

Latino immigrants robbed by police during traffic stops in suburban New York

A reporter
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At least a dozen Latin American immigrants have come forward in recent weeks to report that they have been robbed by the police during traffic stops in Suffolk County, on the eastern edge of Long Island in New York State.

Details of this latest attack on immigrants, particularly those who are undocumented, were provided in a report in the *New York Times* this week, as well as on some local radio stations. The incidents took place in or near the town of Coram, about 45 miles east of the New York City line.

The modus operandi of the corrupt cops apparently involved stopping cars with out-of-state license plates. After determining that the driver was Latino, the officer told him to stand outside the vehicle while the car was checked. The driver placed his hands on the trunk of the car, out of view of the officer, who meanwhile went through the driver's wallet to check for license and registration. Later, after the wallet was returned, the driver saw that money had been taken, but, fearing contact with the authorities, did not report it. In cases where there was no money to steal, the driver was simply given a traffic ticket and allowed to leave.

Many of the drivers who have related these incidents to immigrant advocacy groups or to the district attorney's office have waited up to two years to come forward, fearing retribution from either the police or immigration authorities. Accounts of this form of racial profiling and abuse began to emerge only after a veteran police detective was arrested and charged with official misconduct and petty larceny about five weeks ago, after being caught in a sting operation, stealing money from a driver who was an undercover detective. The detective, Sergeant Scott Greene, a 25-year veteran of the police department, pleaded not guilty to the charges.

One driver, who was robbed of \$200 during a stop, told the *Times* that the cop told him, "And don't turn around" while his wallet was checked. "It started to happen to all my friends," he said. This worker, who has lived in the area for 15 years and spoke only on condition of anonymity, said he had been regularly harassed in this way. "People have always been robbed but were fearful that something else would happen or that they would be sent back to their country," he said.

Other immigrants complained of racial profiling, even in cases where they were not robbed. One worker told of repeated stops without being given any reason for them.

The latest development in Suffolk County is the proverbial tip of the iceberg, both in that area of New York State as well as elsewhere in the US, where Democratic and Republican politicians have stoked anti-immigrant prejudice and the police have either turned a blind eye to crimes committed against immigrants or, as in the latest case, committed the crimes themselves.

The most notorious of the anti-immigrant attacks in the past decade took place about five years ago, when Ecuadorean immigrant Marcelo Lucero was attacked by a group of teenagers and stabbed to death. The attack took place in Patchogue, only about 8 miles from the town involved in the latest incidents. One of Lucero's assailants was later convicted of manslaughter and several others pleaded guilty to lesser charges.

Latino immigrants complained bitterly about other assaults and discrimination, and the refusal of the police to investigate them. A Justice Department inquiry began in 2009 and led to an agreement that promised more "community outreach" and other measures by the police. An immigrant rights advocacy group, LatinoJustice PRLDEF, which has been interviewing the victims in the latest incidents,

indicated it was skeptical of the current investigation into thefts and racial profiling. “We’re concerned about how forceful and comprehensive the investigation really is,” said the group’s president. “This is the same police department that has demonstrated an inability to protect Latinos for years now.”



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