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## Immigration and Crime

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# Immigration and Crime

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## Abstract

The relationship between immigration and crime is one of the most salient issues in public discourse. Despite widespread public concern, most studies find no evidence that immigration increases crime rates in host countries. This article reviews recent empirical evidence on the relationship between immigration and crime. Rather than offering an exhaustive survey, it focuses on recent and seminal contributions, highlighting emerging trends and research frontiers. In particular, the article discusses how immigration policies can mediate the relationship between immigration and crime. It also discusses research on crimes against immigrants, a topic that has attracted increasing scholarly interest but remains largely neglected in public discourse. Finally, given the substantial gap between public perception and the empirical evidence, the article reviews research on immigration and crime perception.

*Keywords:* Immigration, Refugees, Crime, Immigration policy, Hate crime

*JEL Classification:* F22, J15, J61, K37, K42

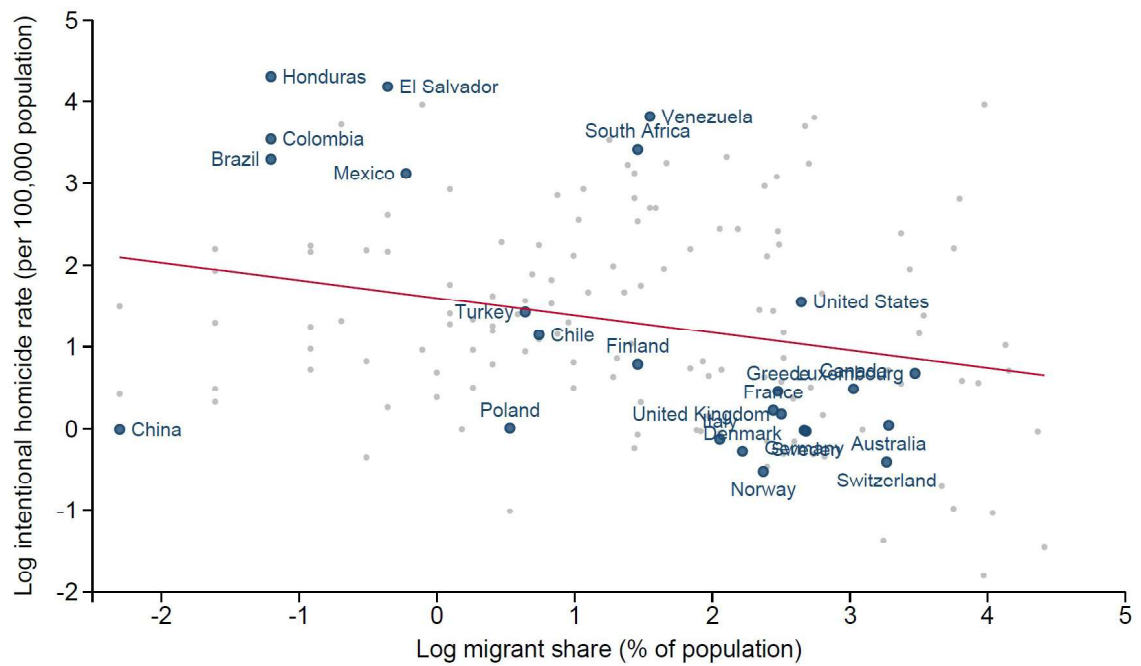
# 1. Introduction

Immigration remains one of the most controversial topics in public discourse. The current debate extends well beyond labor market effects, encompassing concerns about pressure on public services, housing, cultural change, and crime. In the last decades the economics literature on the relationship between immigration and crime has grown substantially, aiming to provide data-driven evidence on this politically salient and often polarizing topic. Despite widespread public concern, most studies find no evidence of a causal relationship between immigration and crime. When effects are detected, they are typically concentrated among groups with weak labor market access and are driven mainly by property offenses rather than violent crime.

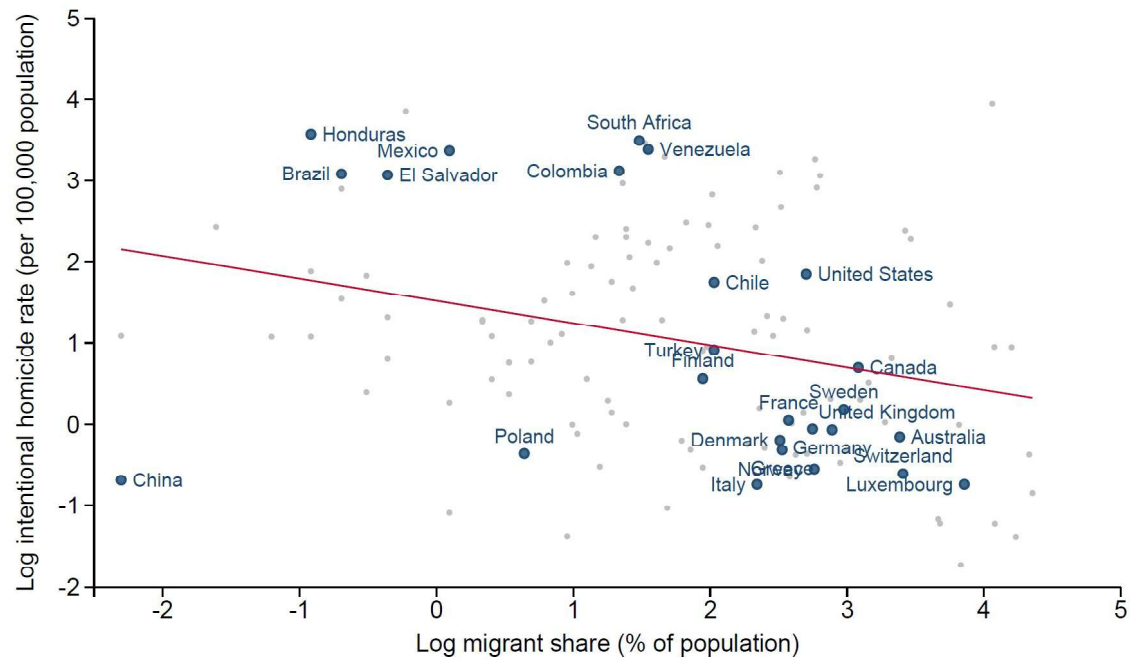
This article reviews recent empirical evidence on the relationship between immigration and crime, building on earlier surveys by Bell and Machin (2013), Pinotti and Rozo (2022), and Marie and Pinotti (2024). Rather than offering an exhaustive survey, it focuses on recent and seminal contributions, highlighting emerging trends and research frontiers. In particular, the article discusses how immigration policies can shape the relationship between immigration and crime. It also examines crimes against immigrants, a growing area of research that remains largely absent from public debate. Finally, given the gap between public perception and the empirical evidence, the article reviews research on how immigration affects perceptions of crime.

The perception that immigration leads to higher crime, standing in contrast to most of the empirical evidence, matters as it has direct policy implications. If voters and policymakers believe that immigration increases crime, they may support restrictive immigration policies, aggressive interior enforcement, or reductions in refugee admissions, even when the evidence suggests that such policies are unnecessary or counterproductive. Understanding both the actual relationship between immigration and crime and the determinants of public perceptions is therefore essential for informed policy design.

Figure 1 provides descriptive cross-country patterns by plotting the log homicide rate against the log share of international migrants in the population in 2010 and 2020. In both years, the unconditional correlation is negative. Many high-migration economies, such as Australia, Canada, Germany, Luxembourg, and the Nordic countries, consistently cluster at the bottom of the homicide distribution, while several countries with very high homicide rates, such as Brazil, El Salvador, Mexico, and Honduras, have relatively low migrant shares.



(a) 2010



(b) 2020

**Fig. 1** Intentional homicide rate and international migrant stock across countries  
*Note:* Both axes are on the natural-log scale. The dark red line is a linear (log-log) fit. Data are drawn from the World Development Indicators. Intentional homicide is defined as an unlawful death purposefully inflicted upon a person. International migrant stock as % of population is the share of the population born in a country other than that in which they live, including refugees, measured at mid-year.

[Hier eingeben]

This descriptive pattern cannot, of course, be interpreted as causal, given the many economic, institutional, and social factors that may jointly shape immigration flows and crime rates, as well as the possibility that higher crime rates themselves deter immigration. Crime itself may act both as a push and a pull factor in migration decisions. Migrants may leave countries affected by high levels of violence and select destinations perceived as safer. At the same time, low-crime destinations often have other characteristics that attract migrants, including stronger labor markets, better institutions, and higher living standards. As a result, simple correlations between migrant shares and crime rates do not permit a causal interpretation.

Similar selection issues arise when analyzing the relationship between immigration and crime using variation within destination countries. Migrants may choose locations with lower crime rates in search of safety or other factors that are correlated with low crime rates. However, these locations may also be more attractive to the native population, increasing housing costs and potentially pushing newly arrived or lower-income migrants into more affordable areas with higher crime rates. These opposing forces imply that the causal effect of immigration on crime cannot be inferred from descriptive patterns alone. The remainder of this article therefore reviews the empirical literature that aims to provide causal evidence using applied microeconomic tools for causal inference or relying on quasi-experimental designs exploiting specific features of immigration shocks.

## 2. Does Immigration Increase Crime?

This section reviews seminal and recent studies on the impact of immigration on crime in recipient regions. It further discusses why the effects may differ between property and violent crime, emphasizing the labor market channel as a potential mechanism through which immigration may affect crime.

The most common empirical approach to studying the relationship between immigration and crime uses spatial panel data, linking changes in the local share of immigrants to changes in local crime rates over time. The central methodological challenge is endogeneity. Analogously to self-selection across countries, immigrants may sort into regions within a country based on factors correlated with crime. For instance, they may prefer low-crime neighborhoods or, conversely, because of limited alternatives or limited disposable income, may settle in areas with cheaper housing or in economically weaker areas where both immigration and crime are high. As a result, OLS estimates may be biased in either direction. The literature typically addresses this concern using an instrumental variable approach based on historical settlement patterns of co-nationals or ethnically similar groups, other instruments such as distance to the border, or by relying on quasi-experimental designs that exploit specific features of immigration shocks.

A seminal study by Bell et al. (2013) examines two large immigration waves in England and Wales: the inflow of asylum seekers from conflict-affected countries in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and the inflow of labor migrants from the A8 countries (Poland, Hungary, the Czech  
[Hier eingeben]

Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia) after the 2004 EU enlargement. The two migrant groups differed sharply in their labor market access: asylum seekers were largely excluded from legal employment and depended on low levels of public support, whereas A8 migrants received unrestricted access to the UK labor market. For identification, the authors exploit two sources of exogenous variation in local migrant stocks: a governmental dispersal policy that allocated asylum seekers to local authorities independently of the asylum seekers' location preferences, and an instrument for A8 migrants based on the availability of direct flights to A8 countries from nearby airports. The results show that the wave of asylum seekers led to a significant increase in property crime, while the A8 wave, if anything, reduced it. There is no significant effect on violent crime for either wave. The contrast is consistent with a labor market mechanism: immigration appears more likely to increase economically motivated crime when migrants face restricted legal employment opportunities.

Studies from continental Europe confirm this pattern. Bianchi et al. (2012) study Italian provinces from 1990 to 2003. Fixed-effect estimates suggest a modest positive correlation between immigration and property crimes. However, their instrumental variable approach, which isolates exogenous variation in immigration to Italy driven by origin-country push factors reflected in migration flows to other European destinations, shows that immigration increases only the incidence of robberies, with no significant effect on the overall crime rate. Piopiunik and Ruhose (2017) exploit the exogenous allocation of migrants of German descent from Eastern Europe across German counties and find that immigration significantly increases total crime, with effects concentrated on burglary, property damage, and battery, but not on drug offenses or street crime. These effects are particularly strong in regions with higher pre-existing crime rates, larger foreign population shares, and higher unemployment.

In the United States, Spenkuch (2014), using county data across three census years and a shift-share instrument, finds a small positive effect of immigration on financially motivated crimes such as motor vehicle theft and robbery, driven by immigrants with poor labor market outcomes. Chalfin (2015) exploits variation in Mexican fertility rates to instrument for migration to US metropolitan areas and finds that Mexican immigration reduces property crime but increases aggravated assaults. However, his earlier study using rainfall shocks as an alternative instrument finds no significant effect on either violent or property crime (Chalfin 2014). These mixed findings highlight that estimated effects are sensitive to the identification strategy, the composition of immigrants studied, and the type of crime considered.

In the wake of the 2015 refugee crisis, the crime effects of refugee inflows have received particular attention and the results are also mixed. In the United States, Masterson and Yassenov (2021) exploit the 2017 Executive Order that abruptly cut refugee admissions by two-thirds and find null effects on county-level crime rates across all crime categories. In Germany, estimates vary with the refugee group, the timing, and the identification strategy. Gehrsitz and Ungerer (2022) exploit exogenous variation in asylum seeker allocation across German counties driven by the competition for available accommodation and report a moderate increase in crime rates. Dehos (2021) distinguishes between asylum seekers and recognized refugees, exploiting [Hier eingeben]

different sources of identification for each group. Using dispersal policies and locational restrictions as exogenous variation for asylum seekers, he finds no impact on crime except for migration-specific offenses such as violations of the residence act. For recognized refugees, who can freely choose their location, he applies a shift-share instrument based on prior settlement patterns and finds a positive effect on total crime, driven by non-violent property crimes and fraud. Lange and Sommerfeld (2024) instrument refugee inflows with administrative allocation quotas and find no contemporaneous effect but a significant lagged increase in property and violent crime one year after arrival. Maghularia and Uebelmesser (2023) use panel data for German administrative districts and find that the effect of immigration on crime varies over time: it is positive before the refugee crisis but negative or insignificant during and after it, averaging out to zero over the full period.

Megalokonomou and Vasilakis (2023) study the refugee inflow to the Greek islands and exploit variation in arrivals induced by different departure points along the Turkish coast. Using instrumental variables and difference-in-differences, they find that an increase in the share of refugees on destination islands raises recorded crime incidents, with the rise driven by property crime, knife attacks, and rape. Kırdar et al. (2022) and Kayaoglu (2022) study the impact of Syrian refugees in Turkey and find, in contrast to the Greek evidence, a reduction in crime. However, Akbulut-Yuksel et al. (2024) argue that these results are driven by the use of prison intake as a proxy for crime, which underreports the actual crime rate. Using administrative records of offenses reported to prosecutors as an alternative measure, they find that the refugee inflow significantly increased crime.

Studies of the large-scale Venezuelan emigration triggered by the country's economic and political crisis provide additional evidence from developing-country contexts. Knight and Tribin (2023) exploit the closing and reopening of the Colombia–Venezuela border in 2016 as a natural experiment and find that homicides increased in Colombian border municipalities, but this rise was driven entirely by the victimization of Venezuelan migrants, with no significant increase in homicides of Colombian natives. Marques (2025) studies the same migration shock in Brazil, instrumenting municipality-level exposure with distance to Pacaraima, the only official land crossing between Brazil and Venezuela. Despite the smaller scale of the inflow and a different identification strategy, he reaches a similar conclusion: forced migration increased violent crime only among Venezuelan victims, particularly young males in the border region, while native victimization rates remained unaffected. That both studies, examining different countries with distinct institutional settings and empirical approaches, converge on the same finding strengthens the conclusion that it is migrants themselves, rather than native populations, who bear the safety costs of forced displacement. The economic vulnerability of these refugees, who often lack access to formal employment in receiving countries, underscores the broader pattern emerging from the literature.

Where immigration effects on crime are found, they are often concentrated in economically motivated offenses, pointing to labor market access as a key mediator. Two recent studies offer particularly direct evidence on this channel by exploiting the rollout of food delivery platforms. [Hier eingeben]

Allouard et al. (2026) exploit the staggered rollout of Deliveroo and Uber Eats across French police jurisdictions between 2015 and 2019. They find that platform entry, which disproportionately benefits young migrants and individuals with criminal records by lowering barriers to legal employment, reduces low-skill property crime, drug offenses, and violent offenses. The decline is concentrated among crime types requiring little planning, such as shoplifting and street robbery, while more sophisticated offenses like vehicle theft remain unaffected. Frankenthal (2025), studying the rollout of iFood across municipalities in the state of São Paulo, finds a similar pattern. Gig work reduced property crime and robbery by roughly 10 percent, with effects concentrated at times of day when delivery returns are highest and in lower-income neighborhoods where delivery workers reside, and no evidence of crime displacement to other areas. Together, these findings directly illustrate the income-substitution mechanism: when legal income opportunities expand, entry-level crime declines. However, labor market access alone does not fully account for the relationship between immigration and crime.

The importance of social integration beyond the labor market is highlighted by Liu and Xu (2025), who study internal migration in China using over six million criminal convictions from 2000 to 2020. They find that dialectal distance between a migrant's origin and destination raises criminal behavior, driven by difficulties in social assimilation and a weak sense of local identity, with effects concentrated among low-educated male migrants. This evidence suggests that the relationship between immigration and crime operates through both economic and cultural dimensions. This finding implies that policies aimed at reducing crime among migrant populations should address not only employment access but also barriers to social integration.

### 3. The Role of Immigration Policy

The evidence in the previous section points to labor market access and social integration as mediators of the relationship between immigration and crime. This section examines how specific policies shape these outcomes. Legalization programs and citizenship reforms can expand immigrants' access to formal employment, directly altering the relative returns to legal and illegal activity. Enforcement policies can erode community trust, while sanctuary policies aim to restore it.

In Italy, Mastrobuoni and Pinotti (2015) exploit the coincidental timing of two events: a mass clemency in August 2006, which released thousands of foreign inmates from Italian prisons, and the EU accession of Romania and Bulgaria in January 2007, which granted legal status to Romanian and Bulgarian nationals. By comparing the re-offending rates of released Romanian and Bulgarian inmates, who gained legal status five months after release, with those of released inmates from non-EU countries, who did not, the study finds that legal status reduces recidivism by 50 percent. The effect is concentrated among economically motivated offenders and appears only in areas with better labor market opportunities for regular immigrants.

Pinotti (2017) provides evidence from Italy's click-day system, exploiting a regression discontinuity design: work permits were issued in the order of online applications until quotas  
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were exhausted, so that immigrants who applied seconds apart ended up in very different legal situations. Those who obtained a permit were roughly half as likely to commit an offense in the following year, with the reduction driven primarily by economically motivated crimes. Fasani (2018) provides complementary evidence by exploiting variation across Italian regions generated by repeated amnesty programs between 1990 and 2005. Using past amnesty application patterns to predict current legalization intensity, he finds that regions with higher legalization rates experienced a decline in non-EU immigrant crime rates in the year following each amnesty.

Baker (2015) examines the 1986 IRCA, which legalized nearly 3 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, and finds a decrease in crime, driven primarily by a decline in property offenses. Conversely, Freedman et al. (2018) show that IRCA's employment restrictions on immigrants who did not qualify for legalization led to a significant increase in felony charges. Together, these two findings illustrate the same mechanism from opposite directions: expanding legal employment access reduces economically motivated crime, while restricting it increases criminal participation. Recent work extends this channel to citizenship. Andres et al. (2026) exploit Germany's conditional birthright citizenship reform, which granted citizenship to eligible immigrant children born on or after January 1, 2000, and find that affected youth are approximately 70 percent less likely to engage in criminal activity.

Taken together, this evidence suggests that immigration policies providing legal employment access reduce the crime effects of immigration. Conversely, policies that restrict labor market participation, such as employment bans for asylum seekers, may increase criminal behavior by reducing the relative returns to legal activity. Beyond legalization, the design of enforcement policy can also influence the relationship between immigration and crime.

In the United States, the Secure Communities program, rolled out across counties between 2008 and 2014, expanded the role of local law enforcement in federal immigration policing by automatically sharing fingerprints of individuals booked into local jails with federal immigration databases, enabling Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to issue detainer requests for potentially deportable individuals. Miles and Cox (2014) show that the program's early adoption did not reduce crime rates. However, Gonçalves et al. (2026) document significant unintended consequences for public safety. Using national survey data, they find that the program reduced the likelihood that Hispanic victims reported crimes to police and simultaneously increased their victimization. Total reported crimes remained unchanged, but this aggregate stability masks two offsetting effects: a decline in crime reporting by Hispanics and a rise in crimes against them. Reduced reporting appears to be the key driver of increased victimization, as offenders face a lower probability of detection when victims are reluctant to contact law enforcement. Jácome (2022) provides corroborating evidence from Dallas, showing that increased enforcement reduces crime reporting among Hispanic victims.

The erosion of trust between immigrant communities and police has broader implications for crime measurement and policy evaluation. If immigration enforcement reduces crime reporting,

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studies relying on reported crime data may overestimate the crime-reducing effects of enforcement policies. These findings highlight a tension in enforcement design: programs intended to identify and deport criminal immigrants can simultaneously undermine the community trust essential for effective crime prevention.

Against this backdrop, a counter-movement has emerged advocating for local sanctuary policies, pro-immigrant laws that limit cooperation between local authorities and federal immigration officers. The debate over sanctuary policies has been politically divisive, with opponents arguing that such measures jeopardize public safety by shielding criminal immigrants from deportation, and proponents contending that they maintain the trust between immigrant communities and local law enforcement essential for effective policing. The empirical evidence consistently suggests that these policies do not increase crime.

Hausman (2020) finds that sanctuary policies halve deportations of individuals without a criminal background while leaving deportations of violent offenders unchanged and with no detectable effect on crime rates. Amuedo-Dorantes et al. (2022) confirm that sanctuary policies do not impede enforcement against convicted criminals, while Gonzalez O'Brien et al. (2019) and Manning and Burkhardt (2022) report either negative or null effects on crime. Otsu (2021) provides evidence that sanctuary policies reduce property crime, with the effect growing stronger in the years following adoption.

The crime effects of sanctuary policies may operate through what Otsu (2021) describes as a “spiral of trust”. By reducing the threat of deportation and signaling local acceptance of migrants, sanctuary policies encourage immigrants to engage with public institutions, strengthening trust and cooperation with police. This trust channel extends beyond public safety. Zuchowski (2025) documents that sanctuary policies increase financial inclusion among Hispanics in the US mortgage market. Greater financial inclusion may, in turn, improve the economic stability of immigrant households, suggesting a potential long-run pathway through which sanctuary policies can reduce crime.

#### 4. Crimes Against Immigrants

Most of the literature on immigration and crime asks whether immigrants commit more crime. A less studied question is whether immigrants are disproportionately likely to become victims of crime. If so, a positive correlation between immigration and local crime rates may reflect crimes committed against immigrants rather than by them, with substantially different policy implications. This perspective has received growing attention, particularly following refugee inflows to Europe after the Syrian civil war. Germany, for instance, experienced a sharp increase in xenophobic attacks beginning in 2014 (Benček and Strasheim 2016).

Huang and Kvasnicka (2026) point to a measurement issue in the literature on the relationship between immigration and crime. They argue that most studies use crude crime rates that conflate crimes confined to foreigners, crimes confined to natives, crimes by natives against foreigners, [Hier eingeben]

and crimes by foreigners against natives, which can lead to biased inference when the goal is to assess whether natives are victimized by immigrants. Using county-level data from Germany's 2015 refugee crisis that distinguish the origin of both suspects and victims, they find no evidence that Germans were victimized at higher rates by refugees.

What drives crimes against immigrants? Krueger and Pischke (1997) examine anti-foreigner violence in Germany and find that it is more prevalent in the former East and increases with distance from the former West German border. Economic variables such as unemployment and wages do not explain the pattern once location is accounted for, suggesting that attitudes and social context matter more than economic conditions. Entorf and Lange (2023) extend this evidence to the 2014-2015 refugee inflow, exploiting institutional features of refugee assignment across German regions. They find that the size of local refugee inflows alone does not drive hate crime; rather, the response is concentrated in ethnically homogeneous areas, regions with hate crimes in the 1990s, and areas with historically high support for the Nazi party in the Weimar Republic, suggesting that latent anti-refugee sentiment is the key moderator.

The consequences of xenophobic violence extend beyond direct harm to victims. Steinhardt (2018) finds that exposure to xenophobic violence negatively affects the socio-economic integration of immigrants in Germany. Deole (2019) documents that following right-wing terror attacks targeting Turkish immigrants in Germany, Turkish immigrants are less likely to identify as German, while their subjective well-being and health decline. These effects extend beyond the host country. Friebel et al. (2013) find that xenophobic attacks in South Africa reduce migration intentions from Mozambique, with the effect concentrated among household heads with young children who lack access to social networks. However, the relationship between hostility against migrants and integration is not uniformly negative. Jaschke et al. (2022) find that refugees allocated to more hostile regions in Germany assimilate more quickly to local culture, possibly as a defensive response to social pressure.

Taken together, these findings suggest that crimes against immigrants can shape integration trajectories, health outcomes, and migration decisions. They also raise a methodological concern. If immigration leads to hate crimes and violence against immigrants, then part of the positive correlation between immigration and local crime rates documented in some studies may reflect crimes against immigrants rather than by them, a distinction that most aggregate studies cannot make.

## 5. Immigration and Crime Perception

A growing body of research examines the relationship between immigration and crime perception. This distinction between the effect on crime and crime perception matters because perceptions can shape economic outcomes and policy preferences independently of whether immigration actually affects crime. Buonanno et al. (2013), for example, show that crime perception affects housing prices beyond the direct costs of crime.

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Media plays an important role in shaping crime perceptions, both through the volume of crime reporting and through selective coverage that can distort the perceived association between immigration and crime. Facchini (2021) provides a comprehensive review of how media exposure shapes individual attitudes toward immigration, the role of information provision in correcting misperceptions, and the mechanisms through which media coverage affects the accountability of elected politicians on immigration policy. Mastrorocco and Minale (2018) find, using a natural experiment in the rollout of digital television in Italy, that reduced exposure to TV channels with high levels of crime reporting lowers concerns about crime, while Schneider-Strawczynski and Valette (2025) demonstrate that media coverage of immigration can polarize public attitudes toward immigrants. Similarly, Cattaneo and Grieco (2021) show, through a survey experiment in the UK, that exposing natives to a narrative emphasizing the positive economic contributions of immigrants leads them to revise their beliefs and exhibit more pro-migrant attitudes and behavior, indicating that perceptions are responsive to how immigration is framed in public discourse.

Two studies provide direct evidence on how media framing of immigrant crime shapes public attitudes and political outcomes. Keita et al. (2024) exploit an editorial shift in the Saxon newspaper *Sächsische Zeitung*, which in July 2016 began systematically disclosing the origin of all crime suspects, foreign and German alike, departing from the longstanding German press code that advised against revealing suspects' nationality. Prior to this change, the newspaper's coverage was comparable to that of other German outlets. After the shift, the share of articles mentioning the origin of suspects rose by almost 10 percentage points relative to comparison newspapers, driven almost entirely by increased disclosure of German suspects' origin. Readers in the newspaper's circulation area experienced a decline in concerns about immigration in the post-treatment period, but, strikingly, an increase in concerns about crime in general, consistent with the heightened salience of native-born offending. These findings demonstrate that the standard practice of omitting native suspects' origin while highlighting that of foreign suspects can create the illusion of a disproportionate link between immigration and crime, and that restoring symmetry in reporting can substantially reduce anti-immigrant sentiment.

Couttenier et al. (2024) provide complementary evidence from Switzerland. Combining data on violent crime with content from twelve newspapers in the months preceding a minaret-ban referendum, they show that local newspapers systematically over-reported offenses attributed to foreigners. Exploiting random variation in the occurrence of crimes near newspapers' headquarters, the authors find that this biased coverage causally raised support for the ban.

A small but growing literature examines how immigration shocks directly affect crime perceptions. Ajzenman et al. (2023) study labor immigration to Chile over the period 2008-2017, during which the foreign-born population tripled. They find null effects on actual crime but significant increases in crime-related concerns and preventive behavioral responses, such as investing in home security. These results suggest that immigration can shift perceptions of safety even absent real changes in crime. Nunziata (2015) documents a similar pattern in Western Europe. Using individual-level data from the European Social Survey and exploiting the increase in immigration flows during the 2000s, he finds that immigration did not affect crime

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victimization but was associated with a significant increase in fear of crime. Zuchowski and Maciel (2026) provide evidence of the opposite pattern in the context of Ukrainian refugees arriving in Poland after Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. Using data on safety concerns that citizens report to the police through an online platform, they find a persistent decline in reported safety concerns in counties more exposed to the refugee inflow. The decline is statistically significant for reports that the police could not confirm and for reports classified as jokes, but not for police-confirmed reports. Total recorded crime and the police clearance rate do not change with refugee exposure. In a related study, Brzezinski (2026) also finds no detectable local increase in recorded crime following the refugee inflow. This suggests that the decline in reported safety concerns is unlikely to reflect improved public safety. Instead, it is consistent with contact with and empathy toward war refugees, mostly women and children, lowering perceived risk or raising the threshold for reporting minor local problems. The direction of the effect thus appears to depend on the type of migration and the nature of contact: labor immigration increases fear of crime even when crime does not rise, while exposure to war refugees reduces reported safety concerns even when recorded crime does not change.

Immigration waves can also shape how crimes committed by immigrant-origin populations are perceived and treated by the justice system. Bertoli et al. (forthcoming) provide evidence that Hispanic citizens in the United States receive significantly longer federal sentences when apprehensions of irregular immigrants along the southwest border are higher. Border apprehensions increase the salience of Hispanic ethnic identity and activate negative stereotypes. The authors interpret this as time-varying discrimination. Immigration enforcement events spill over onto citizens who share the ethnic background of arriving immigrants, affecting their treatment in criminal courts even when they have no connection to immigration themselves. The effect operates only for defendants without a heavy previous criminal record, consistent with stereotypes playing a larger role when judges have less individual-level information.

## 6. Summary

This article has reviewed the recent empirical evidence on the relationship between immigration and crime. Across countries, periods, and identification strategies, the literature points to findings that stand in contrast to widely held public concerns. Causal estimates from credible quasi-experimental designs typically find null or small effects on overall crime rates, and where effects do emerge, they tend to be concentrated in property offenses rather than violent crime and among migrant groups with restricted access to legal employment. This pattern is consistent with an economic-opportunity mechanism: when the relative returns to legal work are low, financially motivated crime becomes more attractive. Recent evidence from the staggered rollout of food-delivery platforms in France and Brazil supports this mechanism, as the expansion of low-skill legal employment is shown to reduce property and street crime (Allouard et al. 2026, Frankenthal 2025). Labor market access, however, seems not to be the only factor. Evidence from internal migration in China shows that cultural distance and barriers to social integration also shape migrant offending, independently of economic conditions (Liu and Xu 2025).

A growing body of literature discusses immigration policy as a key determinant of both labor market and social integration. Legalization programs and birthright citizenship are shown to reduce criminal activity, particularly for economically motivated offenses (Mastrobuoni and Pinotti 2015, Pinotti 2017, Fasani 2018, Baker 2015, Andres et al. 2026), while restrictions on legal employment raise it (Freedman et al. 2018). Furthermore, the design of interior enforcement matters in ways that go beyond direct deterrence. Enforcement programs such as Secure Communities do not reduce crime (Miles and Cox 2014), but they can erode community trust, reduce crime reporting by immigrant populations, and increase their victimization (Gonçalves et al. 2026, Jácome 2022). Conversely, sanctuary policies appear to restore that trust and are associated with either lower or unchanged crime alongside broader gains in economic inclusion (Hausman 2020, Otsu 2021, Amuedo-Dorantes et al. 2022, Zuchowski 2025).

Another growing but still under-researched dimension of the literature covers crimes against immigrants. Evidence from forced-migration waves in Colombia and Brazil shows that the safety costs of displacement are borne primarily by migrants themselves rather than by natives (Knight and Tribin 2023, Marques 2025). Furthermore, research finds that exposure to xenophobic violence has broader consequences for integration, health, and the migration decisions of potential migrants abroad (Steinhardt 2018, Deole 2019, Friebe et al. 2013). Within destination countries, hate crime tends to cluster in places defined less by the size of recent inflows than by latent attitudes, ethnic homogeneity, and historical sentiment toward outsiders (Krueger and Pischke 1997, Entorf and Lange 2023).

Lastly, this review discusses perceptions of crime, as they often diverge from the empirical evidence on the relationship between immigration and crime. Labor migration has been associated with heightened fear of crime even when actual crime is unchanged (Ajzenman et al. 2023, Nunziata 2015), while war refugee inflows can potentially reduce reported safety concerns (Zuchowski and Maciel 2026). Media framing plays a central role in shaping these perceptions. Asymmetric reporting that highlights foreign suspects while omitting native ones creates the illusion of a disproportionate link between immigration and crime, and restoring symmetry can substantially reduce anti-immigrant sentiment and political support for restrictive policies (Keita et al. 2024, Couttenier et al. 2024). Salience effects can also spill onto co-ethnic citizens through the criminal justice system. For instance, when apprehensions along the US southwest border increase, Hispanic citizens receive significantly longer federal sentences, suggesting that immigration salience activates stereotypes that affect the treatment of citizens who share the ethnic background of arriving immigrants (Bertoli et al. forthcoming).

Several avenues for future research stand out. The growing availability of administrative crime data linking suspects and victims by origin creates new opportunities to disentangle crimes committed by immigrants from those committed against them, addressing a measurement problem that may bias aggregate studies. The interaction between specific policy instruments, such as legalization pathways, integration programs, housing allocation, and language training, and crime outcomes also deserves further attention. The determinants of crime perception, and the role of media and political discourse in shaping them, remain understudied relative to the [Hier eingeben]

determinants of actual crime, although misperceptions have direct consequences for policy. Finally, crimes against immigrants remain largely overlooked both as a mechanism that may confound the estimated relationship between immigration and aggregate crime rates and as a main outcome of interest.

The evidence reviewed in this article carries direct implications for policymakers. Immigration policies that provide legal employment access are likely to minimize crime effects, while restrictions on labor market participation may increase offending by lowering the relative return to legal activity. Interior enforcement programs should be evaluated not only on their direct apprehension objectives but also on their effects on community trust and crime reporting. Furthermore, because the gap between perception and evidence on the relationship between immigration and crime can sustain restrictive policies that the data do not justify, addressing misperceptions through transparent communication and unbiased media coverage remains an important challenge.

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