

Race, immigration, and homicide in contemporary Europe and the United States: an urban comparison

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Abstract In this paper we ask a key question: Do immigrants contribute a disproportionate amount of crime beyond what we would expect from native-born populations? We start with a description of the immigration and homicide literature in the United States and Europe and transition into a description of lessons learned from this topic in the United States. Specifically, we compare the level of immigration to white, black, and Latino homicide rates between 1985 and 2009. We compare and contrast racial/ethnic/immigrant group specific homicide rates in the cities of Miami and San Diego from 1980 through 2000. We do so since both cities are major entry points into the United States. We compare these findings to European countries, because there are some similarities on immigration into the United States and Europe and, by extension, the study of immigration and violence. In many ways, the study of urban immigration and homicide in the United States is relevant to the study of urban immigration and homicide in Europe. Many of the topics discussed in this paper are likely to be faced by European countries in the future and our hope is that findings from the United States are useful in other contexts.

Introduction

For several decades Miami, Florida, has been an immigrant majority city. It contained a large Cuban immigrant population, who had arrived since at least 1960 and its proximity made it poised to attract even more Latin American and Caribbean immigrants [1]. As the 1970s ended, however, immigration from the Caribbean had stopped. On the other side of the country, the movement from Mexico across the southwestern border and into the United States continued, but at relatively stable rates. Therefore,

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while the “Hispanic/Latino” population was growing and becoming more visible, it was largely made up of native-born rather than foreign-born groups by 1980.

Nevertheless, an exodus from the Mariel harbor in Cuba during the summer of 1980 transformed Miami; it changed how Americans viewed Cubans, how Cubans viewed each other, and it made the older exiles realize that a return was improbable. In the end, the Mariel boatlift sparked an immigration influx unlike any in contemporary U.S. history and, at the same time, revived nativist fears of the presumed job-taking immigrant, who strains local resources and threatens to cause more crime. Clearly, reactions to the “Mariel” immigrants foretold current negative reactions to Mexican immigrants and the latest immigration hysteria.

While there is no single event in Europe that resembles the Mariel boatlift, it is important to note that similar immigration movements and subsequent negative reactions occurred in Western Europe. In fact, Belli and Parkin [2] claim that over the 1990s, movement from abroad into Western Europe far surpassed the U.S. immigration flow and was higher than that of any other place in the world. During this period, European immigration patterns in the last half century varied widely. For example, the foreign-born moved into western and northern European nations in the 1960s and 1970s as guest workers (labor migrants) and from former colonies in search of work [3]. More recently, many have moved into southern European nations as political refugees, fleeing violence or for other reasons, in addition to undocumented from neighboring countries [4]. And similar to public sentiment in the United States, many European nations have shown growing support for political parties that have made anti-immigrant sentiment the cornerstone of their political campaigns [5].

The rise in immigration sparked legislative action against immigrants, but it also led to an examination of their link to negative social outcomes such as crime. In the United States, the study of immigration and violence grew following the influx of mostly Hispanic/Latino immigrants as noted above. Although nativity-status is not captured in most U.S. crime statistics, research on race and ethnicity has looked at this relationship using ethnicity (Hispanic/Latino) as a proxy. In Europe, immigrants are recorded as aliens, who are persons that do not hold the nationality of the country in which they commit an offense, as opposed to categories of race and ethnicity [6]. There is some variation among European countries on this information given differing migration patterns. Yet, as Marshall [7] points out, there are many more similarities between the United States and European countries than one might expect, particularly when it comes to the unequal treatment of foreign-born individuals following anti-immigrant legislation. Thus, we argue that many of the topics that follow are highly relevant to European nations and our hope is that these findings from the United States are useful in other contexts.

In this paper, our results center on a key question – do immigrants contribute inordinately to levels of crime compared to a similarly situated native-born population? First, we compare the level of immigration to White, Black and Latino homicide rates from 1985 to 2009. Next, we examine the differences in homicide rates by race/ethnicity/immigrant group from 1980 through 2000 in Miami, an entry point for many immigrant groups. Additionally, we draw from homicide data in San Diego to examine racial/ethnic group-specific homicide rates from 1980 through 2000. Much like Miami, San Diego attracts immigrants due to its location along the U.S.-Mexico border, which also attracts a diverse foreign-born population. European nations, like the

United States, share a concern over the undocumented immigrant or the so-called “illegal alien,” but we are aware of the variation in the “immigrant” definition. There are economic immigrants, who are in search of work, and political refugees, who are fleeing violence and seeking asylum. Local immigration histories vary by place, time, and context. Although we are unable to systematically examine these issues in this paper, we acknowledge them as much as possible. We begin with a description of the literature on immigration and homicide in the United States and in Europe.

Immigration in a national context

While the Mariel boatlift changed the U.S. immigration experience, it also the subject of many unsubstantiated claims. As one example, Huntington [8] contributed to the Mariel myth by claiming, “Marielitos were generally poorer, less well-educated, younger, and more likely to be Black than the earlier migrants” (p. 248). In terms of crime, he added, “The Cubanization of Miami coincided with high levels of crime” since presumably the city of Miami “ranked among the top three largest cities (over 250,000 people) in violent crime. Much of this was related to the growing drug trade, but also the intensity of Cuban immigrant politics” (pp. 250–251). These allegations on the Mariel Cubans resembled earlier societal reactions wherein foreign -born newcomers were perceived as a danger to American society [9]. The Mariels were supposedly darker and poorer than earlier Cubans, viewed as culturally different since they had been raised under a communist regime, and conceived to be uneducated [10]. Many were detained indefinitely, considered habitual criminals for minor drug violations in the U.S., and overall generated a great deal of public concern over immigration. Mariels intensified public anxiety over immigration, as well as “rising” crime itself, even absent evidence linking the two social issues.

Conservative political groups in Europe express similar concerns over immigrants. Rather than making specific and open racial/ethnic attacks or anti-Semitic comments, politicians and commentators conjure up a presumed threat to national identity and criticize multiculturalism, especially in relation to Islam. For example, National Front party leader, Marine Le Pen, asserted, “Islam is the biggest threat, threatening our country and the entire free Western world. We have too much mass immigration from Muslim countries and too many hate palaces – Mosques, I believe – and immigrants are still over-represented in crime statistics. Enough is enough” [11]. While this rhetoric is focused on an anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim sentiment, it has deep roots in France and elsewhere across Europe. Many suggest that “the lowest common denominator of this entire far-right narrative is that Islam is barbaric and a threat to European stability and peace” [12]. More recently, there has been a substantial rise in anti-foreigner sentiment particularly in places with a proportionally large foreign population and where economic conditions have suffered following the European debt crisis. But again, most studies in Europe, like the United States, do not substantiate these claims (see [13–15]).

These claims have important consequences. Immigration critics assume that cities like Miami are not only dangerous areas for harboring foreign-born criminals, but also breeding grounds for violent crime involving native-born Latinos [16]. Public anxiety about this region is reflected in the use of military patrols and aggressive national initiatives designed to control the border and to prevent the entry of “criminal aliens,”

who are believed to be contributing to crime in the United States. This sentiment is heightened by pundits and politicians, like Le Pen, who continue to make unsubstantiated claims about the extent of crime committed by immigrants. These include high profile statements like those by Governor Jan Brewer of Arizona: “most illegal immigrants are drug mules” [17]. Or similar comments such as Iowa congressional representative Steve King’s argument against comprehensive immigration reform and claiming, “many young undocumented immigrants who entered the U.S. as children were acting as drug mules” [18]. Although such claims are not supported quantitatively, the cumulative effect of these distortions is to fuel immigration and crime stereotypes. The next section helps us better understand the immigration/crime linkage.

National level homicide

Fortunately for the purposes of this analysis, homicide data for Latinos and other racial/ethnic groups do exist in the United States. These data permit a comparison of Latinos to other racial/ethnic groups in terms of their involvement in serious violent crime. In Fig. 1, national rates of Black, White and Latino homicide victimization from 1985 through 2009 were estimated from death certificates provided by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). Victimization rate information was based on the cause of death and includes killings resulting from legal interventions, such as police shootings or other excusable homicides (i.e., self-defense). An immigration rate variable is also placed on the same scale as the homicide rate for comparison purposes. We include the immigration rate as a means of illustrating how changes in the immigrant population correspond to changes in race/ethnicity specific homicides levels.

The trends in Fig. 1 show that Latino homicide victim rates declined nationwide, as did killings among Blacks and Whites with some very minor fluctuations, despite a massive increase in the overall immigration rate during the same period. Contrary to the

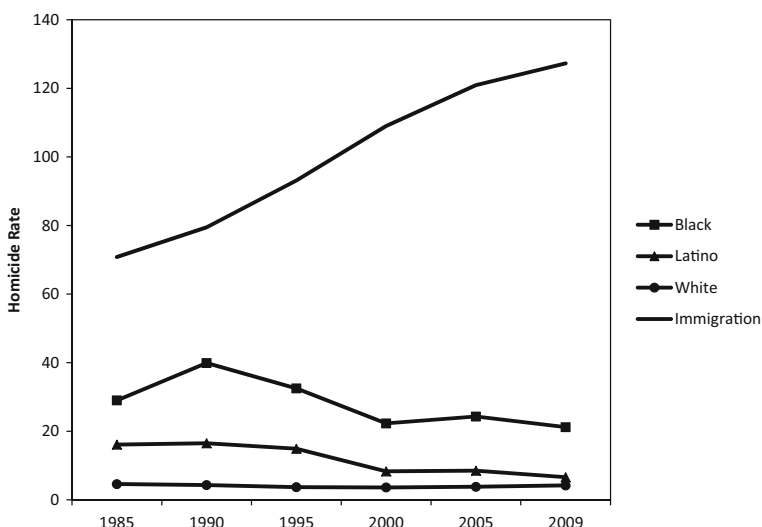


Fig. 1 National immigration rate and Race/Ethnicity homicide rates, 1985–2009

negative imagery of Latino immigrants, the Latino homicide rate presented in Fig. 1 dropped, not only during a period of intense immigration into the United States, but also during the midst of record-high levels of homicide among non-Latino black youths in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It is important to emphasize that this decline occurred amidst the backdrop of decaying social and economic conditions; the presumed upheaval wrought by immigration; and cities and neighborhoods influenced by crack-cocaine/drug trafficking and gang violence. Under such conditions, the widely-held belief is that the Latino homicide rate would have increased rapidly. Yet, these factors did not necessarily shape Latino homicide trends. In fact, the Latino homicide victim rate remained flat across the period of 1985 to 1995, but then dropped in 2009. If immigration contributes to violent crime, it would have been evident during this period, and it should have dramatically pushed Latino homicide rates upward. As shown in Fig. 1, this was not the case.

Another point of interest is that disparity in victimization rates by race/ethnicity. This comparison illustrates that the Latino homicide rate compared to non-Latino Whites and non-Latino Black killings. At each time point, Black homicide rates are the highest of all groups, with Latinos tending to fall in the middle. Black rates were usually 2 to 2.5 times that of Latinos. In contrast, Latino rates were typically 3 to 4 times that of Whites, but eventually converged with the rates for non-Latino Whites. Again, the Latino to White homicide rate gap evaporated during a time of sustained and increased immigration.

Furthermore, even though conservative journalists and political observers clamored that minority males had become criminal elements in society and that intra-racial killings reigned, evidence of high levels of Latino killings was less than persuasive. Over the past 25 years Latino homicide rates dropped precipitously – experiencing roughly a 60 % decline. To illustrate, the White homicide rate in 1985 (4.6) remained about the same in 2009 (4.2). But over this time period, the Latino homicide victim rates dropped across the nation from 16.4 to 6.6. Put another way, the Latino homicide rate declined from 3.6 to 1.6 times of Whites. These patterns suggest that Latino homicides have unique qualities that justify research attention, also because the Latino homicide rate grew closer to that for non-Latino Whites over a period of intense demographic transformation. The specific reasons vary including attachment to work, extended family structure, and member of a poor working class not extremely disadvantaged [16]. In the end, it is evident that Latino homicides declined as immigration rose across the nation.

As noted above, the category of “Hispanic origin” is relatively new for victim and offender data collected in the United States. Further, the United States rarely codes nativity status, at least at the national level, whereas European official crime records generally record this but vary by country, crime counting mechanisms, and even definitions [2]. Some document citizenship status (legal aliens, nation of birth, naturalized citizens), whereas others focus on “minority” or nationality such as Britain and Germany. Still others, like Greece, aggregate by region (South-American, Ex-Yugoslavs, and so on). And many do not or cannot code racial or ethnic background. In some countries, it is forbidden to code information on that topic. Additionally, the collection of homicide data varies significantly between countries. The European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control [6], who is responsible for compiling the European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics, includes police reports

on homicide, but notes, “Differences in definitions may influence homicide rates but do not explain these differences” (p. 26). These rates are also influenced by a small number of cases reported, particularly from the smaller European countries, where homicide is rare in contrast to the United States [2].

To further our examination of immigration and homicide, we introduce two cases in the following sections. We draw from the cities of Miami and San Diego, two leading entry points into the United States, to explore homicide trends and focus on the Latino and immigration histories in these cities. To complement this discussion, we use information found in police reports, data archives, newspapers, and other local sources. We compare these findings to those found in studies conducted in European countries on immigration and violence to show how they relate to our study in the United States. This paper focuses on violent crime as opposed to other types of crime largely due to the media coverage that swept through Europe and the United States blaming immigrants for incidents of violence [2, 19]. Because such cases have led to anti-immigrant protests, we hope to shed some light by examining the local context in our study of immigration and violent crime.

Race/Ethnicity and homicides in Miami

A parallel movement from Haiti that overlapped with the Mariel exodus drew concerns from many across the nation and forever altered Miami’s population composition. An estimated 50,000 to 70,000 Haitians fleeing economic strife and political violence arrived by boat in South Florida and headed to Miami much like the Mariels [20]. Despite fleeing extremely impoverished conditions, a hostile reception awaited the French Creole speakers and few attempts were made to help them assimilate. While the immigrant status of newly arrived Haitians was unclear, so to was their immediate and long-term impact on levels of violence. As Portes and Stepick [20] contend, “Haitians represent one of the most deprived foreign groups who have recently arrived on U.S. shores because their early reception was one of the most adverse. Hence, it is by no means certain that they have managed to reach some form of positive adaptation to American society and that they have not lapsed into permanent marginalization and increasing social deviance.”

In 1980, Miami Police Department (MPD) homicide investigators began identifying Mariel and Haitian cases in their reports. Accessing data directly from homicide files stored in the police department provided an opportunity to read the investigators coding of the victim and offender race (Black or White), ethnicity (Hispanic or non-Hispanic), age, gender, and a narrative, when available, describing the circumstances leading up to the event. With this range of information about the event, we were able to racially/ethnically disaggregate Miami homicides [16].

The victim and offender coding is extremely important because it was and remains a substantial source of crime information on one of the most negatively perceived immigrant groups in recent history. It also provides a rare opportunity to compare homicide among Mariels and Haitians with other segments of the population in Miami. Throughout the 1980s, MPD homicide investigators noted if the victim or offender was an “MR” for Mariel refugee or “HR” for Haitian refugee on the homicide logs. These notations were verified with homicide records stored in the Miami Dade Medical Examiner’s office and with news articles in the Miami Herald. These data show that

over time, Mariels were absorbed into the community by the older existing Cuban or Latino community. Because so few engaged in or were victims of homicide by the end of the 1980s, the investigators stopped coding them. Yet, the Haitian movement continued, legal and illegal, as does the coding of “BH” for Black Haitians. This allows for homicide victims to be categorized by race or ethnicity. That is “Black” or African American, “Latino” or a Hispanic regardless of nativity, or “White” or non-Latino White. Separate codes were recorded if the victim was “Mariel,” someone who entered the United States from the Mariel harbor over the summer of 1980. And, of course, “Haitian” to distinguish homicide victims of Haitian descent. A close reading of the homicide narratives suggests that most “Haitians” in the MPD immigrated into the Miami area over the 1980s and 1990s. A separate category for “Latino” was also coded throughout this period as someone of Hispanic/Latino/Spanish-speaking origin, foreign or native born, regardless of race. For the purposes of this paper, Mariel Cubans are not counted as “Latino.”

The denominator for all groups was drawn from the 1980 and 1990 census. Because it is difficult to assess the number of Mariels and Haitians in Miami, city population estimates generated by local surveys and decennial census estimates were used [10]. For example, the 1990 Census estimate for the Year of Entry of Foreign-Born includes data from 1980 and 1981. In addition to this estimate, other local population estimates were used to create a base number of Mariels. The Haitian population was estimated from the census Ancestry category and number of Black immigrants.

As shown in Fig. 2, in the early 1980s, there is an initial and temporary upward thrust in homicide rates for the Mariels, countering the declines for all other ethnic groups. Moreover, from 1981 through 1983, the Mariel homicide rate came very close to that of Blacks/African Americans, but followed the trends for the rest of the city and fell below all other groups by the end of the decade. The Mariel Cubans may have had very high rates for a couple of years immediately after their arrival, but by 1990, they were no longer singled out by detectives. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the Mariel drop paralleled that of Whites in the late 1980s, shortly after arriving in Miami.

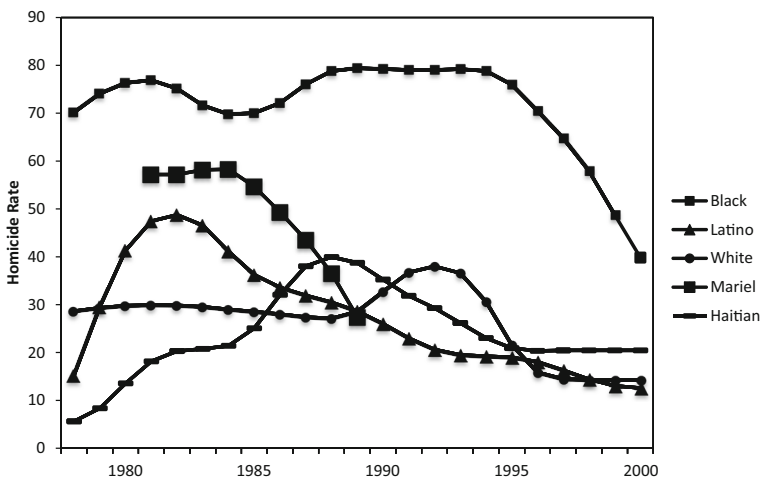


Fig. 2 Race/Ethnicity/Immigrant homicide victim rates in Miami, 1978–2000

One immigrant-crime trend is worth noting. The Haitian homicide rate spiraled up and intersected with the Mariel level in the late 1980s. Despite the widely held misperception, Haitians never approached similarly situated Mariels, non-Mariel Latinos, or Blacks/African Americans' homicide peaks. In the relatively short-term, immigrant homicide increase was followed by a drop. To the extent that they were able to assimilate, the newcomers experienced a reduction in violence, particularly around the end of the last century. The level of immigrant homicide and the form changed dramatically even in high crime Miami. With rare exceptions, the newcomer rate was not very different from others; namely that the Haitian homicide rate is similar to that for Whites and Latinos.

Looking at the European context, Engersen and colleagues [3] provide us with a point of comparison with ethnicity, migration and crime drawn from research conducted in the Netherlands. Over the 1980s and 1990s, research concentrated on four immigrant groups – Surinamese, Turks, Moroccans, and Antilleans – that are now Dutch ethnic minorities. To a certain extent, there were some integration and incorporation problems that resulted initially in high levels of unemployment. This is, of course, an expected pattern for immigrants generally as they adjust to their receiving societies. More interestingly, the authors note that these four non-native groups had higher levels of “criminal suspect offenses” (4.1; 3.1; 5.3; 6 %, respectively) than the native-born Dutch (1 %). They contend these findings are not surprising as they were younger and residentially concentrated in center city locations. Both individual and community-level factors – age and place – are found to influence criminal victimization and offending across most urban environments.

What about relative to Miami? The Mariels were quickly absorbed into the local community. Similarly, the Haitian homicide rate declined. Both groups have Caribbean roots, similar to Surinamese and Antilleans in the Netherlands, and never directly colonized by the United States. And there are some elements of the economic migrant and political refugees across all four groups. Perhaps the best lesson is that, again, the hyper-criminal immigrant element does not exist, at least as measured by homicide victims in Miami. Further, despite initial spikes in homicide rates, the levels experienced dramatic declines over time. That is possibly the case in the Netherlands, that violence among immigrants will probably be lower than expected as a product of time.

Race/Ethnicity and homicides in San Diego

The San Diego Police Department (SDPD) homicide data offer a way of comparing individuals of Mexican origin to Asians, mostly Indochinese, in a border city that is home to a diverse immigrant population. Similar to Miami, data were collected from SDPD homicide unit. Using report narratives, the race/ethnicity of victims and offenders were coded. The primary racial/ethnic categories of White, Black, Asian and Hispanic/Latino were identified. Broad categorizations were used even though in many cases the Asian category included specific ethnic notations (e.g., Filipino, Chinese, Vietnamese).

A few points are worth mentioning. First, access to archival data in places with an Asian presence is limited. Examining Asian specific crime data requires entry to archives containing original information. Second, the underrepresentation of Asians in criminal involvement and victimization is well known. Even in San Diego, a city

where Asians are the third largest racial/ethnic group and have been present for a long time, the disparate involvement in serious crime is apparent when compiling data. Further, the number of Asian homicides is very low when disaggregated to the census tract level [21]. This pattern holds even in extremely disadvantaged areas, but it is clear that Asians, as a group, are underrepresented in homicide data.

The empirical proof also provides further evidence of disparity between Latinos and other racial/ethnic groups (e.g., Whites and Blacks). During this time, political advertisements blanketed California media markets with depictions of “illegals” crossing the border into San Diego, overrunning freeways, and engaging in crime in the local area. [22] According to Lamm and Imhoff [22], as early as the mid-1970s, “the number of maimed illegals and unidentified murdered bodies being brought into the city [of San Diego] from the no-man’s-land had gotten too great.” Similar to claims about Mariel crime, the veracity of such claims remains unsupported.

But that did not stop the exaggerations on the level and source of Latino homicides. Lamm and Imhoff [22] still claimed the border havoc was the result of Mexican and Mexican American border bandits who preyed on “illegal aliens” trying to cross into San Diego from Mexico. The border bandits “prefer to operate on the American side, in the no-man’s-land that the United States has ceded to illegals, their smugglers, and their parasites. American law is so much more lenient, criminals are so much less likely to get beaten up when they are in the custody of the American police.”

Clearly, homicides declined over time among Blacks, Latinos and even Whites (see Fig. 3). The smaller Black population always has the highest homicide rate and Latinos fall somewhere in between Whites and Blacks. It is clear from this figure that the trend lines for each group follow a similar pattern of decline over time. Still, Asian homicides remained almost flat, hovering near 3.7. The Latino homicide rate, however, declined dramatically over this time period. To illustrate, the Latino homicide rate in 1980 was 17.7 and dropped in 2000 to 6.1. But over this time period, the White homicide victim rates fell from 9.2 to 2.9. Moreover, the Black homicide victim rate fell from 28.4 to 14.0. Put another way, the White victim rate was half of the Latino victim rate and the Black homicide rate was twice that for Latinos.

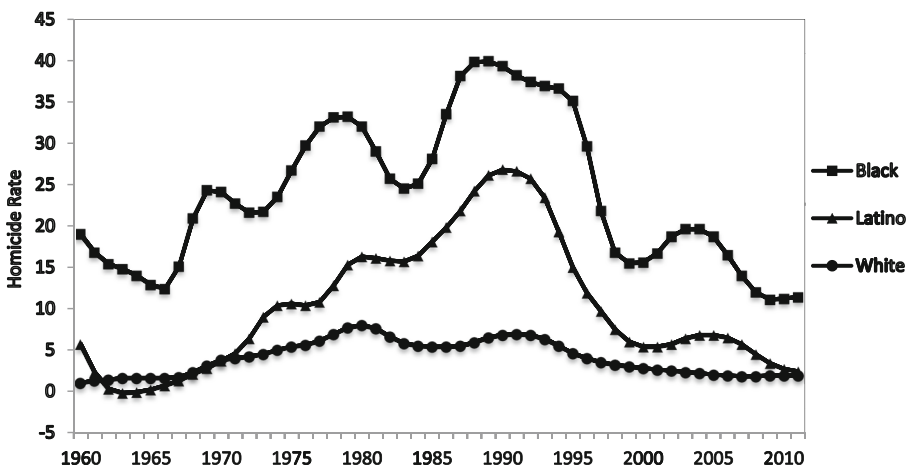


Fig. 3 Race/Ethnicity homicide victim rates in San Diego, 1960–2010

However, there was an exception. Over the late 1980s and early 1990s, the homicide gap between Whites and Latinos expanded. For several years, the Latino rate was around four times that for Whites. Overtime, the homicide rate among these three groups declined at the same pace and the gap returned to the 1980 level. The exception, again, is the Asian homicide in San Diego and how it compares to Latinos since both have sizable foreign-born populations. Some statistical support emerges for both immigrant opponents and proponents that are central to the border argument. When the increases and decreases in homicides over 20 years are disaggregated to incorporate Asian homicide victims, a cycle emerges. When homicide victimization went up in the mid-1980s, Latino and Black rates rose and Asian killings increased, but at a far lower level.

In the 1990s, murders among Black and Latinos plummeted to the point that heavily immigrant Latinos and primarily foreign-born Asians mirror the White rate. Over the 1980s, the White homicide victim rate was twice that of the Asian homicide victim rate. That gap closed in the early 1990s as the Asian rate rose to a level higher than that of Whites for a very short time period. Both groups – White and Asian – now have similar levels of homicide victimization.

The fact that there is a decline in homicide across all groups and in particular Latinos and Asians supports the belief that immigrants are not crime prone. Perhaps more immigration traditionally was thought to contribute to disorder on the border. But more immigration meant less homicide for the two largest immigrant populations. As noted in the discussion of the national level homicide data, the relatively low level of Latino homicide may be surprising to some scholars and pundits. Despite high rates of poverty and high levels of immigration, Latino homicide is lower than might be expected, a clear trend that that is robust overtime in two cities with large foreign-born segments of their populations—Miami and San Diego.

Related to the national trends, there is a point that we also believe warrants additional consideration. Specifically, note that we chose to situate the temporal patterns for Miami and San Diego within the broader national context. We chose to display general trends for ease of interpretation and for consideration of how similar patterns may play out cross- nationally. However, we would like to remind readers that these trends are not merely suggestive of underlying patterns (e.g., an inverse relationship between immigration and lethal violence), but rather ones that have been supported empirically. Indeed, a growing body of research does find that immigration, *as a social process*, is associated with lower levels of criminal violence [23, 24]. That is, net of other factors, immigration is found to be inversely related to national levels of violence. There is even some evidence to suggest that deportation efforts to remove undocumented immigrants, over time, may have negative impacts on community stabilization [25]. Taken together, we believe that our figures and discussion of the negative association between immigration and crime is appropriate.

This, of course, does not mean that Latinos are not influenced by violence or that crime is not an important feature of Latino communities especially in old Mexican American barrios. It does suggest that public panics or hysteria that surround immigration discussions are unwarranted. The holds for the much maligned immigrant groups in Miami and San Diego. But are there lessons for Europe? As in Miami and San Diego, explaining violent crime rates in 589 Belgian municipalities is important [26]. While unemployment levels have a strong impact on crime, ethnic origins

(Turkish, Moroccan, African nationals), concentration of migrants, and number of immigrants had no direct impact on violent crime. Despite the various measures of ethnic diversity, the authors found that a commonly used economic indicator – unemployment – influenced violent crime. A finding that is similar to one found in Miami and in San Diego community-level studies. That is, economic disadvantage is a consistent positive influence on homicides [16].

In another example, Bucerius [27] describes her ethnographic study on 55 second-generation male drug dealers in Frankfurt, Germany. These were the children of former guest workers recruited to fill low-skill jobs between the 1955 and 1973 period. Mostly of Turkish background, these young males drifted into the drug trade, primarily selling marijuana but dabbled in cocaine and heroin sales. They report working in the drug market after facing obstacles in the educational system and local economy. They turned to the informal economy after quitting school. Feeling marginalized and singled out for discrimination is common between second-generation male Muslim immigrants [27]. Participation in the drug trade here is a rationalized reaction to social, political and economic exclusion. Bucerius [27] claims that Germany has a reputation of being one of the least immigrant-friendly countries in the world. It does not recognize the “foreigners” living among them as real immigrants and foreign workers, their children, and their grandchildren are not eligible for citizenship. Without citizenship, they cannot vote or fully engage in society, change their position in society, or integrate. Nor can their children. This study is valuable because it gives us a clue as to the impact that limited/obstructed assimilation, in Europe and the United States, can have on the immigrants themselves as well as their children.

Discussion and conclusions

Throughout the paper, potential similarities and differences in the U.S. and European countries as they relate to immigration and homicide have been pointed out. First, immigration into the United States is near an all-time high. That is also the case for many European countries, including Switzerland, Luxembourg, Belgium, Italy, Austria, Spain, and Sweden, which have foreign-born proportions equal to or higher than the United States. Yet homicide rates are near all-time lows in the U.S. and homicides are relatively low across most European countries. Perhaps immigration has played a role in buffering killings? Certainly in the United States, there is evidence supporting the immigrant revitalization hypotheses [28]. Second, immigrants help fortify social organization. Intact two-parent families, extended households and strong family ties characterize immigrant communities [16]. Third, at least initially, immigrants typically settle in poorer neighborhoods and stimulate local economies, which strengthens inner city communities. Following deindustrialization in the 1970s and 1980s when older residents fled urban communities, many of these communities were reinvigorated in the 1990s and at the turn of this century with the newly arrived immigrants [29]. Fourth, many of these cities had high homicides rates even before immigrants arrived. In some cases, their arrival generated new employment opportunities and helped dampen homicide and other violent crime. At least in the United States, the study of immigration and homicide has meant that homicides have declined over time and, in part, that is due to the benefits of immigration.

How, then, can the U.S. example provide a template for the items to consider when studying immigration and homicide in Europe? We recognize, of course, that Europe is composed of many countries with different laws, complex relationships with former colonies and unique reactions to immigrants. At the same time, the United States is a complex nation with variations across and within regions, states, and even cities. Like other scholars, we encourage further examination on this topic particularly on questions that have been raised. First, the present study draws on research to illustrate how lessons can be learned from studying immigration and homicide in the United States and how it can be applied to studies on immigration and violence in European countries. Although homicides have declined while immigration has increased, it appears that in the United States, as well as in Europe, the public supports increased immigration restrictions and anti-immigrant legislation. Scholars and professionals should, however, examine in more detail why this relationship exists, and, if it holds within and across European nations. Such findings would help us understand why there is local and national variation in immigration and homicide, and particularly its fluctuations. In the present study, we examine two U.S. border cities that experienced a drop in homicide, which mirrors the national decline experienced over the same period. Still, anxiety over the “Mariel” Cuban refugees energized largely dormant anti-immigrant groups and commentators, who soon claimed “Hispanic immigrants” threatened “American” society by avoiding assimilation and generating national security issues, among other problems [8, 10]. This surge galvanized nativists, nationalized the immigration issue by directing attention to Miami, and later, refocused the nations gaze to large numbers crossing the U.S.-Mexico border [8]. Yet, almost without exception, homicides and other crimes dropped while immigration rose, even in the face of long held claims that more immigrants would mean more crime [16].

However, we close by suggesting other approaches to study this complicated topic. One promising approach would be the use of qualitative studies to draw upon moral panic theory to examine the backlash against Latino immigrants in the United States and similarly situated newcomers in Europe. Recent work by Longazel [30] highlights the role racial motives play in fostering moral panics and the perceived racial threats that trigger them. By describing how local anti-immigration legislation and politics “contributed to the racialization of Latino/as, the social construction of whiteness, and the reaffirmation of racial hierarchies” ([30], p. 111), this type of inquiry demonstrates how hundreds of municipalities and even some states passed similarly racially tinged and hostile immigration laws. These copycat laws singled out immigrants with harsh legislation meant to make everyday life unbearable. By linking local immigration laws to our understanding of national-level policies in both the United States and Europe, it appears that many sweeping changes in immigration policy were justified by the myth that immigrants are inherently crime prone [30].

Finally, we end with a reminder. The Mariel Cuban newcomers generated a fierce nativist backlash. In 1980, an initiative passed on the local Miami ballot that prohibited the use of county funds for “any language other than English or any culture other than that of the United States,” which gave rise to the U.S. English Only movement. Local officials stated that public health services were strained, schools were overrun with refugees, and some depicted the newcomers as invading barbarians intent on destroying civilized society. After 30 years, those remarks still resonate with immigration opponents. The lesson learned here is that after a short time period homicides rates went

down, and among all groups. Rather than supporting anti-immigrant legislation, Europeans and Americans alike should consider how to facilitate immigrant adaptation into local society and remember that in the long run, this usually leads to less crime. Helping incorporate immigrants into society makes them and subsequent generations better able to participate fully, which can promote lower levels of criminal violence. On the other hand, singling out immigrants for discrimination or punitive treatment will likely have a deleterious impact socially.

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