

Kerry Sims
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Barry Waite and Bonnie Shrewsbury

Los Angeles County's Foreign Born of Residents and Violent Crime and Income Levels

Introduction

Recent immigration trends have greatly increased the number of foreign born persons in the United States today. Although foreign born persons settle across the United States, they are most likely to reside in large urban areas with established immigrant population such as Los Angeles County. A recent trend since 2000, has been the acceleration of immigrants' growth in suburbs outside of major areas (Svajlenka and Wilson). This trend continues in the areas surrounding the City of Los Angeles (Figure 1). According to the most recent data from the United States Census Bureau, 34.9% of the entire County of Los Angeles were born outside of the United States (United States Census Bureau).

The reality of a large foreign born population presents real policy issues for public administrators in many areas, however, this report will limit its discussion to the areas of crime and income levels. Although a broad discussion of education and healthcare are also important, it is necessary to limit the scope to fully analyze relevant data. Both crime and income levels are central to a healthy and successful life for all residents of Los Angeles County, regardless of the immigrants' status or origin. When crime is high and income levels are too low, quality of life drastically suffers. It is therefore imperative that policy makers and program directors understand the current relationship between the foreign born population and both crime and income levels. This report will use GIS and public information to analyze trends between the foreign born population in Los Angeles County and violent crime and income levels.

Income Levels

The importance of income levels has briefly been presented, yet its value to immigrant communities cannot be understated. Many immigrants arrive in the U.S. with the expectation of finding a better life, yet income has been shown to be the single largest determining factor in whether that expectation is fulfilled. The median household income in Los Angeles County is \$56,266 per year, yet the reality that most immigrants discover in terms of average wages is vastly different (American Fact Finder).

Because this report did not separate educated from non-educated immigrants, the data shows two divergent trends: 1. The vast majority of immigrants live in low-income areas and 2. A select subset of the immigrant community live in affluent areas (Figure 2). Figure 2 breaks down Los Angeles County residents' household income into three categories, and places an outline of the areas that have 30% or more foreign born residents. The data shows that the lowest earners reside in downtown Los Angeles and just south of the city's central area, with an average household income level of below \$40,000, many immigrants struggle to make ends meet. However, in eastern Los Angeles County in the San Gabriel Valley, many immigrants live in middle class neighborhoods that make between \$40,000 and \$80,000 a year, suggesting a divide along ethnic lines, as the San Gabriel Valley is known for its large Asian population. Finally, in the southern area of Los Angeles County, pockets of immigrants live within several affluent communities with an average household income of more than \$80,000 a year. The divergence of household income levels along ethnic lines is supported in Figure 4, which shows that the ethnic majority in middle-to-high income areas are either of Asian or Caucasian ethnicity. Although the data displayed in Figure 4 does not break down ethnicities based solely upon the status of being

born abroad, correlations between ethnic majority and large foreign born areas can be made and therefore appear to support the theory of income divergence along ethnic lines.

Violent Crime

The issue of violent crime and immigrants and received considerable press coverage in this election year, as many have sought to connect immigrants as a causation of criminal activity. However, this report simple seeks to understand the type of communities that immigrants tend to move live in. Violent crimes are defined in this study as rapes, homicides, robberies, and assaults of all kinds. Figure 3 suggests that immigrants live within communities that have low, medium, and high levels of crime. Furthermore, a comparison of Figure 2 and Figure 3, suggests that income levels have much more of an impact on violent crime levels and criminal activity than simply large foreign born communities.

Violent crime does, however, have a major impact on the quality of life for immigrants, as public safety is often one of the most basic needs of any population, but particularly for minority groups who have been known to face increased threats and violence when compared to the population at large. Figure 3, shows that roughly half of the foreign born population resides within communities that have greater than 25 violent crimes per 1,000 persons, with the central downtown area being the most afflicted. However, there are also several pockets of immigrants that reside in areas that experience fewer than 9.9 violent crimes per 1,000 persons, also falling within the high income levels shown in Figure 2.

Data Sources and Methodology

Data Collected Includes:

1. **Los Angeles County and Neighborhood and Census Tract Shapefiles** were obtained from

the Los Angeles County Enterprise GIS website and Census Bureau's Tiger website. These data served as the principle map for all three maps included in this report. They provided the boundaries of not only Los Angeles County, and Census Tracts to join demographic information, but also the neighborhoods for easy reference while analyzing the data.

2. **Los Angeles County Violent Crime** data was obtained from the American Fact Finder website as an Excel spreadsheet, which was modified to work with ArcMap and joined to the Los Angeles County Census Tract shapefile using the GEOID field. Excess fields were deleted while in Excel, in order to simplify the attributes' table within ArcMap. Violent crime data was presented as violent crimes per 1,000 persons, with three separate categories ranging from 0 to more than 25 violent crimes per 1,000 persons.
3. **Los Angeles County Median Household Income** data was obtained from the American Fact Finder website as an excel spreadsheet, which was modified to work with ArcMap and joined to the Los Angeles County Census Tract shapefile using the GEOID field. Excess fields were deleted while in Excel, to simplify the attributes' table. Median household income data was presented as three categories representing median household income within the county, which ranged from less than \$40,000 a year to more than \$80,000.
4. **Los Angeles County Foreign Born** data was obtained from the American Fact Finder website as an excel spreadsheet, which was modified to work with ArcMap and joined to the Los Angeles County Census Tract shapefile using the GEOID field. Foreign born data was presented in a categorical way, with three separate categories, ranging from 0% to more than 30% foreign born population residing within the geographical vicinity.
5. **Los Angeles County Ethnic Majority** data was obtained from the American Fact Finder

website as an excel spreadsheet, which was modified to work with ArcMap and joined to the Los Angeles County Census Tract shapefile using the GEOID field. Furthermore, the data was joined to a preexisting layer used in Figure 3 to show large foreign born areas of Los Angeles County. The data was shown in four separate categories based on ethnicities. The data was further modified to only show areas within large foreign born areas of Los Angeles County.

Figure 1 was created by joining the foreign born table with the Los Angeles County shapefiles and adding the city shapefile from GIS Tutorial 1, and running a definition query to removal all cities aside from Los Angeles. Three separate categories were created to show the percentage of foreign born persons that resided within the specific geographical area of Los Angeles County.

Figure 2 was created by taking Figure 1's data on the foreign born population, neighborhoods, and county boundaries. Income data was then joined and three separate categories were created to show income levels of less than \$39.9 thousand, \$39.9 thousand, and more than \$80,000. In order to show the areas where the foreign born population lived, Figure 1 was made the first layer, editing mode was turned on, and the outside of all foreign born boundaries was manually traced with black lines. Finally, Figure 1 was removed, thus resulting in a map that shows income levels, as well as the largest foreign born communities in the county.

Figure 3 was created by taking Figure 1's data on the foreign born population, neighborhoods, and county boundaries. Violent crime data was then joined and three separate categories were created to show violent crime levels per 1,000 persons. This method of showing violent crime data was chosen over total number of crimes in order to

compensate for rural areas in the north was a sparse population. The data ranged from less than 9.9 crimes per 1,000 persons, to more than 25 in the most dangerous areas of the county. To show the areas with the greatest percentage of foreign born persons, the same method described for Figure 2 was used, thus resulting in a map with violent crime levels, and showing the foreign born communities for quick comparison.

Figure 4 was created by using Figure 3 as a base and making the foreign born persons outline a layer. Ethnicity information was downloaded from the American Fact Finder website and separated into four separate categories. Ethnic information outside of the foreign born persons layer was clipped, thus resulting in information only contained within the layer. The resulting map quickly shows the ethnicity of persons living within the most densely foreign born areas of the county.

Conclusion

Figure 1 by itself provides limited information, yet it serves an important baseline by providing a visualization of where in Los Angeles County immigrants are residing. The map suggests that the greatest concentration of foreign born persons reside predominantly within central Los Angeles, and major suburbs in the Van Nuys, San Gabriel, and Long Beach areas. The explosion of growth within suburban areas previously discussed is visible in Figure 1. It is also possible to conclude that although immigrants are moving away from major downtown urban areas such as Los Angeles, they still serve as the core of immigrant communities, and by the same token, rural areas remain a largely native born area of residence.

Figure 2 provides essential data on income levels throughout the county and within the major immigrant communities. It is therefore possible to indirectly compare native born and

foreign born income levels on a large community level. The central downtown Los Angeles and Van Nuys areas are amongst the poorest in the county, but also serve as the hubs of the foreign born population. However, the areas of Inglewood and Compton also experience low incomes, yet are outside of the densest foreign born communities. Furthermore, areas in the southeast of the county experience high income levels and also reside within pockets of foreign born community, thus suggesting a highly educated and well compensated segment of the foreign born community. Yet the most prosperous area of Los Angeles County along the Pacific Ocean, continues to remain outside of the foreign born population's center of residence.

Figure 3 presents violent crime data within Los Angeles county as well as providing the locations of the densest immigrant communities. The data shows four major violent crime areas throughout the county. The largest is in the northeast section of the county, yet exists simply because of comparison method chosen, furthermore, it is well outside of the immigrant community and is inconsequential in the analysis. The other three areas are more interesting, particularly the central area of Los Angeles and the areas of Inglewood and Compton. A large percentage of the immigrant community resides within an area that experiences more than 25 violent crimes per 1,000 persons, yet roughly 40% of the violent crime area flows outside of the immigrant community. Furthermore, the area near Van Nuys experiences high to moderate crime rates, both within the immigrant community. These data suggests that immigrant communities have a causal relationship with crime, and that income is a far more reliably predictor of violent crime rates. Finally, a pocket immigrant community within the southern area of the county near Long Beach is almost exclusively within a high crime area, providing some evidence that immigrant communities can shape high crime areas. However, within this specific area, it is

unclear whether immigrants are the cause of the crimes, or simply the victims. With that said, it is possible to conclude that immigrant communities are likely to reside in moderate to high crime areas, yet income levels are far more useful when predicting violent crime areas.

The data presented in this report suggests that as the foreign born population continues to grow, spread to suburban areas, and make up a larger percentage of Los Angeles County's population, policy makers must address two of the most influential factors that determine quality of life within immigrant communities: 1. Income Levels and 2. Violent Crime Rates. Failure to address these issues will only further alienate a large percentage of the community, and could further erode the quality of life in areas that traditionally provide a home for the native born population and those with means.

Data Limitations

Immigrant information that is broken down into specific educational attainment and income levels was not readily available, thus presenting the report with its most significant limitation. That data on violent crime and income levels show a divergent type of immigrants and immigrant community, yet without specific facts a definitive conclusion could not be made. The information in figure 4 shows that the majority of high-income and low-crime areas are within areas that are predominantly of Asian ethnicity, and promoting the theory that they arrive with higher education and funds, and are therefore more likely than other ethnic groups to have a higher standard of living.

Furthermore, although it was the hope of this author to include information on other facts that contributed to life for immigrants and immigrant communities, processing of data and its subsequent analysis proved a feat much more daunting than first realized. Thus, the report was

forced to be scaled back to only two, albeit extremely important, facets of life for immigrants and their respective communities.

Another major limitation is the unfortunate fear many immigrants have of reporting violent crimes, or crimes in general. The data included is limited to crimes that are reported to authorities, but doubtlessly includes many unreported crimes, especially within undocumented immigrant communities that fear deportation or similar repercussions for not legally residing in the United States.

Finally, although neighborhoods within Los Angeles County are small enough to generally reflect specific demographics such as large immigrant communities, some, especially in the rural north of the county, were vast and might not reflect relevant data on immigrants as well as those areas in the central and southern sections of the county. Because rural low-density areas have fewer immigrants, the link between immigrants and high crime areas is less conclusive. Furthermore, the northeast contains Lancaster and Palmdale, both of which are well known for their high crime rates and lack of immigrant communities.

American FactFinder. "American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates- Los Angeles County."

American FactFinder. United States Census Bureau, 01 July 2014. Web. 20 Apr. 2016.

Svajlenka, Nicole, and Jill Wilson. "Immigrants Continue to Disperse, with Fastest Growth in the Suburbs." *The Brookings Institution*. The Brookings Institution, 2014. Web. 20 Apr. 2016.

United States Census Bureau. "Population Estimates, July 1, 2015, (V2015)." Los Angeles County California QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau. 01 July 2014. Web. 19 Apr. 2016.

Figure 1

Los Angeles County Foreign Born Population

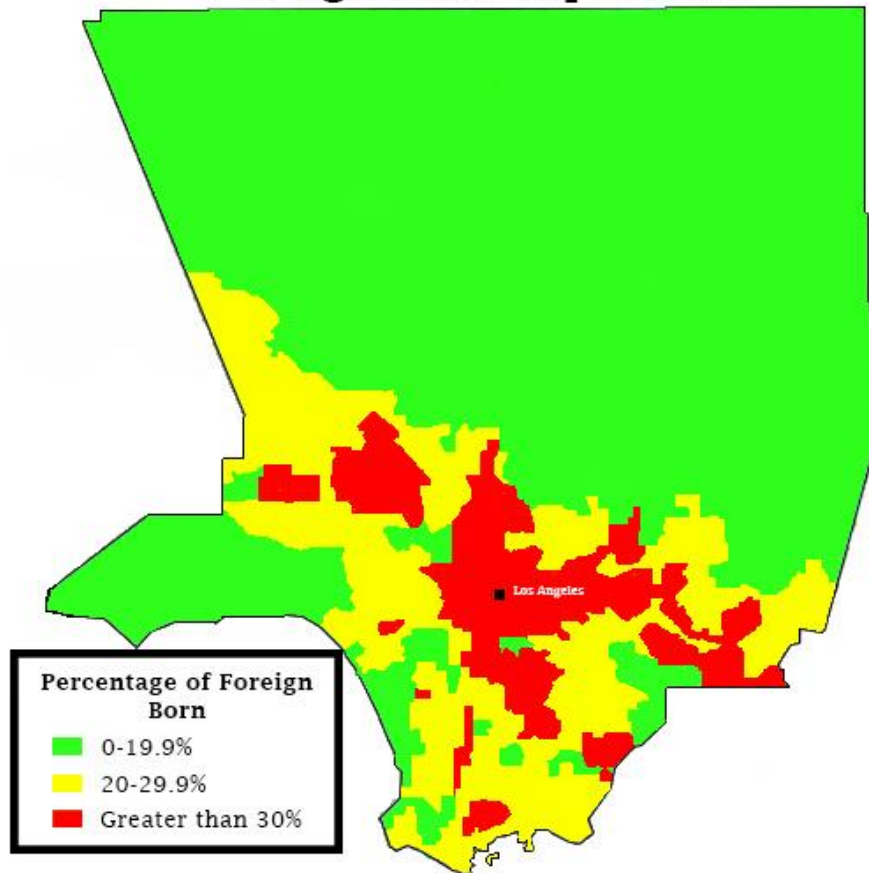


Figure 2

Average Annual Income and Los Angeles County's Foreign Born Population

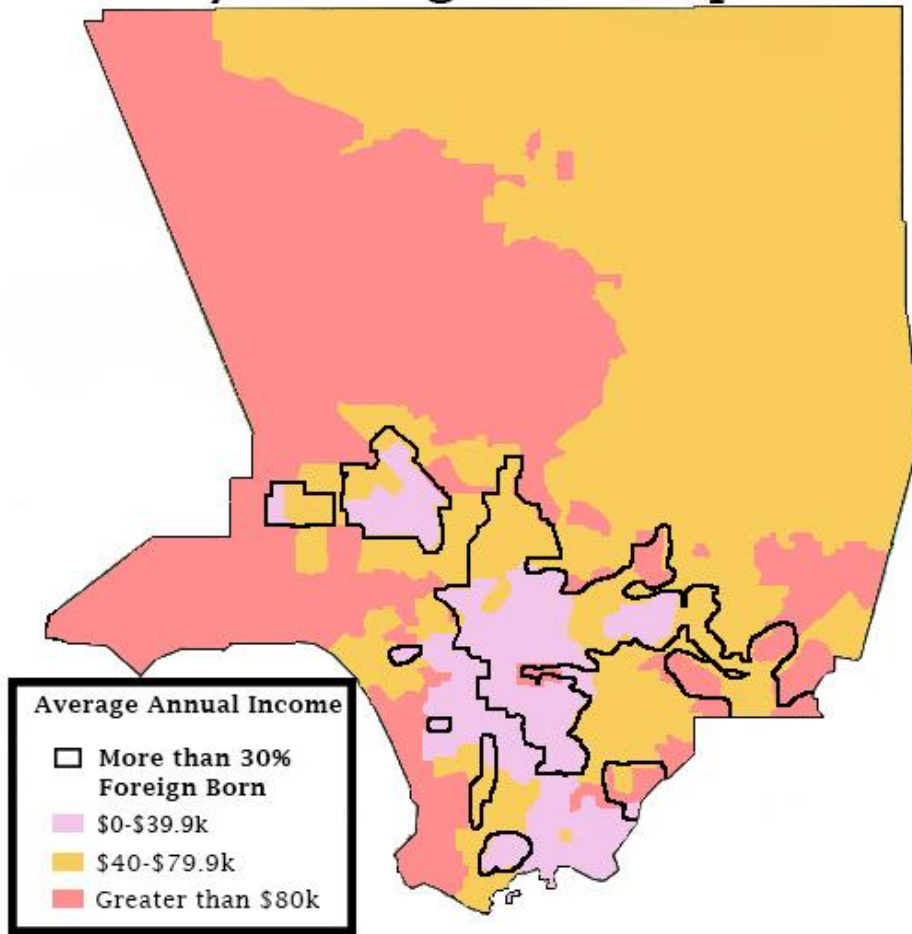


Figure 3

Violent Crimes in Los Angeles County and Foreign Born Areas

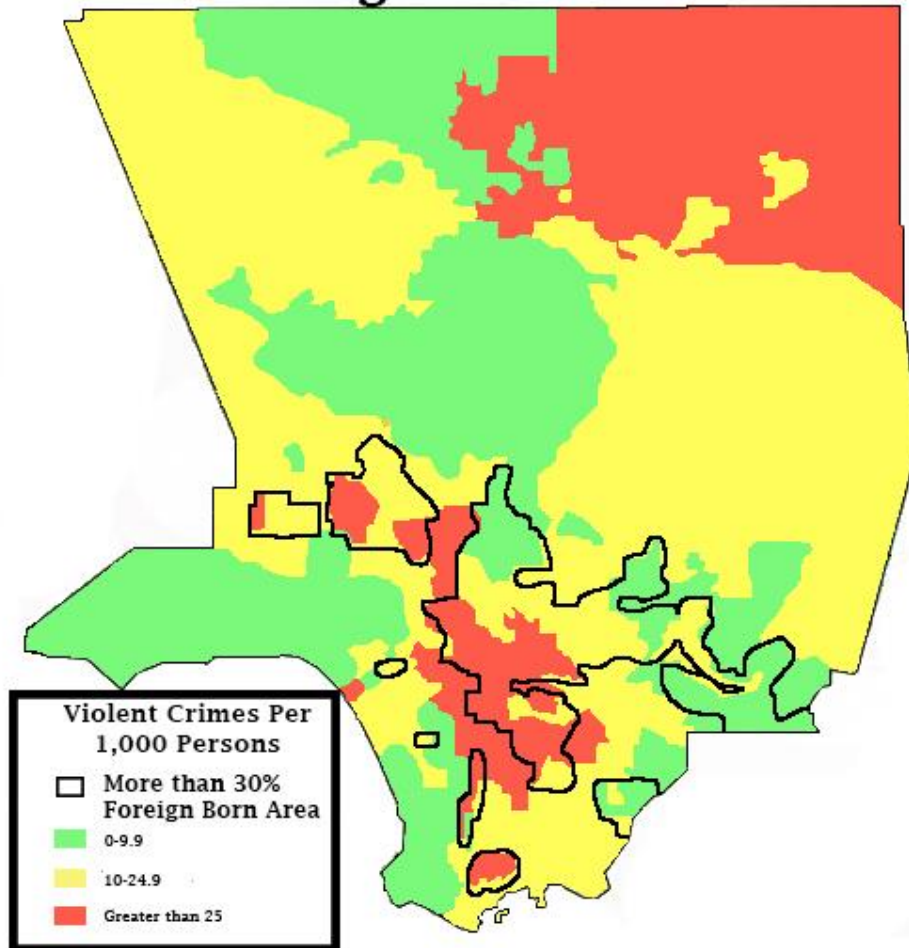


Figure 4

Predominant Ethnicity in Foreign Born Areas

