

Immigration and Crime

The myth that there is a correlation between high immigration rates and increased crime

My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no wrong. Daniel 6:22

Information:

Across the country calls are being made to limit immigration and deport undocumented immigrants based on the erroneous belief that there is a correlation between high levels of immigration and crime. Although, research consistently reveals immigrants are less likely than native-born citizens to commit crimes, the misperception continues. The National Opinion Research Center's 2000 General Social Survey, asked whether respondents believed "more immigrants cause higher crime rates" and 73% believed that immigration is causally related to more crime.

Some groups exploit the fear of increased crime in pushing agendas to limit immigration. This is used to justify the many state and local immigration related ordinances and laws, detention of immigrants, and increased spending on border security. At all levels of the immigration debate crime and immigration are conflated and portrayed as if there is a positive correlation.

Insight:

In reality immigration rates are at their highest yet crime is at some of the lowest levels seen. In fact, since the early 1990s while immigration quadrupled, crime rates have declined both nationally and in cities and regions of high immigrant concentration.¹ Immigrant populations doubled from 1994 to 2004 and the violent crime rates declined by 35.1% and property crime rates fell by 25.0%.² While crimes rates have declined, incarceration rates have sharply risen.

¹ Police Foundation, <http://policefoundation.org/indexStriking.html>.

² Immigration Policy Center, *From Anecdotes to Evidence: Setting the record straight on immigrants and crimes.*

Throughout the period of 1925-1975, there was stability in the numbers with 110 prisoners per 100,000 people. Between 1980 and 2006, the rate grew to 751 per 100,000.³ The vast majority of the over 2 million people in jail are men between ages 18-39. Of those prisoners, the incarceration rate of US born was five times the rate of the foreign-born.⁴

The causes of crime are complex and involve a host of factors. However, a higher predictor of crime is ethnicity and educational level, not immigration status. The risk of imprisonment for male high school dropouts is 6.9% compared to high school dropouts, 2%. It follows that increasing the support of education, especially for minority males, would lower their risk of incarceration.

Invitation to act

Be aware of the immigration debate in the local community and oppose rhetoric which characterizes immigrants as the root of violence and crime in neighborhoods.

Recognize and provide the space for immigrants to share their work in the local community through educational opportunities, forums, and workshops.



³ Immigration Policy Center, see #2.

⁴ Immigration Policy Center, see #2.

Inquire

Daniel, a stranger in the king's land, was wrongly charged with a crime. The king believed in Daniel's innocence and prayed for his deliverance. The belief that immigrants have committed crimes by virtue of being an immigrant contributes to an environment of hostility that denies them opportunities to advance and contribute to American culture. As Christians, we can work to change the perception but also pray that they be delivered from false charges and uplifted in their efforts to attain the American Dream. Please join in prayer.

God, blessed be your name from age to age. To you, O God of our ancestors, we give thanks and praise, for you gave Daniel wisdom and power to interpret the king's dreams and find favor in him and to us you also give wisdom and power so that we might deliver the strangers in our midst from false charges. We recognize that in nurturing and supporting youths, we lower their risk of incarceration. Please help us reach out in love to all the children in our communities and see not only their potential to change our society but see Christ in them. We pray through Christ in whom your light and love has been revealed to us. Amen.

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