigrant Communities in a Complex Political Environment” *Police Executive Research Forum, 2018*
- “Community Policing in Immigrant Neighborhoods: Stories of Success” *Police Executive Research Forum, 2019*