

A Dynamic Approach to Understanding Immigration, Ethnicity and Violent Crime in Chicago Communities

Ph.D. Dissertation

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Abstract

Once again, politically-driven events in the United States have brought the relationship between immigration and crime to the forefront in public, political, and academic discourses. Yet, despite proclamations made by a key U.S. political figure claiming that immigrants, specifically Mexican immigrants, are “bringing drugs...[and] bringing crime” (Trump, 2015) to U.S. communities, criminological research consistently finds that there is either an inverse relationship between immigration and crime- or no relationship at all (see Ousey and Kubrin, 2017 and National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine, 2015 for review). Moreover, with decades of research on the relationship between immigration and crime, this large body of literature has remained either cross-sectional in nature and/or relied on pan-ethnic foreign-born measures of immigration.

Following the tradition of early urban sociology, this dissertation contributes to immigration and crime scholarship by focusing on the dynamic nature of neighborhoods, ethnoracial neighborhood structure, and changes in community populations’ ethnic immigrant groups on community violent crime. The current work draws upon fundamental ecological theories of crime, note-worthy immigration, communities and crime scholarship to argue for including measures of ethnicity in immigration and crime studies. Further, it argues that the logical next-step in immigration-crime research is to examine how changing community population compositions affect safety within neighborhoods inherently shaped by the U.S. ethnoracial regime. Using secondary data from the 2000 U.S. Decennial Census, the 2005-2009 American Community Survey (ACS) and the National Neighborhood Crime Study I and II (NNCS) on 814 Chicago census tracts, the current work adds another layer of richness to the body of communities, immigration, and crime scholarship. Thus it presents how, all things equal, changes (2000-2009) in Chicago communities’ foreign-born populations by ethnicity and nativity affect changes in community violent crime (2012).