

Immigration and Crime Rates

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Introduction

This paper is the third in a series focusing on immigration and crime. This paper focuses on whether or not immigrants breed crime in neighborhoods that they inhabit.

Background

A common theory today is that immigrants breed crime in all of the neighborhoods that they move into. Many recent studies have shown that immigration may actually reduce crime rates in specific neighborhoods. Many studies conducted on the individual level have shown that immigration reduces crime but there is not a lot of literature on immigration and crime at the macro level. Violent crime is also an area where immigration is show to not affect crime rates. Studies continue to show that the current trend in immigration does not increase the levels of crime on the individual level.

Crime conducive aspects of immigration

Many current theories suggest that immigrants face many disadvantages when they settle into new areas such as higher levels of poverty, labor market discrimination, and economic hindrances. When an immigrant is not able to obtain economic success by legitimate means, they often participate in illegitimate activities. In many cases, the legitimate work an immigrant receives may not be enough to sustain them so they will also participate in illegitimate work (Reis, Weiss, Adelman & Jaret, 2005). Weiss (2005) notes that the crimes immigrants often partake in are theft, robbery, and extortion, but these may lead to more serious violent crimes, as immigrants form subcultures and gangs. Another way immigration may increase crimes rates is by displacing native-born people within the job market. If many immigrants receive jobs in a specific area this may

cause native residents to not be hired and then commit a deviant act to sustain themselves (Reis, Weiss, Adelman & Jaret, 2005).

Crime inhibiting aspects of immigration

Current trends in immigration show that immigrants today are coming to this country at a higher socio-economic status, versus the turn of the 20th century when many of them were impoverished. New immigrants are more educated and less dependant, so they don't rely on deviant behavior to support themselves. Immigrants also form niches and communities where they support one another and no longer fill job positions native residents would be applying to (Zhou, 2001). Large groups of immigrants may also reinvigorate metropolitan areas by redeveloping cities and bringing new economic growth that was previously not there (Reis, Weiss, Adelman, & Jaret, 2005). This will decrease crime overall because immigrants, as well as native residents, will have jobs and no longer have a need to offend. With crime and immigration becoming a national concern, there has been a new wave of research focusing on the criminal involvement of immigrants in relation to native born residents (Olson, Laurikkala, Huff-Corzin & Corzin, 2009).

Social Disorganization Theory

Shaw and McKay (1942, 1969) developed the Chicago School and Social Disorganization theory. This theory was developed to show the patterns of delinquency and other social problems. The theory focuses more on structural differences of neighborhoods rather than individual traits (Olson, Laurikkala, Huff-Corzin & Corzin, 2009). Disorganization theorists believe that immigration is a disruptive force that increases disorder and raises crime rates, because areas with large amounts of

immigrants have language and cultural differences which perpetuate the disorganization theory (Stowell, Messner, Mcgeever & Raffalovich, 2009). Many researchers looking into the affects of immigration on crime rely on social disorganization theory. Issues of immigration are explicitly addressed by social disorganization, stating that the presence of immigrants will be positively associated with levels of crime (Stowell & Martinez, 2009).

Researchers against the social disorganization theory have written that social disorganization will not adequately predict a positive relationship between immigration and crime (Olson, Laurikkala, Huff-Corzin, & Corzin, 2009). Crime and immigration is generally presumed to be a positive relationship, because immigrants move into neighborhoods where social disorganization is prevalent among the native-born people residing there. Social structural factors are solid predictors of neighborhood levels of violence among immigrants, but also native born residents of these neighborhoods (Stowell & Martinez, 2009). These neighborhoods are resource poor and residentially unstable before the immigrants get there (Stowell, et al., 2009), so it appears that immigrants build upon the social disorganization, but in reality may have no effect at all.

The social disorganization may have had some validity in the 19th and early 20th century when there was a very large influx of immigrants into socially unstable neighborhoods (Olson, Laurikkala, Huff-Corzin & Corzin, 2009). Today many researchers look at the selectivity theory of immigration to state that immigration has a negative effect on crime. It has been researched that if immigrants today have the means and the motivation to come to this country, then they will not move into the neighborhoods that social disorganization describes (Stowell et al., 2009). They are

known to have reliable financial means and higher education, which allows them to fill job positions that other people will not be fighting for. The new waves of immigrants are financially more stable and have no need to commit crimes.

Immigration and Violent Crime

It has been found that new waves of immigrants do not increase violent crime rates. Violent crimes committed by foreign born citizens, naturalized citizens, and non citizens are no higher than violent crimes committed by native citizens and in many cases, immigrants are attributed to lowering crime rates (Olson, Laurikkala, Huff-Corzin & Corzin, 2009). Immigrants have been found to reduce homicide at a local level because they strengthen private networks and they help reinvigorate local community institutions. There is a protective affect among immigrants in disadvantage minority neighborhoods which helps lead them to lower violent crime rates. New immigrants tend to settle in the same places previous immigrants have settled so there are already pre-established institutions that facilitate community social control (Velez, 2009).

Some research has taken a look at ethnic specific immigration and how it affects violent crime rates. Latinos continue to comprise the majority of immigrant populations. It has been found that Latinos, specifically, do not contribute to increased rates of violent crimes (Stowell & Martinez, 2009). There has been a theory know as the “Latino Paradox” that suggests Latino immigrants, turn out better in several health related issues compared to native born residents (Stowell et al., 2009). It has even been found that Latino immigrants can diffuse native populations to the point where they lower homicide rates among black and white residents (Olson, Laurikkala, Huff-Corzin & Corzin, 2009).

Conclusion

This paper focuses on whether or not immigration affects crime rates. All of the studies that have been done in the past focus mainly on the local level. Not a lot of studies have been done on the macro level. This paper looks at crime conducive aspects of immigration, crime inhibiting aspects of immigration, social disorganization theory, and immigration and violent crime.

Policy and Research

In the future immigration can be compared to crime rates in Rochester, NY to see if there is a relationship or not. If immigrants are the result of increased crime rates then policy can be implemented to try and stop more crime.

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