

Sanctuary cities do not experience more crime

October 12 2016, by Bettye Miller

Sanctuary policies adopted by dozens of cities since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks have essentially no impact on crime, according to researchers at the University of California, Riverside and Highline College in Des Moines, Washington.

Sanctuary policies forbid local police departments from inquiring about immigration status. Despite popular accounts, decades of research show that immigrants, regardless of legal status, tend to have lower [crime](#) rates, the researchers wrote in summarizing their findings in a recent blogpost on the *Washington Post's* [Monkey Cage](#). The website is a place for political scientists and other scholars to share relevant research.

The research team – UC Riverside scholars Loren Collingwood, assistant professor of political science, and Stephen El-Khatib, a Ph.D. student in political science, and Benjamin Gonzalez-O'Brien, assistant professor of [political science](#) at Highline College – analyzed FBI crime data and demographic information for 55 of the sanctuary cities listed by the National Immigration Law Center. The cities are located in 20 states and the District of Columbia.

Some current sanctuary policies have roots in the faith-based Central American Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s, which was motivated by the deportation of refugees fleeing political violence in El Salvador and Guatemala, the researchers said in a longer paper, "The Politics of Refuge: Sanctuary Cities, Crime, and Undocumented Immigration." A network of churches and synagogues provided safe harbor to these

immigrants, in defiance of U.S. immigration policy.

The New Sanctuary Movement dates from the Sept. 11 attacks, the passage of the Patriot Act, and more aggressive immigration enforcement by Immigration and Customs Enforcement that often led to the separation of families, the researchers wrote in "The Politics of Refuge."

Numerous studies over the last 80 years show that immigrant populations tend to produce less crime because they are more concerned with deportation and running afoul of the law than the native-born population, the team noted. Other research indicates that, relative to other cities, sanctuary cities produce less crime or no crime.

Collingwood, El-Khatib, and Gonzalez-O'Brien analyzed changes in the rates of violent crime, property crime, and rape in sanctuary cities immediately after those communities passed those policies. Some cities did see increases in crime, some saw a reduction, and others experienced no change.

"Taken together, the average change in crime is not statistically significant," they wrote.

The researchers then matched each sanctuary city to comparable non-sanctuary cities in the same states and compared crime rates from 2000 through 2012. They found that rates of violent crime, property crime, and rape were slightly higher in sanctuary cities in some years after the policies were adopted, but within the margin of error, making the relationship statistically insignificant.

"These results make sense if sanctuary city policies have countervailing effects," the researchers concluded. "Given lower crime rates among immigrants, crime rates in sanctuary cities should drop, if those cities do

attract new immigrants."

Sanctuary policies are typically designed to increase trust between immigrant communities and law enforcement, they noted. "Thus, crime reporting – but not necessarily crime itself – might actually increase in these locations if undocumented immigrants are more likely to work with police and local authorities. Taken together, these explanations may explain what we observe in these data: a sanctuary city designation does not produce a significantly higher crime rate."

More information: "The Politics of Refuge: Sanctuary Cities, Crime, and Undocumented Immigration."

www.collingwoodresearch.com/research.html

Provided by University of California - Riverside

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