research highlights

CRIMINOLOGY

Immigration reduces violence

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In his first presidential campaign speech, Donald Trump infamously described Mexican immigrants to the United States as rapists and criminals, responsible for bringing drugs and violence into the country. Although his remarks were controversial, the idea of an ‘immigration–violence’ nexus is well-situated in immigration debates. Yet, research is increasingly pointing in the opposite direction.

A study by Michael Light of Purdue University now adds to a growing literature showing that immigration not only does not lead to more crime, but probably reduces it. Using longitudinal data from 1990 to 2010 on 132 US metropolitan areas, Light shows that increases in Latino presence within such areas is negatively associated with homicide victimization for whites, blacks and Hispanics. What is perhaps most intriguing is that popular wisdom suggests that minority communities bear the greatest brunt from Latino immigration, but the negative association between Latino immigration and black and Hispanic homicide rates is among the most consistent results reported in Light’s research. One explanation for these findings is that immigration enhances social control by bolstering social, economic and cultural institutions in recipient communities.

Although the literature increasingly indicates that immigrants do not sow disorder, further research and better data is needed to understand the conditions in which immigration has a clear crime-reducing effect.

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