

# Latina/o/x Criminology

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## Scholar Spotlight

**Dr. Jose Atilés**

**Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology  
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (UIUC)**

**"Emergency powers, anti-corruption, and policy failures during the COVID-19 pandemic in Puerto Rico"**

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Dr. Jose Atilés' website:

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Jose Atilés is an Assistant Professor in the Departments of Sociology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Jose holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Coimbra (Portugal), a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of the Basque Country (Spain), and a MA in Sociology of Law from the International Institute for the Sociology of Law (Oñati). His research and publications focus primarily on the sociolegal and criminological implications of US colonialism in Puerto Rico, and to elucidate how corruption, state violence and state-corporate crime exacerbates the unequal and undemocratic condition of Puerto Rico. He has published in peer-reviewed journals such as *The Sociological Review*, *British Journal of Criminology*, *Critical Criminology*, *Latin American Perspectives*, *State Crime Journal*, among others. Currently, Jose is working on his book manuscript *Crisis by Design: Emergency Powers, Corruption and Resistance in Puerto Rico*. The book analyzes the role of law, the state of emergency, and anticorruption mobilizations in the current multilayered crisis of Puerto Rico: economic instability and insurmountable debt since 2006, devastation generated by hurricanes Irma and María in 2017, a swarm of earthquakes in January of 2020, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The LC seeks to exchange, promote, and disseminate information that contribute to the criminological knowledge and understanding of the rapidly growing Latina/o/x population.



**Dr. Jose Atilés**

**Emergency powers, anti-corruption, and policy failures during the COVID-19 pandemic in Puerto Rico**

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### Abstract

This paper explores how the use of emergency powers by the US and Puerto Rican governments exacerbated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and manufactured the conditions for furthering the multilayered economic, legal, political, and humanitarian crisis affecting Puerto Rico since 2006. The paper discusses three cases. First, it examines how the multiple declarations of the state of emergency, and its constant renewals, produced contradictory public health policies. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the Puerto Rican government has issued over 90 executive orders aimed at addressing the emergency, producing an unclear, contradictory, and unequal emergency management policy. Second, the paper focuses on the impact of the passing of Law 35 on April 5, 2020, which imposed severe penalties on those who disobeyed executive orders. As a result, hundreds of Puerto Ricans were arrested, fined, and incarcerated for violating the issued order. Third, the paper studies how, citing the presence of corruption, the Puerto Rican government implemented anti-corruption and anti-fraud policies that made it more difficult for those most in need of it—mainly poor and racialized individuals, as well as immigrants and working women—to access Pandemic Unemployment Assistance. Thus, the paper argues that emergency policies designed to address the pandemic, punitive governance, and anti-corruption and anti-fraud policies undermined Puerto Rico's capacity to handle the pandemic, exacerbated its impact, and created an unequal recovery scenario.

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