

Final Project: Crime in America – Perception vs. Reality

For my final project, I decided to focus on one of the most contentious narratives in American media today; the idea that crime is spiraling out of control and that this rise is largely driven by immigrants, particularly the Hispanic population. When reading the assigned news article, I was struck by the mention of the "gap" between what the public believes and what the data actually shows. I wanted to explore that specific disconnect.

My rationale for choosing this topic was personal curiosity mixed with skepticism about the current news cycle. We constantly hear about a "border crisis" leading to a crime wave, but I wanted to see if the FBI's own data supported that claim. Specifically, I wanted to investigate if Hispanic individuals are overrepresented in federal crime statistics, or if they are being unfairly scapegoated. The goal of my dashboard was to create a "fact-check" visualization that contrasts the scary headlines (Perception) with the hard demographic numbers (Reality).

To build this visualization, I relied on two primary sources. For the sentiment analysis, I used historical polling data from Pew Research and Gallup, which track Americans beliefs about crime rates over the last two decades. For the actual crime statistics, I pulled data from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program, specifically looking at federal offenses by demographic.

Getting this data ready for Power BI was actually the hardest part of the project. I ran into several technical hurdles that needed significant data manipulation:

1. **Merging Contrasting Tables:** The FBI data came in separate files for different crime types (Drug Offenses, Liquor Laws, Tobacco, etc.). I couldn't visualize them together initially, so I had to go into the Power Query editor, standardize the column names (renaming them all to "Demographic" and "Count"), and use the "Append Queries" function to stack them into one master dataset.

2. **Privacy Level Errors:** When I tried to combine these tables, Power BI threw a "Privacy Level" firewall error because it thought I was mixing private and public data. I had to go into the project options and manually set all data sources to "Public" to bypass the firewall and merge the queries.
3. **Date Formatting:** The dates in the original file were formatted as text strings (e.g., "2004 Oct 11-14"), which meant the X-axis on my charts wouldn't sort chronologically. I used a custom column function to extract the first four characters of the string to create a clean "Year" column.
4. **Data Types:** Finally, I had an issue where my charts were counting rows instead of summing values because the numbers were formatted as text. I had to manually convert the "Value" columns to "Whole Numbers" to get the visualizations to render correctly.

I wanted the dashboard to feel like a modern, serious executive summary rather than a standard academic chart. I chose a dark color palette using deep purples, dark greys, and high-contrast white text. This "Dark Mode" aesthetic was chosen to make the data pop and to give the report a sleek, investigative feel.

I structured the dashboard to tell a linear story from top to bottom:

- **Top (The Hook):** I started with a Line Chart comparing "Public Perception" vs. "Actual Crime Rates." This immediately establishes the conflict. I used distinct colors (Purple for rising fear, Blue for the flat reality) to show the massive gap that opened up around 2020.
- **Middle (The Demographic Context):** I used a Doughnut Chart to tackle the specific narrative about Hispanic crime. By placing the population percentage (19%) next to the crime share (7%), the chart visually proves that Hispanic populations are significantly *underrepresented* in crime statistics.
- **Bottom (Volume Comparison):** I used a Clustered Bar Chart to show raw offender numbers. Because "Drug Offenses" (in the millions) dwarfed things like "Tobacco Offenses" (in the thousands), the smaller bars were invisible. To fix this, I applied a Logarithmic Scale to the X-

axis, which allowed me to display vastly different volumes of crime on the same visual while maintaining readability.

Reflecting on the final dashboard, I believe I successfully met the objective of countering the media narrative with data. The strength of the project lies in its narrative flow; the viewer is guided from the problem (false perception) to the evidence (demographic data) without needing much explanation. The interactive tooltips are also a strength, allowing users to hover over the donut chart to see the exact "Gap" percentage, which adds depth without cluttering the screen.

However, there are weaknesses. Even with the logarithmic scale, the bottom bar chart can be difficult to interpret for someone who doesn't understand non-linear scales. The gap between Hispanic and Non-Hispanic offenders is so wide in some categories that it visually overwhelms the chart. If I were to do this again, I might split the bottom visual into two separate charts, one for high-volume crimes and one for regulatory offenses, to make the comparisons clearer. Additionally, for the static version of the visualization, I realized that removing the interactive slicers was necessary to make it look like a finished report rather than a screenshot of a tool.

Overall, I think the visualizations effectively convey that the "migrant crime wave" is largely a myth, supported by data that shows a sharp disconnect between public fear and statistical reality.

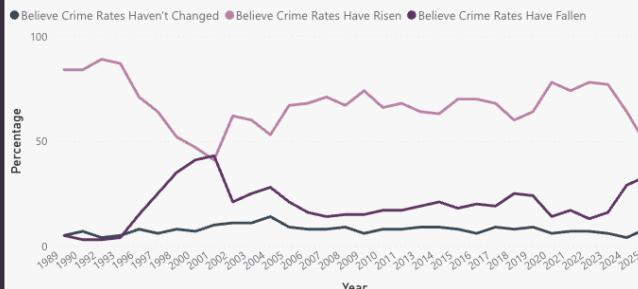
Dashboard Access

- **Access:** The interactive dashboard file (.pbix) is attached to this submission.
- **Screenshot:** See below for the static view of the dashboard.

Crime in America: Perception vs. Reality



Public Perception: Most Americans Believe Crime Has Risen



The Perception Gap

While public surveys indicate that 60%+ of Americans believe crime is rising, FBI data shows that crime rates have actually remained flat or declined over the last 20 years. This reveals a significant disconnect between public sentiment and statistical reality.

Individual years

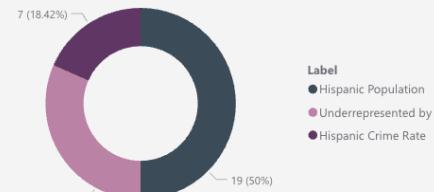
1989-2025

All

Demographic Context

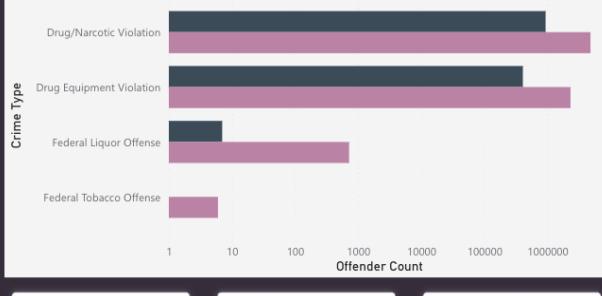
Despite making up 19% of the total population, Hispanic individuals account for a disproportionately low share of reported crime (7%). This data challenges common misconceptions regarding crime and demographics.

Hispanics are Underrepresented in Crime Statistics



Reality: Hispanic vs Non-Hispanic Offenders

Demographic ● Hispanic or Latino ● Not Hispanic or Latino



8M

Total Offenses

Volume Comparison

When comparing raw volume, Non-Hispanic offenders vastly outnumber Hispanic offenders across all major federal categories, particularly in Drug and Narcotic-related offenses.

Data Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program & Pew Research Center (2024).

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