

Neighborhoods -- not immigrants -- determining factor for homicides

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Public opinion and public policy often assume that immigration is directly related to higher rates of crime, but the social conditions of neighborhoods actually have a more significant effect on violent crimes than immigrant populations. A new study in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* titled "Extending Immigration and Crime Studies: National Implications and Local Settings," examines the issue using local and national data over several decades.

"The research settings for immigration histories are different, but we find no [clear evidence](#) that immigrant concentration is associated with higher levels of lethal violence," wrote issue co-authors Ramiro Martinez Jr. and Jacob I. Stowell.

The researchers selected two cities affected by immigration in different ways during different time periods, as well as recent national data that compare [violent crime rates](#) to immigration [concentration levels](#). Looking at Miami, FL during the 1980s and San Antonio, TX during the 1990s gave the researchers more specific homicide data for their analysis. They combed the data from the specific homicide units that allowed them to directly examine drug- and gang-related homicide information that is not available at the national level.

"Given the 1980 Mariel boatlift, attention is directed to Miami homicide data over the 1980s," wrote the authors. "Because San Antonio drug/gang/youth homicides peaked in the 1990s, homicide motivations over that decade were examined."

The researchers also compared the data to national data from the 2000s and found that having more [immigrants](#) did not equate to higher crime at the national level either.

The authors replicated an index of "disadvantage" that was created to statistically mimic economic disadvantage in urban neighborhoods and, using the local data, Martinez and Stowell were able to view of the impact of immigrants on violent crime. The bottom line was the same across all locations and time periods: more IMMIGRATION does not necessarily mean more homicide. As it turned out, location and neighborhood characteristics were the most significant influencers of homicide rates.

"Neighborhoods with higher levels of disadvantage experience significantly more homicides, including those that are gang- and drug-related," wrote the authors. "Residential stability, percentage professional, adult to child ratio, and young male emerges (but the latter two in opposite directions) for total and gang [homicide](#)."

The authors feel these findings could be used to help direct immigrant crime prevention resources to other more influential areas, such as help to encourage Latinos to seek employment in professional occupations.

More information: "Extending Immigration and Crime Studies: National Implications and Local Settings," by Ramiro Martinez Jr. and Jacob I. Stowell is available free for a limited time at: ann.sagepub.com/content/641/1/174.full.pdf+html

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