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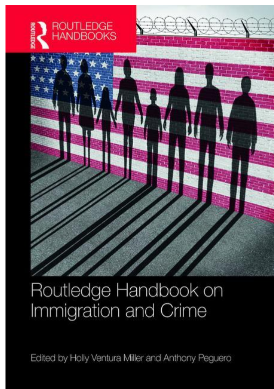

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10

LATINO IMMIGRATION AND CRIME

Carlos E. Rojas-Gaona and Arelys Madero-Hernandez

> I believe in the idea of amnesty for those who have put down roots and lived here, even though some time back they may have entered illegally.
>
> *(Ronald Reagan, former President of the United States)*

Introduction

Generation after generation, immigration has been a core attribute of U.S. society and culture. Yet, concerns have always existed about the possible consequences of immigration for the U.S. economy, health services, jobs, welfare, and ultimately crime. These concerns have been accentuated in recent times, as much of the rhetoric permeating public debates suggests that immigrants are disproportionally crime prone. Yet, research studies have revealed quite the opposite: foreign-born individuals have less of an involvement in criminal activity than their native-born counterparts (Morenoff & Astor, 2006; Rojas-Gaona, Hong, & Peguero, 2016; Sampson, 2008; Sampson, Morenoff, & Raudenbush, 2005), and communities with higher concentrations of immigrants do not experience the acute levels of violence expected by many (Martínez & Lee, 2000; Martínez, Stowell, & Lee, 2010; Rumbaut & Ewing, 2007). The existing research has also documented that this is particularly the case of Latino immigrants and Latino enclaves, findings reflected in the concept of the "Latino paradox" (Martínez, 2010; Sampson, 2008; Sampson & Bean, 2006; Stowell, Messner, McGeever, & Raffalovich, 2009).

The rapid growth in the number of studies in this area in the past decades makes it all the more important for researchers to take stock on the accumulated evidence. It is also vital to reflect on what this body of literature tells us about future directions policy wise. Thus, our goal in this chapter is to present a general overview that includes the historical background, theoretical perspectives, and existing empirical evidence behind the Latino immigration and crime link. We begin with a brief review of the historical background, policies, and changes in immigration trends to provide a window into the roots of the current rhetoric on the alleged relationship between immigration and crime. Next, we turn our attention to the theories that can be used to understand the effects of Latino immigration on crime and criminal behavior. We then present a detailed synthesis of the empirical studies published to date, both micro- and macro-level studies. We conclude with a discussion of the policy implications of these findings and considerations for future research.

Latino Immigration to the United States

Historic and Current Trends of Latino Immigration

Although the United States is a nation of immigrants, there has been tremendous variation over the years in the numbers of foreign nationals admitted, their countries of origins, and their geographical areas of settlement. The first era of rapid immigration growth occurred between 1820 and 1930, when the immigrant population in the United States increased from 0.1 million to 14.2 million (Gibson & Lennon, 1999). Throughout this period, most immigrants came from Northern and Western Europe (particularly Italy, Russia, Germany, Hungary, and the United Kingdom) and settled in Northeast cities like New York, Boston, Baltimore, and Philadelphia (Office of Immigration Statistics, 2016). Immigration declined during the Great Depression but resumed soon thereafter. In 1970, there were 9.6 million immigrants residing in the United States. By 2014, that number had grown to 44.4 million (Migration Policy Institute, 2016). The latest surge of immigration, unlike the original waves from Europe, originated in Latino-America nations (e.g., Mexico and Cuba) and Asia (primarily the Philippines, Korea, China, and India).

Recent results from the American Community Survey for the year 2015 estimate that there are 56.5 million Hispanics or Latinos in the United States. The majority of them—nearly 36 million—are of Mexican origin, followed by Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Salvadorans, and Dominicans. Other nationalities are represented in smaller proportions, with Central Americans (excluding Salvadorans) and South Americans accounting for less than 20 percent of the Latino population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The share of the Latino population that is foreign-born ranges tremendously, with as much as 60 percent in Miami, Florida, versus less than 20 percent in Albuquerque (Pew Research Center, 2016a). Geographical differences are also notable in the concentration of Latino immigrants by nationality; for example, whereas most Mexicans reside in cities like Los Angeles, San Diego, Chicago, and Houston, Puerto Ricans are largely concentrated in the New York/New Jersey metropolitan areas, and Cubans in Miami and Fort Lauderdale. A relatively recent shift in the preferred areas of immigrant settlement has given rise to a distinction between "traditional" versus "new destinations" (Massey, 2008). Traditional destinations, such as the largest cities in New York, California, Texas, Florida, and Illinois, saw a surge of immigration in the 1970s and 1980s. New destinations emerged after the 1990s, with immigrants arriving in greater proportions in smaller cities and towns in the Middle West and South (e.g. Nevada, Georgia, and North Carolina). As we argue below, this historical background on the volume, origins, and geographies of immigration to the United States is important to consider when examining the hypothesized link between Latino immigration and crime.

Immigration Policy and Its Impact on Latino Immigration

Immigration policies in the United States have shifted widely over the course of the last two centuries, although at a slow pace. Until the 1910s, the country maintained an "open doors" policy with few restrictions for immigrants. The first federal laws that regulated naturalization matters stated that any free person who resided in the country for two years could acquire U.S. citizenship, a provision that attracted numerous newcomers (Bernard, 1998). Between 1880 and 1914, only 1 percent of the 25 million immigrants arriving in U.S. entry points were denied entrance (Ngai, 2004). Immigration was unregulated during much of the 20th century, except for key policies (e.g., the 1882 Exclusion Act) that outlawed selective groups of migrants, particularly the Chinese. During this period, Latinos accounted for a small proportion of all immigrants, but they grew in numbers. As is the case today, the largest share of Latino immigration originated in Mexico. For example, in 1920, the number of foreign-born Mexicans reached 486,418, far exceeding the 4,912 immigrants from Central America

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and 18,551 from South America. It was also a large increase from the 103,445 Mexican nationals recorded in the 1900 Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1900, 1920).

The largest shift away from the open doors policy that characterized the United States for over a century was perhaps the Johnson Act of 1921, which limited the annual number of admissions on the basis of a quota system. For each country, the quota was set to be no more than 3 percent of the U.S. foreign-born population native from that country, as per the 1910 Census. This quota system favored migrants from Europe, but also resulted in significantly less immigration overall, reducing admittances to less than a quarter of what they were in the 1800s. Later, the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 further restricted the quota thresholds to 2 percent and added new screenings via the requirement of visas from U.S. consulates for admission into the country. The Act also enabled the creation of a border patrol and the allocation of resources for deportations, both of which were not priorities in years past.

Immigration restrictions continued during the second part of the 20th century. The quota system remained in place, although with episodic revisions to the actual quotas and provisions to admit refugees. A new focus of immigration policies was to accommodate the need for seasonal workers. The Bracero program was at the core of the flow of Latino immigrant workers, especially Mexicans. In place between 1942 and 1964, this foreign/guest worker program allowed for contracting Mexican laborers for limited periods of time, at low wages. It is estimated that over 4 million Mexicans entered the country to work while the Bracero program was in place, both as seasonal workers and illegal workers (Eastman, 2012). The program was discontinued in 1964 due to the declining need for labor, continuing conflicts between employers and organized laborers, and concerns about immigration overall.

By 1980, immigration from Latin American nations was well established while anti-immigration sentiments increased. In 1986, Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), largely known for its provisions to legalize millions of unauthorized immigrants who were residing in the country, labeled by some as an "amnesty." This legislation added mechanisms to regain control of the U.S. border, including more patrols' resources and penalties for employers who knowingly hired unauthorized workers. IRCA also set a Special Agricultural Worker Program, which allowed the legalization of select agricultural workers and provided pathways for hiring additional workers if needed. Despite a short-term success in curbing illegal border crossings, IRCA was mostly seen as a failed policy or "a symbolic measure with little meaningful potential" (Calavita, 1998, p. 93). Following IRCA, the Immigration Act of 1990 added new regulations of legal immigration, with emphasis on raising the caps for employer-based visas and facilitating the entry of highly skilled professionals needed for a changing U.S. economy that relied less on manufacturing and more on services.

Post-IRCA policies continued to prioritize the need for border controls and enforcement. Between 1993 and 1997, various crackdown programs—such as Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego, among others—sought to halt the flow of illegal immigrants coming from Mexico and Central America. Mandates for building fences along the Southwest border were included in the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 and the Secure Fence Act of 2006. This emphasis on enforcement has continued in recent years, as the number of deportations reported by the Department of Homeland Security between 2001 and 2014 showed a clear upward trend, reaching a record high of 435,000 in 2013. Deportations dropped by about 5 percent in 2014 and are estimated to have continued to decrease in 2015 (Pew Research Center, 2016b). Given this historic background, it is remarkable that two key recent programs, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA), are seeking to legalize unauthorized immigrants. Both of them are executive actions that bypass Congress and have been largely criticized for that reason. DACA allows young adults who were illegally brought to the United States as children to apply for temporary relief from

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deportation and a two-year work permit. DAPA similarly extends a temporary deportation relief and a three-year work permit to the unauthorized immigrant parents of U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents who have resided in the country for five or more years. To date, more than 650,000 young adults have received deferred action through DACA, while DAPA remains blocked by the judiciary.

The previous review of U.S. immigration policies highlights a crucial point: immigration flows are the result from push and pull forces. This has been very much the case for Latino immigrants, particularly from Mexico and Central America. Historically, expansions in agriculture, infra-structure, and housing development in the U.S. economy have served as pull factors for migrants, especially Mexicans moving north of the border (Eastman, 2012). This movement was, in many cases, accommodated via temporary immigration policies or under guest laborer programs that paid lower wages to workers. More recently, a combination of political turmoil, rising crime rates, limited opportunities, and gang violence, has pushed citizens of Central American countries such as Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Honduras, away from their homeland in the search for a better quality of life in the United States.

Although immigration is at the very foundation of the United States as a global nation, a history of failed immigration policies combined with up and down cycles in the economy have come to shape public attitudes and support, or lack thereof, toward immigration. Policies have selectively opened up immigration opportunities in times when labor has been needed, but this has changed in periods of economic depression, when immigrants have been perceived as a threat for taking away jobs from qualified Americans or for depending on welfare and evading taxes. In 2008, 89 percent of Americans thought that illegal immigration was a serious problem and 82 percent stated that the government was not doing enough to keep the borders safe (Miller, 2008). As much as three-fourths of Americans have expressed the belief that immigration causes crime (Rumbaut & Ewing, 2007). It is not surprising that in the current climate preceding the 2016 presidential elections, concerns about immigration have reemerged, particularly the claim that Latino immigrants are disproportionately involved in crime. A clear example of this is a quote by Donald Trump, the candidate for the Republican Party and eventual election winner, who stated in reference to Mexicans: "They're bringing drugs, they're bringing crime. They're rapists" (Rappeport, 2015).

Theoretical Perspectives on Immigration and Crime

Social Disorganization Theory

The role of immigration in shaping community outcomes, including crime, was highlighted in the work coming out of the Chicago School of Criminology in the early 20th century. In *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, Thomas and Znaniecki (1918) argued that social disorganization was a key concept to understand deviant and criminal behavior among Polish immigrants in Chicago. The authors explained that in immigrant communities there is a divide in the cultural values embraced by first-generation immigrants—values imported from their country of origin—versus the values of their second-generation children as they assimilate into a heterogeneous society. Feelings of group solidarity and attachment to family are weakened among second-generation youths. The result is social disorganization, defined as "a decrease of the influence of existing social rules of behavior upon individual members of the group" (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918, p. 2). The declining role of social rules that emerges in immigrant communities means that traditional mechanisms of social control are no longer effective to inhibit antisocial behavior, and individuals are free to engage in crime.

Although social disorganization was introduced by Thomas and Znaniecki in connection to the process of assimilation, it was the work of Shaw and McKay (1942) that consolidated a theory about social disorganization and crime. The main premise in their work is that areas of high poverty, residential instability, and ethnic heterogeneity are more likely to have high crime because the structures

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of formal and informal control are weak, which decreases the costs of deviance and facilitates opportunities for illegal activity (Shaw & McKay, 1942). Weak controls emanate from multiple sources: (1) community institutions are difficult to maintain because residents are not invested and plan to move out when the first opportunity comes; (2) the flux of local networks precludes the development of ties needed for the exercise of informal control; and (3) heterogeneity in terms of ethnicity or national origin impedes communication and obstructs the quest for solving common problems. In addition, Shaw and McKay believed that a differential system of values, which facilitated the transmission of criminal definitions and attitudes, also explained why poor neighborhoods were more criminogenic.

Thus, social disorganization theory could be interpreted as to suggest a positive relationship between immigration and crime (Lee & Martínez, 2006; Lee, Martínez, & Rosenfeld, 2001; Martínez & Lee, 2000; Olson, Laurikkala, Huff-Corzine, & Corzine, 2009). After all, communities with high concentrations of immigrants are characterized by high ethnic heterogeneity and residential instability, variables that Shaw and McKay (1942) described as predictors for community levels of crime. This applies to Latino immigration too, as "social disorganization theory suggests that the immigration process could have destabilizing and possibly crime-generating effects on Latino communities" (Feldmeyer, 2009, p. 719).

Interestingly, Shaw and McKay posit that it is the disruption in the community social organization brought about by the flux of residents in areas of high immigration, and not the characteristics of the immigrants themselves, that caused crime. Their research on youths referred to the Cook County Juvenile Court between 1900 and 1965 called into question the very idea that certain nationalities of immigrants were inherently crime prone. They demonstrated that the relative distribution of delinquency rates remained stable between 1900 and 1933, despite changes in the ethnic and racial composition of neighborhoods. This finding implied that high crime rates were not due to the characteristics of individual residents, but the social environment or type of neighborhood. Shaw and McKay noted that race and nationality were only related to delinquency to the extent they were related to differences in geographical location or patterns of segregation of these racial/ethnic groups within the city (i.e., a spurious relationship). Generation after generation, both immigrants and non-immigrants who settled in the zone of transition—areas directly adjacent to the central business district—had high delinquency rates, but those rates declined once they were able to move out.

Contemporary applications of social disorganization theory highlight the fact that the meaning of immigration has changed substantively since Shaw and McKay's work (Martínez et al., 2010). This relates to our earlier discussion of historic trends in immigration, and the changes in terms of nationalities of origin and areas of settlement, as well as volume of immigrants coming to the United States. As Martínez et al. wrote: "We have good reasons to suspect that residential stability, often defined in terms of population turnover and the proportion of vacant buildings, will have different effects in the San Diego of today compared to the Chicago of yesterday" (Martínez, 2010, p. 803). Indeed, as we describe later in this chapter, several studies published recently indicate that immigration has different effects on crime, depending on the time of the arrivals, as well across traditional versus new destinations. On the other hand, contemporary research acknowledges the limitations of applying social disorganization theory to study immigration, mainly the fact that immigration does not increase crime, as the theory would indicate (Martínez & Lee, 2000).

The Immigrant Revitalization Perspective

In light of the now robust empirical evidence that shows that immigration does not increase crime, researchers have proposed a new theoretical perspective, the immigrant revitalization (see Lee & Martínez, 2006; Lee, Martínez, & Rosenfeld, 2001). The immigrant revitalization perspective is founded upon the so-called "Latino paradox," the finding that Latinos have unusually positive

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outcomes (e.g., less criminal involvement and better health outcomes) given their low socioeconomic status (Sampson, 2008). According to this perspective, an influx of immigrants does not need to lead to crime. Instead, it can have the opposite effect of transforming a community's economic and cultural institutions in ways that protect it against crime. In particular, the literature highlights two potential transformative processes, described below: (1) immigration as a force that opens up new opportunities and strengthens social ties; and (2) immigration as an injection of new cultural values incompatible with violence.

First, immigrant communities in the United States are characterized by strong ties to the labor market, and in the case of Latinos specifically, by strong family and kinship networks. Previous studies show how immigrant enclaves have high social capital and strong ties that may shield against the deleterious effects of poverty (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). Latino immigrant concentration areas are characterized by strong kinship networks that open up labor opportunities for incoming immigrants that would not be available to this minority group outside the ethnic enclave (Portes & Manning, 1986; Portes & Zhou, 1993). Ethnic enclaves may enhance informal social control to the extent that social networks formed to reinforce coethnics' identity, language, and cultural memory are used to exercise social controls and transmit shared expectations of behavior. Portes (1995) argues that the immigrant enclave provides valuable tools for parenting and exercising social control to the extent that immigrant parents can "call on co-ethnics to reinforce normative expectations vis-à-vis their offspring and to supervise their behavior" (Portes, 1995, p. 257). Although Portes's (1995) thesis aimed to explain differences in assimilation, the author illustrates well the notion that Hispanic immigrant communities have a kind of social capital that is unique given their conditions of economic disadvantage. This social capital may work to reduce both individual- and macro-level crime.

Second, it is also possible that immigration helps reduce crime because it brings new cultural values to the community, especially values shaped by religion. This thesis, unlike social disorganization theory, emphasizes the importance of the transmission of cultural values that are not oppositional to mainstream culture, but rather oriented to strengthening institutions of control in communities, particularly churches. Elaborating upon commentary by Brooks (2006) in the *New York Times*, Harris and Feldmeyer (2015) propose that Latino immigration may act as a "shot of morality" that may protect communities against crime. They describe how Latino communities have high levels of church participation and civic engagement, as well as uniformity in religious values. They hypothesize that these characteristics will be negatively associated with violence and also mediate the link between immigration and crime, a hypothesis for which they found support. On the other hand, others have proposed that immigration may simply help to dilute oppositional cultural values existing in U.S. society, as first-generation immigrants' values emphasize an appreciation for working hard and a desire to stay out of trouble. As Robert Sampson notes: "Selective immigration in the current era may be leading to the greater visibility of competing non-violent mores that affect not just immigrant communities but diffuse and concatenate through social interactions to tamp down violent conflict in general" (Sampson, 2008, p. 33).

Taken together, social disorganization and the immigrant revitalization perspectives provide a theoretical background to draw hypotheses about the relationship between immigration and crime. Although these theories have been applied primarily at the macro level, micro-level research can also draw from them to inform their findings. In the next section, we describe in depth the existing empirical literature on the link between Latino immigration and crime.

Empirical Evidence on Latino Immigration and Crime

In the introduction to this chapter it was suggested that along with a significant increase in the foreign-born Latino population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011a, 2011b, 2012a), there has been an anti-immigration rhetoric that often depicts Latino immigrants as criminogenic.

However, researchers rely on several sources of crime statistics, official reports, and self-reports, as well as empirical evidence derived from their research at the micro and macro levels of analysis, to objectively assess the argument that Latino immigrants are "harmful" to U.S. society. Taken as a whole, the available empirical evidence to date seems to demystify the idea that Latino immigration is per se criminogenic (Harris & Feldmeyer, 2013; Sampson, 2008), and in some cases maintains that Latino immigration is in fact beneficial by reducing overall crime rates in the community (Feldmeyer, Steffensmeier, & Ulmer, 2013; Harris & Feldmeyer, 2013; Martínez, 2002, 2010; Ramey, 2013).

Micro-Level Research Studies

A growing body of research to date has shown that foreign-born individuals have less of an involvement in criminal activity than their native-born counterparts (Morenoff & Astor, 2006; Rojas-Gaona et al., 2016; Sampson, 2008; Sampson et al., 2005). Scholars suggest that Latino immigrants may be insulated from criminogenic forces by virtue of their higher social integration and participation in the labor market, even when this entails partaking in the informal economy, facing low wages, or experiencing structural constraints similar to those endured by other racial/ethnic groups (Martínez, 2010; Martínez, Lee, & Nielsen, 2004; Martínez & Valenzuela, 2006; Sampson, 2008).

This buffering effect might be understood as a two-pronged process. First, Latino immigrants might import pro-social cultural values to their new setting by virtue of *familism*, a process that in turn protects them from criminal involvement. Second, varying levels of criminal involvement among Latino immigrants might depend on processes of *acculturation* and *assimilation* that they experience in their host country (Estrada-Martínez, Padilla, Caldwell, & Schulz, 2011; Jacobson, England, & Barrus, 2008). Sampson (2008) asserts that Latino immigrants are insulated from criminal involvement insofar as they have not acculturated into the highly violent U.S. society. Similarly, as conceptualized in the process of *segmented assimilation*, Latino immigrants are insulated from criminal involvement and are able to ascend upwardly in U.S. society to the extent that they are able to slowly incorporate and balance the demands of their host country while maintaining a sense of belonging to their country of origin (Rojas-Gaona et al., 2016). At the crux of this argument is the idea that Latino immigrants' generational status (e.g., foreign-born, second-, third-generation) might serve to explain varying levels of criminal offending among this group.

Empirical evidence at the micro level about the Latino immigrant-criminal offending nexus— particularly studies of generational status— shows that Latino immigrants are less likely to engage in criminal offending than the U.S.-born, regardless of their racial/ethnic background. For example, consistent with the "Latino immigrant paradox," Sampson (2008) published a report for the American Sociological Association's magazine *Contexts* in which he demystifies the argument that Latino immigrants are crime prone (Sampson, 2008; Sampson et al., 2005). Sampson et al. (2005) analyzed data from official records, a separate community survey of more than 8,000 Chicago residents, and three waves of data based on 3,000 Chicagoans nested within 180 neighborhoods. Through a series of multilevel logistic regression models, the authors found that net of a series of individual, family and neighborhood characteristics, Latino immigrants were 45 percent less likely to commit violence than the U.S.-born, and that living in a neighborhood of high Latino immigrant concentration was in fact a protective factor against violent offending.

Morenoff and Astor (2006), and Rumbaut, Gonzalez, Komaie, Morgan, and Tafoya-Estrada (2006) provided evidence supporting acculturation hypotheses when examining the effects of Latino immigrants' generational status on interpersonal violence and incarceration rates. In the first case, the authors found that compared to the native-born, first-generation Latino immigrants (i.e., foreign-born) are significantly less likely to commit acts of violence such as being involved in gang-related fights, hitting someone, carrying a weapon, or picking pockets/snatching purses (Morenoff & Astor, 2006). In the second case, the authors found that first-generation Latino immigrants are significantly

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less likely to be incarcerated compared to the U.S.-born. Moreover, longitudinal analyses revealed that the likelihood of incarceration among foreign-born Latino immigrants increases significantly as a function of time living in the United States (Rumbaut et al., 2006). In another individual-level study, Alvarez-Rivera, Nobles, and Lersch (2014) examined arrest data in El Paso, Texas and San Diego, California, pertaining to felony and misdemeanor offenses committed by young adults. Net of socio-demographic and situational factors, negative binomial regression models showed that higher levels of acculturation were associated with a higher likelihood of felony and misdemeanor arrests and convictions.

More recently, researchers have used the acculturation and segmented assimilation hypotheses at the individual level to assess differences among Latino immigrants in their criminal offending and victimization levels, compared to the U.S.-born, and to disentangle what protective or risk factors might explain these differences. Almeida, Johnson, McNamara, and Gupta (2011) used data obtained from 1,348 adolescents who participated in the 2008 Boston Youth Survey to examine the prevalence of peer violence perpetration. Net of the effects of socio-demographic characteristics, depressive symptoms, substance use, school performance, single-parent household, and perceived neighborhood problems, recent Latino immigrants (i.e., those who were foreign-born and had lived in the United States for four years or less) were significantly less likely to engage in peer violence perpetration compared to non-recent Latino immigrants, second- and third-generation U.S.-born individuals. Consistent with acculturation and segmented assimilation hypotheses, the authors found that the likelihood of peer violence perpetration among recent Latino immigrants increases significantly with more time spent in the United States. Among protective factors, the authors found that recent Latino immigrants were less likely to use licit and illicit substances, and more likely to have good school performance compared to the U.S.-born.

Similar results were obtained by Peguero and Xing (2014) in a multilevel study using data from the 2002 Educational Longitudinal Study, where the authors found that among adolescents, first-generation immigrants are less likely to be engaged in school misconduct than the second-generation (Peguero & Xing, 2014). A subtler interpretation of these findings comes from multilevel research that seems to support the notion that familism is a protective factor against violence in Latino immigrants' households (MacDonald & Saunders, 2012), or from longitudinal research indicating that first-generation Latino immigrants are more compliant and less cynical about the criminal justice system compared to second-generation and the U.S.-born (Piquero, Bersani, Loughran, & Fagan, 2014).

Although most individual-level research on the Latino immigrants-crime nexus is cross-sectional, some scholars have used longitudinal designs to examine criminal offending over the life course (Bersani, 2014; Bersani, Loughran, & Piquero, 2014; Jennings, Zgoba, Piquero, & Reingle, 2013; Vaughn et al., 2014). In a recent longitudinal study, Bersani et al. (2014) used official reports of arrest and self-reported offending data from the Pathways to Desistance Study to examine serious criminal offending risks among Latino immigrants over a period of 84 months in Arizona and Pennsylvania. Net of socio-demographic characteristics and risk factors, results from this study indicated that over a period of 84 months: (1) foreign-born Latino immigrants were significantly less likely to commit serious criminal offenses than the U.S.-born; (2) across time, foreign-born Latino immigrants were less likely to show a pattern of persistence in criminal offending compared to the U.S.-born; and (3) across time, foreign-born Latino immigrants were significantly more likely to desist from criminal offending, and do so in shorter periods of time than the U.S.-born. The authors found evidence indicating support for the acculturation and assimilation hypotheses in that Latino immigrants are more likely to offend, display persistence in offending, and be unable to desist from criminal offending by virtue of belonging to a higher generational status (i.e., second-, third-generation), having higher levels of assimilation, and by experiencing greater situational constraints (Bersani et al., 2014). Similar results were obtained by Bersani (2014).

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Longitudinal research on the intersection of Latino immigration (i.e., generational status) and gender also offers support for the acculturation thesis. For example, in a study using two waves of data from the National Epidemiologic Survey of Alcohol and Related Conditions, Vaughn et al. (2014) found that being foreign-born had the strongest protective effect against violent antisocial behavior and nonviolent criminal offending, and these protective effects substantially decreased among third-generation immigrants. Likewise, DiPietro & Cwick (2014) found that first-generation immigrant males had lower levels of conflict with their families, lower levels of harsh parenting, and displayed lower levels of violence compared to immigrant males from successive generational statuses, net of background characteristics. Similar results were obtained when comparing first-generation females with females from successive generations (DiPietro & Cwick, 2014).

Finally, a group of studies have assessed not only offending, but also victimization outcomes among Latino immigrants (Decker, Raj, & Silverman, 2007; DiPietro & Cwick, 2014; Eggers & Jennings, 2014; Gibson & Miller, 2010; Peguero, 2013; Ramos, Green, Booker, & Nelson, 2011; Sabina, Cuevas, & Schally, 2013). In general, these studies provide evidence in favor of the Latino immigrant paradox, acculturation, and segmented assimilation arguments described earlier. For example, Eggers and Jennings (2014) conducted a study using Add Health data with a subsample of Latino immigrant youth to assess the effects of immigrant generational status on violent victimization. A bivariate logistic regression model revealed that U.S.-born Latino youth had a higher likelihood of experiencing violent victimization compared to the foreign-born Latino youth, but these differences disappeared when controlling for familial attachment, having delinquent peers, and violent offending (i.e., victim-offender overlap), which suggests that the protective effect present among foreign-born Latino immigrants against violent victimization disappears by virtue of socialization experiences in the United States. As such, based on the notion of segmented assimilation, it might be argued that foreign-born immigrants would assimilate into criminogenic values conducive to violent offending and victimization, to the extent that they are associated over time with delinquent peers and/or have fewer familial attachments. In another study, Sabina et al. (2013) studied a subsample of adult Latinas from the Sexual Assault among Latinas Study and found that net of a host of background characteristics and socio-psychological measures, foreign-born Latina immigrants were less likely to experience physical assault, sexual assault, stalking, and violence threats than the U.S.-born, by virtue of their lower levels of acculturation (i.e., Anglo-orientation). In contrast, having greater levels of Latino orientation was found to be a protective factor among foreign-born Latinas against sexual victimization, compared to the U.S.-born Latinas.

Macro-Level Research Studies

Macro-level research over the past 15 years has provided substantive evidence of an inverse relationship between Latino immigration and crime, and this pattern holds after controlling for longstanding correlates of crime such as unemployment, structural disadvantage, and other socio-demographic characteristics. For example, research conducted by Martínez and colleagues in various U.S. cities has illustrated the negative association between Latino immigrant concentration and crime. Martínez (2002, 2008, 2010) used decennial census data and conducted analyses in Chicago, Illinois; San Diego, California; Miami, Florida; El Paso, Texas; and Houston, Texas, to assess the effects of Latino immigration on neighborhood-level homicide rates. Net of the effects of socio-demographic and economic factors, the overall findings of his research indicate that the rates of lethal violence were lower in neighborhoods with higher concentrations of Latino immigrants, and this likelihood was reduced even more over time, suggesting a Latino immigration protective effect. Among the possible explanations for the protective effect of immigrant concentration on neighborhood-level homicides, the author suggested a series of characteristics that seem to be particular to Latino immigrants, such

as higher levels of social integration, higher labor force attachment even when facing low-wage jobs, and familism (Martínez, 2002, 2008, 2010).

The research on the Latino immigration crime nexus has also examined various units of analysis, like metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs), census tracts, counties, or neighborhoods. For example, Reid, Weiss, Adelman, and Jaret (2005) conducted a study assessing the immigration crime nexus by combining data from the U.S. Census and the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting program for the year 2000, with a stratified random sample of 150 metropolitan areas. In this case, the authors were interested in examining the effect of immigration on both violent (i.e., murder and robbery) and property crimes (i.e., burglary and theft), net of the effects of a host of variables that are often correlated with crime such as age, population density, unemployment rate, family structure, and percent employed in the low-skill service sector. A series of OLS regression models revealed that although the effect of Latino immigration on both outcomes did not reach statistical significance in the expected direction, the overall effect of recent immigration on violent and property crimes was statistically significant in the negative direction. That is, the authors found a crime-reducing effect in MSAs with higher levels of recent immigration, consistent with the immigrant revitalization perspective (Ramey, 2013; Reid et al., 2005).

Similar to the study described above, Stowell et al. (2009) used UCR data and MSAs to estimate the effect of Latino immigration on crime rates for the years 1994 to 2004. A longitudinal analysis of crime trends across 103 MSAs for the ten-year period revealed a sharp increase (i.e., more than 20 percent) in the Latino immigrant concentration index, along with a sharp decrease in the mean violent crime rate (i.e., a mean difference of approximately 200 per 100,000 population). Moreover, dynamic regression models revealed that relative increases in the Latino immigrant population were statistically significantly associated with decreases in violent crime, robbery, and assault rates, net of the effects of a host of socio-demographic factors.

Another factor present among Latino immigrant communities that has been identified to be protective against violence is religious context. That is, Latino immigrant concentration has been found to be associated indirectly with higher levels of Catholic adherence, civically engaged religious adherence, and religious homogeneity that in turn are inversely associated with violent crime rates (Harris & Feldmeyer, 2015). Also, increases in Latino immigrant concentration have been found to be associated with increases in levels of collective efficacy (Browning, Dirlam, & Boettner, 2016), a key predictor of community-level crime. These findings are in stark contrast with the purported criminogenic nature of Latino immigration, and suggest a plausible explanation for the sharp crime drop experienced in the United States during the 1990s; a claim that is capturing more attention among researchers (Davies & Fagan, 2012; Ousey & Kubrin, 2014; Wadsworth, 2010).

It is important to note that at the backdrop of the macro-level research findings described earlier, recent projections by the U.S. Census Bureau estimate a 3 percent annual increase in the Latino population in the United States. This means that over the next 50 years, one out of every three people in the United States will be Latino of either foreign-born, second, or successive generational statuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b).[1] Given these projections, some scholars have provided an extension of the Latino immigration crime nexus by examining whether the inverse effect of Latino immigration on crime remains when comparing established versus new Latino immigrant destinations (Harris & Feldmeyer, 2013; Painter-Davis, 2016; Ramey, 2013). This line of research is currently being developed, but preliminary findings suggest a complex pattern by which Latino immigration produces a revitalization effect, contingent on the type of destination.

For example, Ramey (2013) conducted a multilevel study to assess the effects of Latino immigration on violent crimes using data from 8,628 census tracts aggregated within 84 cities that were classified as either established or new immigration destinations. A series of Poisson models controlling for tract- and city-level measures revealed a contingent process whereby immigrant revitalization operates in Latino neighborhoods only. That is, compared to White, Black, and integrated

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neighborhoods, communities that have a greater foreign-born Latino population are more likely to experience a decrease in violent crime rates in both established and new destinations. These results suggest a protective quality of Latino immigration, perhaps fostered by informal social controls, and social and economic ties that in turn curtail violence.

Finally, Harris and Feldmeyer (2013) analyzed arrest data from 326 census tracts in California, New York, and Texas to assess the Latino immigration crime nexus in traditional and non-traditional destinations. A seemingly unrelated regression model controlling for neighborhood disadvantage, residential mobility, racial heterogeneity, police per capita, total population, and male population, indicated three major findings: (1) there was no association between recent Latino immigration and violent crime across all destination sites; (2) recent Latino immigration was statistically significantly associated in the negative direction with violent crimes in traditional destinations; and (3) there was a significant, albeit weak association in the positive direction for the relationship between recent Latino immigration and Latino and Black violent crime in non-traditional destinations. These results suggest once again a protective effect in communities with high concentrations of Latinos, whereby increments in the recent Latino immigration population help to reduce violent crime rates. However, these effects appear to be dependent upon type of destination and racial/ethnic composition. For example, Painter-Davis (2016) conducted a recent study examining 2001 to 2004 arrest data from the National Incident-Based Reporting System in New York, California, and Texas along with the 2000 U.S. Census summary files across 592 census tracts. Similar to the results of Harris and Feldmeyer (2013), Latino immigration was significantly associated in the negative direction with violent crime in established destinations, but had no significant effects in emerging destinations. Thus, it seems that the protective quality of Latino immigration against crime in such communities might not be present yet; it takes time to develop.

Interestingly, macro-level research on Latino immigration and victimization in traditional versus new destinations shows a complex pattern. That is, the effect of Latino immigration is protective against serious violent victimization in traditional destinations only. In new destinations, Latino immigration increases homicide victimization risks for Latinos only (Shihadeh & Barranco, 2010, 2013), and similar to Harris and Feldmeyer (2015), Catholic presence has an inverse effect on violent victimization against Latinos (Shihadeh & Winters, 2010). As these studies suggest, the pervasiveness of economic deprivation in new Latino immigrant destinations might be a relevant community-level factor to explain both violence and victimization rates.

Unlike the above-discussed studies that focus on rates of crime as the dependent variable, a number of studies on the Latino immigration crime link have focused on rates of incarceration. The general findings from these studies indicate that: (1) federal and state institutionalization rates among Latino immigrants are lower compared to those of U.S.-born citizens; and (2) first-generation Latino immigrants are less likely to be committed than successive generations or the U.S.-born. Not withstanding methodological disadvantages inherent to the measurement of crime and victimization by criminal justice agencies (Rojas-Gaona, 2014), researchers have examined immigrants' incarceration rates at the federal and state level as a proxy to understand the Latino immigrant-crime nexus (Butcher & Piehl, 2008; Piehl & Butcher, 2007). For example, Piehl and Butcher (2007) examined three waves of data from the U.S. Census (i.e., 1980, 1990, and 2000) regarding institutionalization rates for immigrants versus native-born males, ages 18 to 40. Consistent with data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau, Piehl and Butcher (2007) found a substantial increase in the general Latino immigrant population over the period under investigation. Interestingly, along with an increment in the immigrant population over three decades, the institutionalization rates for immigrants versus native-born was lower and the difference between both groups widened substantially up until the last decade under investigation (i.e., the year 2000), making the institutionalization rate for the former one-fifth of the rate of the latter. Moreover, the lower incarceration rates for Latino immigrants were not explained by the enforcement of anti-immigration policies like deportation, suggesting a migration selection

effect by which Latino immigrants who come to the United States (e.g., regardless of their legal status) already have low criminal propensities or are more responsive to general deterrence than native-born citizens.

A second study conducted by the same authors in California explored incarceration and institutionalization rates under the premise that Latino immigrants in California were more likely to be male, younger, and less educated than the average native-born; all of those characteristics that are often associated with higher likelihood of criminal involvement (Butcher & Piehl, 2008). Results were parallel to the federal trends in that, in California, although the adult immigrant population ages 18 to 40 accounts for roughly one-third of the total state's population (i.e., 35 percent), less than 20 percent constitute the total adult prison population. Specifically, the authors estimated that immigrants in California (e.g., who are mostly Latino) are about two-and-a-half times less likely to be incarcerated than the native-born, and this gap grows exponentially when examining institutionalization rates (i.e., prisons, halfway houses, jails, and similar facilities).[2] That is, U.S.-born adult males are about ten times more likely to be institutionalized than the foreign-born, net of the effects of age and education level. Based on their findings, the authors suggested that deportation procedures might not be fully responsible for the lower incarceration and institutionalization rates of Latino immigrants compared to the U.S.-born. Rather, the authors proposed that Latino immigrants might be less prone to criminal activities due to immigration selection effects, the general deterrent effect of facing greater consequences for criminal convictions than the native-born (Ewing, Martínez, & Rumbaut, 2015), and/or the detailed screening processes for those immigrants who enter the United States legally (e.g., background checks).

Implications

Policy

Research findings from empirical studies about the Latino immigration crime nexus reviewed earlier have two important policy implications. Results from these studies raise the question of whether the enforcement of anti-immigration policies like forced deportations are producing the intended results, specifically a significant reduction in overall crime rates in the United States. In this chapter we showed that the bulk of research tends to indicate not only that the purported positive association between Latino immigration and crime is null, but rather that Latino immigration has an overall beneficial effect to U.S. society by aiding in the reduction of crime rates. This notion is supported by the historic crime drop in the 1990s that coincided with a large influx of immigrants to the United States; although causation is difficult to establish, the Latino paradox, and the Latino immigrant revitalization perspective.

Based on these arguments, some researchers have directly assessed the effects of forced deportation policies on crime. Stowell and colleagues (2013) conducted a multilevel study using data from the Current Population Survey about the effects of deportation policies on crime across 102 MSAs across the continental U.S. Net of a series of demographic and economic factors, the authors found that the effects of increased levels of deportation on crime rates were at best nonexistent, given the consistent decline of crime over a period of ten years and even during periods of sharp decreases in deportation activities. These results might be contrasted with a macro-level study that found a direct effect of immigration on enforcement activities, whereby the ratio of stops and arrests to crime was disproportionately higher in neighborhoods with high immigrant concentration; despite the fact that total, violent, and property crimes in these neighborhoods were lower on average compared to other neighborhoods (Davies & Fagan, 2012). These results call into question the harsh anti-immigration policies that might not be beneficial or cost-effective for U.S. society, especially in terms of reducing crime.

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Furthermore, it is reasonable to argue that anti-immigration policies and forced deportations might produce reluctance in immigrant communities to collaborate and create partnerships with law enforcement to curtail crime. It is important to note that current policing approaches, such as community-oriented policing, have been designed and implemented to encourage police-citizen partnerships, and to some extent have been deemed as meaningful responses by the criminal justice system to strengthen relationships, improve police legitimacy, and in turn reduce criminal offending (Tyler & Wakslak, 2004). These approaches should be encouraged in Latino immigrant communities, especially considering the added benefits of partnering with first-generation Latino immigrants, who, as mentioned earlier, tend to be more compliant and less cynical about social control institutions than the U.S.-born (Piquero et al., 2014). Overall, the available evidence on the Latino immigration crime nexus calls for a reexamination of current immigration policies and immigration reform (Harris, Gruenewald, & Painter-Davis, 2015; Higgins, Gabbidon, & Martin, 2010; Lilley & Boba, 2009; Peguero, Popp, & Koo, 2015; Stansfield, 2014; Vaughn et al., 2014).

Future Research

In the past 15 years, research has offered robust evidence about the Latino immigration crime link (Rojas-Gaona et al., 2016). However, as the Latino immigration landscape continues to take form in the United States, new avenues for research are needed. In this chapter we offer two suggestions for future research. First, research on the Latino immigration crime nexus has shifted from the examination of crime trends using arrest and institutionalization data to more complex methodologies. Most of the available micro-level research has focused on the effects of acculturation or segmented assimilation in the Latino immigrant-criminal offending nexus (Ventura Miller & Gibson, 2011). However, as criminologists give more attention to individual-level research on this issue, it is warranted to assess the intersectionality of multiple dimensions of Latino immigrants' experiences in the United States. This is important given the particular socio-psychological and cultural contexts in which first-generation immigrants are raised before coming to the United States, which might reveal differences in offending by virtue of the confluence of race/ethnicity, gender/sex, and country of origin (Decker et al., 2007; Estrada-Martínez et al., 2011; Estrada-Martínez, Caldwell, Schulz, Diez-Roux, & Pedraza, 2013; Koo, Peguero, & Shekarkhar, 2012; Peguero & Popp, 2012; Peguero et al., 2015; Ramos et al., 2011).

Second, macro-level research has relied on complex methodologies that take into account concentration effects in geographical areas (e.g., census tracts, MSAs) and the differences on crime rates across destination types. As the influx of Latino immigrants continues, more macro-level longitudinal research is warranted to assess whether the effects of Latino immigration on crime in traditional destinations also holds in emerging destinations (Harris & Feldmeyer, 2013; Painter-Davis, 2016; Ramey, 2013). Also, given that deportation of unauthorized immigrants is part of current policies, future research could assess the effects of these policies on crime rates, and other macro-level indicators. That is, beyond the longitudinal effects of Latino immigration, what are the longitudinal effects of out-migration of Latinos to their countries of origin (either by forced- or self-deportation) on the U.S. crime rates, or even the nation's economic growth?[3] Also needed at the macro-level is research that disaggregates data by immigrant concentration levels, race/ethnicity, and country of origin (see Kubrin, Hipp, & Kim, 2016).

Conclusion

In this chapter we highlighted theoretical perspectives and research findings pertaining to the purported Latino immigration crime nexus. First, we discussed the historical context of Latino immigration, by underscoring the demographic landscape of Latino immigrants, the most relevant immigration policies

that have affected Latino immigrants in the United States, and a discussion about the immigration shift from traditional to new destinations. Second, we discussed a situational context in which we highlighted theoretical perspectives that guide research on Latino immigration and crime such as social disorganization theory, the Latino paradox, and the immigrant revitalization perspective. Third, we discussed empirical evidence on the purported Latino immigration crime nexus.

In sum, the bulk of empirical evidence available on this issue offers a different conclusion about the Latino immigration crime nexus than that promoted by some media outlets and political figures. Research at the micro and macro level, as well as cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, shows that: (1) on average, first-generation Latino immigrants are less likely to offend than U.S.-born citizens, and among Latino immigrants the likelihood of criminal offending increases along with generational status; and (2) Latino immigrant settlements are not criminogenic, but rather have an overall beneficial effect on U.S. society by aiding in the reduction of crime rates. These findings indicate that the etiology of crime in the United States is far from being directly attributable to Latino immigration, and that policy changes are paramount to recognize the added benefits of immigration in a globalized, multicultural landscape.

Notes

1 It is estimated that in the period between 2012 and 2060 there will be an increase of 75.5 million Latinos, as in the total U.S. population.

2 The authors reported that the total adult immigrant population in California was 37 percent by the time of the study, but the vast majority of this figure (i.e., about 24 percent) represents immigrants who were born in Mexico and Central American countries.

3 Despite this gap in the literature, it is important to note that a recent report published by the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine found that over a period of ten years: (1) there was no negative impact of immigration on the wages of U.S.-born citizens; (2) immigration has an overall positive effect on the U.S. economy; and (3) compared to the U.S.-born population, second-generation immigrants are the strongest fiscal and economic contributors to the United States (National Academy of Sciences Engineering and Medicine, 2017).

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