An Examination of American Perceptions of the Immigrant-Crime Relationship

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Abstract

The notion that immigrants are more crime prone or increase crime has been largely debunked by criminologists over the last two decades. However, there is a lack of contemporary research on explaining perceptions of immigrant criminality, specifically. This study examines the factors that relate to American's belief that immigrants increase crime rates in local communities. Using weighted blocked logistic regression analyses, this study found that individual factors related to identity (e.g. race, gender, age, religion, etc.) *were not* significant predictors of the view that immigrants increase crime. Instead, individuals who believe immigrants are a burden to society, already have negative views of immigrants, and are more resistant to societal and cultural change are more likely to believe this falsehood. Overall, the findings offer partial support for the social disorganization and conflict perspectives, with the latter receiving the most support. Economic competition hypotheses received no support.

A common misperception is that anti-immigrant sentiment emerged during the 2016 Presidential debates. Unfortunately, this type of malign rhetoric by politicians is as American as apple pie and has been around since America's inception (see Hutchinson, 1981). Presidential hopeful Donald Trump amplified what had already been used by politicians for decades before him: tropes that falsely link immigrants to crime, drugs,

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and violence (Brown, 2016). History has shown these types of messages obtain support within the broader public; especially amongst whites. Some speculate that support from white voters is directly gleaned from fears of demographic changes that were highlighted by Trump (Major et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the hysteria employed by then candidate and now President Trump has only marginalized immigrant communities further (Wray-Lake et al., 2018) at the expense of educating the public on the mythology of this belief.

Immigrants have often been improperly linked to both increases in crime and specific typologies of crime. Despite the misperception that immigration and crime are positively related (see Butcher and Piehl 1998; Hagan et al., 2008; Hagan and Palloni 1998, Martinez and Lee 2000; Mears 2001; Ousey and Kubrin, 2009; Reid et al. 2005; Rumbaut and Ewing, 2007; Tonry 1997), a majority of research demonstrates that immigration: reduces crime (Light, 2017; MacDonald et al., 2013; Reid et al., 2005; Sampson, 2006; Sampson, 2008; Stowell et al., 2009), is negatively associated with violent crime (Lee et al., 2001; Ousey and Kubrin, 2014; Reid et al., 2005) or is weakly associated with crime (Ewing et al., 2015; Ousey and Kubrin, 2018).

At the macro-level, almost all research has demonstrated that immigration is not associated with increased levels of crime; even over different periods of time, jurisdictions, and across different types of offenses (see Akins, Rumbaut, & Stansfield, 2009; Butcher and Piehl, 1998; Ferraro, 2016; Feldmeyer, 2009; Feldmeyer, Harris, & Scroggins, 2015; Feldmeyer & Steffensmeier, 2009; Lee, Martinez, & Rosenfeld, 2001; Light & Ulmer, 2016; Light, 2017; Lyons et al., 2013; MacDonald, Hipp, & Gill, 2013; Martinez and Stowell, 2012; Martinez et al., 2008, 2010; Martinez, Stowell, & Iwama, 2016; Ousey & Kubrin, 2009, 2014; Sampson, Morenoff, & Raudenbush, 2005; Stansfield et al., 2013; Stowell et al., 2009; Wadsworth, 2010). Most of these improper connections between immigrant status and crime are often the product of false assumptions and stereotypes (Higgins et al., 2010; Martinez and Lee, 2000; Rumbaut and Ewing, 2007).

Between the 1990s and 2000s, U.S. citizens' perceptions of immigrants was much more positive vis-à-vis concerns of crime, economic insecurity, economic input, and overall contribution to the country (Segovia and Defever, 2010; Simon and Sikich, 2007). Furthermore, citizens' fear of immigrants and level of support for increased deportations for illegal immigrants did increase alongside a decrease in opposition for a border wall (Segovia and Defever, 2010). More recently, over half of citizens believe immigration levels should be decreased and slightly over a third of Americans believe immigration increases crime (Pew Research Center, 2015).

The present analysis supplements earlier efforts by examining citizens' perceptions about whether immigrants commit more or less crime.

Specifically, the study explores whether individuals' opinions about the link between immigration and crime are influenced by their unique demographic characteristics as well as social and economic variables. Results from this analysis will help to address some of the misconceptions about the immigration and crime link and while continuing the empirical discussion of this issue. The theoretical frameworks guiding this analysis are discussed in the following section, so that each perspective can be examined in terms of its explanatory power vis-à-vis US citizens' perspectives of the immigrant-crime link.

Literature Review

The Group Conflict and the Instrumental Group Conflict Theories

Attitudinal studies examining the correlates of native-born perceptions about immigrants have been used to study this phenomenon at both the macro and micro-levels. At the macro-level, explanations are mostly based on the assumptions of the group conflict theory which focuses on perception of threat and competition as major determinants of hostility and conflict between groups (LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Stephan et al., 2000). According to this theory, perception of competition from foreigners over scarce resources such as employment opportunity, social benefits, influence and power, and money leads to hostility and conflict between the native-born population and the immigrant population (McLaren, 2003; Meuleman, Davidov & Billiet, 2009). The native-born population, according to these studies, will not only express negative sentiments toward immigrants but will also be less inclined to support pro-immigration policies. A variant of the group conflict theory, the instrumental model of group conflict, which was pioneered by Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, and Armstrong (2001), argues for two conditions resulting in intergroup antipathy. According to these authors, perception of resource stress and the presence of a distinctive outgroup lead to antagonism between groups. The theory suggests that the two conditions will combine to create a feeling of group-based competition for the limited economic and social resources. When the dominant group members feel they are relatively being deprived (due to inability to obtain a 'lions share' of the societal resources) of access to resources, they tend to develop bad attitudes toward immigrants (Florack, Piontkowski, Bohman, Balzer & Perzig, 2003), who they view as the source of their relative deprivation.

Several studies have examined various effects at the macro-level and have found tremendous support for the group conflict theory (Ceobanu & Escandell, 2008; Dustmann & Preston, 2007; Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2009; Meuleman et al., 2009; Quillian, 1995; Schneider, 2008). An important conclusion made by these studies is the importance of outgroup size in explaining resident population's attitudes toward immigrants. Schnieder (2008), using data from different sources, observed a positive effect of the size of immigrants on threat against this minority population. Similar observations were made by studies that have found a positive and significant relationship between the proportion of immigrants and anti-immigration attitudes, suggesting that the greater the number of immigrants in a host nation, the stronger the anti-immigration sentiments expressed by the native-born population (see Kunovich, 2004; Gijsberts, Hagendoorn & Scheepers, 2004; Semyonov, Rijman & Gorodzeisky, 2006). Size therefore matters in explaining perceptions of immigrants at the contextual level.

Also significant is the economic condition of the host country in predicting attitudes toward foreigners (McLaren, 2003; Dustmann & Preston, 2007). Existing evidence suggests that as the economic health of the country deteriorates, the stronger anti-immigration sentiment becomes. For instance, McLaren (2003) found a positive effect of economic threat to the host nation on citizens' willingness to expel immigrants. Similarly, others have found in analyzing data from the British Social Attitude Survey that labor market concerns, which they operationalized using questions related to fear

of one losing his/her job and ease of finding a job, influenced attitudes toward immigrants (Dustmann and Preston, 2007); with negative attitudes reported by those who were worried about the prospect of the labor market. Finally, unemployment rate (Espenshade and Hempstead, 1996) and welfare concerns (Dustmann and Preston, 2007) have also been found to predict attitudes toward immigrants. It must be noted that not everybody agrees on the effects of certain macro indicators. For example, some researchers believe that labor market concerns/competition do not play a role in explaining native-born attitudes towards immigrants (Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2010; Mayda, 2006).

Other Explanations – Intergroup Contact and Demographic Hypotheses

At the micro-level, previous research has observed the effects of several individual level variables on attitudes toward immigrants. Among these effects is the influence of intergroup contact on perception of immigrants (Escandell & Ceobanu, 2009; Dixon, 2006; McLaren, 2003; Stangor, Jonas, Stroebe & Hewstone, 1996). The notion among these studies is that greater contact with a member of the outgroup improves intergroup perceptions, understanding and appreciation of the outgroup, deters negative attitudes, and encourages support for policies aimed at improving the lives of immigrants. Friendship is necessary, and as McLaren (2003) noted, having some or many friends from minority groups is significantly related to lower levels of hostility toward immigrants. Research has also found that perception of immigrants and support for immigration related policies vary across demographic characteristics such as race, education, income, gender, age or political ideology (Burns and Gimpel, 2000; Chandler and Tsai, 2001; Espenshade, 1995; Espenshade and Hempstead, 1996; Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014; Neal and Bohon, 2003). The observation is that individuals that are older, possess low socio-economic capital, are less educated, and are affiliated with right-wing political parties tend to express strong anti-immigration sentiments and are less likely to support immigration related policies. People with more isolationist views on certain issues (e.g. NAFTA, global free trade, and foreign manufacturing) also see immigration as largely negative (Espenshade and Hempstead, 1996).

Nevertheless, perceptions of immigrants amongst racial and ethnic groups vary (Higgins et al., 2010), despite immigrants having more positive attitudes about the process of immigration (Burns and Gimpel, 2000; Higgins et al., 2010). Unfortunately, negative perceptions of immigrants are often worsened by perceived by racial/ethnic tensions within the community (Higgins et al., 2010). Views of immigrants are often predicated on citizen's views of immigrant-related crime, culture, economic security, or their burden on the welfare system (Burns and Gimpel, 2000; Chandler and Tsai, 2001; Espenshade, 1995; Espenshade and Calhoun, 1993; Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2010; Mayda, 2006; Neal and Bohon, 2003; Sydes et al., 2014), and linguistic factors (Chandler and Tsai, 2001; Espenshade and Calhoun, 1993).

The reviews above highlight some of the works done by previous researchers in the attempt to enhance our understanding of how native-born citizens formulate their views about immigrants. As remarkable as these efforts may be, there are inherent limitations that need to be acknowledged. Unfortunately, research on the perceptions of immigrants or immigration is primarily focused on the political process and citizens' (i.e.,

native-born) views of immigrants (both legal and undocumented) as a whole (Burns and Gimpel, 2000; Chandler and Tsai, 2001; Espenshade, 1995; Espenshade and Hempstead, 1996; Higgins et al., 2010; Iyengar et al., 2013; Mayda, 2006; Neal and Bohon, 2003; Segovia and Defever, 2010; Simon, 1993; Simon and Sikich, 2007). This means that research lacks nuance about citizens' beliefs on the immigrant-crime link. Furthermore, the literature does not adequately parse out the complex factors, that may affect or drive these problematic views; such as prior victimization, level of interaction with immigrant populations, or notions of procedural fairness concerning the government's response to immigrant populaces. Furthermore, trends in anti-immigrant sentiment are rarely consistent over time (Simon and Sikich, 2007).

One study that examined citizen perceptions of the criminal threat posed by undocumented immigrants found that percent Latino was not associated with undocumented immigrants as a perceived criminal threat, whereas unemployment rate was significantly related, but only for native-born respondents once birthplace was modeled separately (Wang, 2012). However, regardless of the actual size of the immigrant populace, the perceived size of the undocumented population *did* significantly predict whether respondents viewed undocumented immigrants as a criminal threat; thus distorted views of presence influence perceptions of immigrant-related crime (Wang, 2012). This relationship was also true for respondents living in higher crime counties (Wang, 2012). Looking only at the native-born, immigrant population size and economic conditions overall were not significantly associated with the perceived size of the undocumented population, and thus the perceived size did not ostensibly influence the perceived criminal threat; even indirectly (Wang, 2012, pg. 764). Also of note is the massive difference in the variance explained between native-born and immigrant populations when modeled separately (.15 and .40, respectively). This could signify that numerous variables related to native-born perceptions, specifically, and those residing in the U.S., generally, are not being examined. This study remains as the most recent and closely related study to the analysis undertaken herein.

To date, most research has focused primarily on perceptions of racial and ethnic minority populations. For example, when Hispanics reside in greater numbers in proximity to Whites, fear of crime is higher than it is for blacks living in closer proximity to whites (Chiricos et al., 2001). When whites are more segregated from blacks, the size of the Hispanic population has a much bigger impact on whites' fear of crime (Eitle and Taylor, 2008). When communities are more integrated, however, attitudes towards immigration are more negative (Burns and Gimpel, 2000). Regardless, blacks, Hispanics, immigrants, and women are all less likely to believe that immigration increases crime (Higgins et al., 2010), but some acknowledge that this perceived link may be more indicative of a fear of foreigners than an actual fear of crime that immigrants may bring (Ceobanu, 2011). Nonetheless it is well established that perceptions of the racial composition of a community influences people's perceived risk of victimization (see Wang, 2012 for review). More research needs to be done on the perceived size of immigrant populations on perceptions of immigrant threat, however (Wang, 2012). Citizen perceptions of immigrants in general as well as narratives by hate groups, both support the notion that immigrants are a racial and/or ethnic threat to the larger community (Gemignani and Hernandez-Albujar, 2015). For example, examinations of the racial and ethnic threat hypotheses have established that police department size and presence is correlated with the racial composition of a

community (Carmichael and Kent, 2014). The fear brought about by imminent demographic changes also directly leads to support for xenophobic candidates (e.g. Trump), but only when ethnic identity is high (Major et al., 2018). Sometimes immigration or the presence of insular minorities influences intergroup violence- whether via economic or political competition (Jacobs and Wood, 1999)- this does not consistently occur though (Stacey et al., 2011).

Perceptions can also vary by whether a minority group is involved with- or is believed to be involved with- some subversive political movement (King and Brustein, 2006). However, neighborhoods that witness influxes in immigration also were subject to spikes in anti-Hispanic hate crime (Stacey, 2015; Stacey et al., 2011), so examining what influences citizens' perceptions of immigrants, generally, and the immigrant-crime relationship, specifically, may shed some light on intra-group processes that are conducive to different modes of conflict or crime. Based on these findings, it may be useful to examine whether macro-level perspectives like social disorganization theory can explain why aggregate changes to the community may make people believe crime is going up even though it did not.

Social Disorganization Theory

Social disorganization theory has been used for almost a century to explain immigrants *actual* offending patterns. While it has not been used to fully explain *perceptions* of immigrants and offending, it can be used to examine whether perceptions of social and communal change -vis-à-vis demographic, cultural, and social changes- leads to the belief that new immigrants bring more crime.

Social disorganization theory argues that a decrease in neighborhood homogeneity could have criminogenic outcomes. Shaw and McKay (1942) believed that macro-level factors, such as low socio-economic status, racial heterogeneity, and residential mobility, increased crime rates in local communities. Basically, new immigrants can disturb existing structures and networks, indirectly leading to crime. Building on Shaw and McKay's original work, Sampson and Groves (1989), using data from the British Crime Survey, investigated the effects of informal social controls on social disorganization. They concluded that social disorganization, manifesting as low socio-economic status, ethnic heterogeneity, and/or residential mobility, has a deleterious effect on informal social controls, which in turn is linked to higher crime rates. Light and Miller (2018) addressed the role of social disorganization in the immigration–crime nexus more explicitly, by stating that the natural tendency of illegal immigrants to live in the shadows and to avoid detection by legal authorities, may *weaken* their ability to coalesce around mutual goals; such as fighting crime in their communities.

However, empirical examinations of Sampson and Groves' (1989) argument have revealed mixed findings. For instance, a study conducted by Sun et al. (2004) observed that socially disorganized neighborhoods - neighborhoods characterized by high levels of poverty, residential mobility, racial heterogeneity, and family disruption - are more likely to experience high crime rate due to weak local friendship, kinship bonds, and low organizational participation. Based on this argument, it is believed that higher levels of immigration would be *positively* correlated with higher crime rates because immigration led to "racial and ethnic heterogeneity, which, similar to residential

mobility, can undermine the strength and salience of informal social control in communities" (Ousey & Kubrin, 2018, p. 77).

Results from Ousey and Kubrin's (2018) meta-analytic study failed to support claims about a positive relationship between immigration and crime, however. The authors rather observed a negative relationship between immigration and crime, suggesting that immigration reduces crime in spite of the higher social disorganization found in immigrant communities. Ousey and Kubrin (2018) explained the link between social disorganization and immigration, noting that immigration may uproot the levers of informal social control in a community. They added that the migration of ethnically diverse groups into the community may lead to residential instability and mobility, thereby weakening "social ties and shared values," important social indicators required to engender informal social controls (Ousey & Kubrin, 2009; Stowell, Messner, McGeever, & Raffalovich, 2009). As Chenane and Wright (2018) argued, although immigrants tend to live in neighborhoods that may have a higher propensity for criminal activity, immigrants' presence in these neighborhoods may actually stymie crime rates. Ousey and Kubrin (2018) also argued that immigration has been known to revitalize communities and strengthen social bonds. This is in line with the immigrant revitalization hypothesis (see Feldmeyer et al., 2019).

These findings comport with prior findings that crime and immigration are actually negatively correlated (see Butcher and Piehl 1998; Hagan et al., 2008; Hagan and Palloni 1998, Martinez and Lee 2000; Mears 2001; Ousey and Kubrin, 2009; Reid et al. 2005; Rumbaut and Ewing, 2007; Tonry 1997). Some research actually shows that immigration *inhibits* crime (Light, 2017; MacDonald et al., 2013; Reid et al., 2005; Sampson, 2006; Sampson, 2008; Stowell et al., 2009); even violent crime (Lee et al., 2001; Ousey and Kubrin, 2014; Reid et al., 2005). Others merely contend that the relationship between immigration and crime is very weak. (Ewing et al., 2015; Ousey and Kubrin, 2018). Basically, the aforementioned misperceptions about immigration and crime continue to belie our public discourse about immigration despite empirical research over the last two decades undermining the notion that immigration is positively associated with crime. Drawing on this theory, this article examines whether *perceived* community level changes related to population growth of immigrants and cultural changes can explain these misperceptions about immigrants and crime.

Current Study

The primary focus of the current study is to examine factors that influence citizens' views about the immigration and crime relationship. Put simply, we are interested in examining opinions within the United States on whether immigrants increase crime. As such we will examine the underlying factors associated with this opinion. Based on the review of literature and assumptions derived from the theoretical perspectives, it is hypothesized that:

1. Respondents who perceive that their communities have absorbed 'many new immigrants' will be more likely to associate immigrants with crime in local communities. This would be consistent with the social disorganization, conflict, and intergroup contact and demographics hypotheses/theories.

2. Blacks, Hispanics, and women will be less inclined to perceive that immigrants increase local crime rates, consistent with the findings from Higgins et al. (2010).
3. Respondent fear of victimization will be positively associated with their perception that immigrants increase local crime rates. This would be consistent with the intergroup contact and demographics hypotheses/theories.
4. Respondents' "resistance to change"- based on the *resistance to societal change* index measure- will be positively associated with their perception that immigrants increase local crime rates. This would support a social disorganization perspective or the various theories within intergroup contact perspective, as most of the items within this index deal with demographic, cultural, and legal changes that favor or benefit "foreigners".
5. Respondents' "views of immigrants"- based on the *views of immigrants* index measure- will be positively associated with their perception that immigrants increase local crime rates. This is consistent with each of the perspectives mentioned as the items within this index focus on perceptions of work ethic, family values, and linguistic factors.
6. Respondents' economic anxiety- measured by their views on free trade, household income, and whether the economy is in a recession- will be positively associated with their perception that immigrants increase local crime rates. It is expected that those with less favorable views on free trade and the state of economy will view immigrants as committing more crime. This would be consistent with the conflict theories presented earlier.

Methods

This study uses data from the PRRI/Brookings 2016 Immigration Survey to assess respondents' perceptions of immigrant-criminality. The data in question was collected via a probability-based panel survey conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute and the Brookings Institution. The survey respondents ($N = 2607$) were all 18 and up, were residing in the United States at the time of the survey, and were interviewed via telephone ($n = 461$) (if they had no internet access) or internet ($n = 2146$) by professional interviewers under the guidance of NORC at the University of Chicago via AmeriSpeak; a probability-based panel created to be representative of the general U.S. adult population. The margin of error for the survey used is ± 2.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, and sampling weights were provided and used in the analyses. For more information on sampling methodologies see the NORC website (NORC, 2018). Interviewers utilized both Spanish and English to conduct the interviews between April and May of 2016.

Measures

The primary dependent variable for this study is *Immigrant-Crime* which is derived from the survey question: "In general, how well do you think […] the following describes immigrants coming to the U.S. today? [T]hey increase crime in local communities." Respondent options were: 'very well', 'somewhat well', 'not too well',

and 'not at all well'. Due to issues with low cell probabilities based on the inclusion of other ordinal variables as independent measures (see below for examples), this was collapsed into a dichotomous measure since there was also no neutral option. Thus, respondents either supported (e.g. 'very well' and 'somewhat well') or did not support (e.g. 'not too well' and 'not at all well') the above assertion. Essentially, this measure states whether an individual believes immigrants increase crime or not within their given community.

Demographic measures included gender, age, and race of respondent, whereas contextual and background variables classified the respondent's level of education, marital status, household income, and whether or not the respondent had access to the internet. 'Household income' and 'Marital status' were collapsed due to low cell counts for numerous categories (i.e. over 14 and 6 categories, respectively). 'Region' was also included as a control measure to discern whether there was regional difference between respondent beliefs about immigration and crime. Other variables included the individual's political ideology (e.g. very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, very liberal), religious affiliation (e.g. Christian, Catholic, Agnostic/Atheist/Nothing, all else), and their most trusted television news source (e.g. broadcast news networks, CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, or Other). The latter two variables were also collapsed to make comparisons more parsimonious and less susceptible to separation of data. Religions such as Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and many others that obtained very small portions of the overall sample comprised 'All Else'.

Contextual questions were also included to determine whether the respondent's views or beliefs about certain issues or phenomena relate to their views on immigration and crime. Questions that focus on economic anxiety ask, "Do you think the country's economic recession is over, or do you think the economy is still in a recession?" ("Recession") and which of the following statements (see Appendix A) was closest to their own view concerning free trade agreements ('mostly helpful' or 'mostly harmful')("Free Trade"). Other measures ask questions about the extent to which new immigration is visible in one's community ("New Immigrants"), whether immigrants are a net benefit or burden to America ("Immigration Impact"), and how much immigrants are changing the respondent's local community ("Change-Community") and America as a whole ("Change-America").

Composite measures were also constructed to measure respondents *Fear of Victimization*, *Resistance to Societal Change*, and *Views of Immigrants*. Those with higher scores are more fearful of victimization, favor restrictionism, and hold less favorable views of immigrants, respectively. Each one of these measures is a composite of 2–9 different ordinal measures in order to create a continuous scale measure. Each of these measures were characterized by a high degree of reliability via principle components analysis (Cronbach's Alpha: .801, .871, and .804, respectively). Appendix A details the various questions and responses that went into each scale. Across all measures used within this study, if an item (i.e. question) did not have a response or the person answered, "I don't know", then the response was coded as missing. Missing responses were rare, so focusing only on those who responded to all of the questions added significant value to the study without losing too many cases during the logistic regression analyses.

Close to 38% of respondents stated that they believed immigration increase crime in local communities (see Table 1). Most respondents were White, Non-Hispanic (69%), Christian (51.3%), Female (57.1%), and had at least some college education (77%). The average age of the respondent was 50.9 years old (median was 52 years). A little more than half of the sample was not married (51.3%) and had a household income of at least $50,000. Media viewership for daily news varied, but broadcast networks (e.g. ABC, NBC, CBS, etc.) held the largest share (26.3%). A large chunk of respondents maintained that they were ideologically 'moderate' (42.3%), with conservatives comprising 25.3%, liberals 17.3%, and very conservative and very liberal respondents making up approximately 7% of the sample.

In terms of respondent views and perceptions, more than half thought that free trade agreements were a detriment to the United States (55.7%), and that the U.S. was still in a recession as of 2016 (69.8%). Close to a quarter of all respondents said that their respective communities had 'almost no new immigrants' (25.3%) whereas 16.3% claimed that their communities had 'many new immigrants'. A majority of respondents felt that immigrants were at least changing their community and America 'a little' (73.4% and 90.2%, respectively). Respondents were somewhat split on immigrants' net impact on the U.S. with 48.6% saying that immigrants strengthen our country and 43.3% saying that they are a burden on our country. Each of these variables are fundamental to testing whether economic anxieties, views of foreigners, and perceived change to one's community and society influence perceptions of immigrant criminality.

Analytic Strategy

This study uses weighted blocked binary logistic regression analyses to test the hypotheses. This methodology is most suitable for this study because the outcome measure is dichotomous ("Yes"/" No") and examining the impact that demographics, media and economic anxiety, immigrant presence, and internal views and perceptions in a staggered manner will yield more insight into the nuances of how Americans perceptions of the immigrant-crime link are shaped. Model 1 tests the baseline demographic variables relationship with the outcome measure. Model 2 introduces the influences of the media and economic variables on the outcome measure, while Model 3 focuses on the internal dimensions (i.e. values, beliefs, ideology, etc.). Model 3 adds variables that depict the extent to which immigrant presence in one's community is changing their community, or whether perceived changes to society at large have an effect on perceptions of immigrant-crime. Model 3 also adds the various indices and the "Ideology" measure to examine the extent to which views of immigrants, fear of victimization, resistance to societal change, and political ideology influence the outcome measure and whether any of these mediate the impact of the measures from Models 1–2. Put simply, Model 1 tests hypothesis #2 (e.g. influence of demographics), Model 2 tests hypothesis #6 (e.g. the effect of economic anxiety), and Model #3 tests hypotheses #1, 3, 4, and 5 (e.g. the influences of culture, fears of change and victimization, and views of immigrants).

Table 1 Unweighted Descriptives ($N = 2607$)

Variable	N	Valid %	Mean	St. Dev
Immigration-Crime				
Yes	963	38.0		
Region				
Northeast (ref)	422	16.2		
Midwest	705	27.0		
South	898	34.4		
West	582	22.3		
Age			50.9	17.5
Female	1488	57.1		
Race/Ethnicity				
White, Non-Hispanic (ref)	1798	69.0		
Black, Non-Hispanic	293	11.2		
Hispanic	312	12.0		
Other	204	7.8		
Education				
Less than High School (ref)	143	5.5		
High School	458	17.6		
Some College	907	34.8		
Bachelors Degree or Higher	1099	42.2		
Religion				
Christian (ref)	1338	51.3		
Catholic	515	19.8		
Agnostic/Atheist/Nothing Specific	496	19.0		
All Else	258	9.9		
Married	1269	48.7		
Media				
Broadcast Network News (NBC, ABC, CBS)(ref)	686	26.3		
CNN	389	15.3		
Fox News	420	16.1		
Public Television	287	11.0		
Other	335	12.9		
Do not watch television news	481	18.5		
Internet Access	2189	84.0		
Household Income				
up to $24,999 (ref)	621	23.8		
$25,000-49,999	648	24.9		
$50,000-99,999	818	31.4		
$100,000+	520	19.9		
Free Trade				
Beneficial (ref)	1032	41.0		
Harmful	1400	55.7		
Other	83	3.3		

Table 1 (continued)

Variable	N	Valid %	Mean	St. Dev
Recession				
Recession is over	780	30.2		
Still in a recession	1802	69.8		
New Immigrants				
Many new immigrants (ref)	421	16.3		
Some new immigrants	846	32.8		
Only a few new immigrants	660	25.6		
Almost no new immigrants	654	25.3		
Change-Community				
A lot (ref)	566	21.9		
A little	1331	51.5		
Not at all	685	26.5		
Change-America				
A lot (ref)	985	38.2		
A little	1340	52.0		
Not at all	252	9.8		
Immigration Impact				
Strengthen our country (ref)	1235	48.6		
Burden on our country	1102	43.3		
Other/Neither/Both	206	8.1		
Ideology				
Very conservative (ref)	185	7.2		
Conservative	649	25.3		
Moderate	1085	42.3		
Liberal	445	17.3		
Very liberal	201	7.8		
Resistance to Societal Change			21.44	6.6
Views of Immigrants			6.2	1.91
Fear of Victimization			5.24	1.67

Results

Results from the weighted binary logistic regression analyses showed major changes across models. Model 1 was significant ($\chi2 = 129.7$, $df = 17$, $p < .001$), and 'Region', 'Female', 'Race/Ethnicity', 'Education', and 'Religion' were all significantly associated with the outcome measure. Women were less likely to believe immigrants were associated with increases in crime ($b = -.227$, $Exp(B) = .797$), as well as Black ($b = -.673$, $Exp(B) = .510$) and Hispanic respondents ($b = -.442$, $Exp(B) = .643$) in comparison to White respondents. Furthermore, those with less than a bachelor's degree were all significantly more likely to believe immigrants were associated with more crime as well ($b = .475$, $Exp(B) = 1.607$; $b = .859$, $Exp(B) == 2.361$; $b = .541$, $Exp(B) = 1.178$). Also those who classified themselves as Atheist, Agnostic, or nothing specific

Table 2 Weighted Binary Logistic Regression Analyses ($N = 2231$)

Variable	Model 1 95% C.I. for Exp(B)							Model 2 95% C.I. for Exp(B)		
	B	SE	Wald	p	Exp(B)	Lower	Upper	B	SE	Wald
Constant	-0.168	0.219	0.586	0.444	0.845			-1.633	0.337	23.457
Region			11.667	0.009						10.004
Midwest	0.212	0.146	2.095	0.148	1.236	0.928	1.646	0.137	0.152	0.817
South	0.444	0.133	11.084	0.001	1.560	1.201	2.026	0.408	0.138	8.681
West	0.268	0.146	3.347	0.067	1.307	0.981	1.741	0.240	0.152	2.485
Age			6.977	0.073						8.414
30-44	0.105	0.137	0.594	0.441	1.111	0.850	1.453	0.109	0.142	0.592
45-59	0.286	0.134	4.542	0.033	1.332	1.023	1.733	0.306	0.143	4.598
59+	-0.002	0.138	0.000	0.989	0.998	0.761	1.309	-0.042	0.147	0.082
Female	-0.227	0.090	6.332	0.012	0.797	0.667	0.951	-0.283	0.094	9.117
Race/Ethnicity			25.984	0.000						21.175
Black, Non-Hispanic	-0.673	0.155	18.961	0.000	0.510	0.377	0.691	-0.600	0.161	13.870
Hispanic	-0.442	0.137	10.410	0.001	0.643	0.492	0.841	-0.453	0.143	9.960
Other	-0.027	0.167	0.027	0.871	0.973	0.702	1.349	0.022	0.174	0.016
Education			53.579	0.000						25.041
Some College	0.475	0.118	16.096	0.000	1.607	1.275	2.027	0.290	0.126	5.304
High School	0.859	0.118	53.067	0.000	2.361	1.873	2.974	0.637	0.129	24.407
Less than High School	0.541	0.163	10.969	0.001	1.718	1.247	2.365	0.265	0.179	2.192
Religion			22.007	0.000						8.690
Catholic	-0.284	0.124	5.253	0.022	0.753	0.590	0.960	-0.209	0.128	2.658
Agnostic/Atheist/Nothing Specific	-0.540	0.128	17.790	0.000	0.583	0.454	0.749	-0.313	0.135	5.391
All Else	-0.456	0.168	7.399	0.007	0.634	0.456	0.880	-0.369	0.175	4.443
Married	-0.070	0.048	2.108	0.147	0.932	0.848	1.025	-0.076	0.052	2.179
Media										44.853
CNN								0.195	0.147	1.756
Fox News								0.487	0.142	11.778
Public Television								-0.554	0.188	8.691
Other								-0.502	0.175	8.188
Do not watch television news								0.114	0.144	0.626
Internet Access								0.016	0.143	0.012
Household Income										3.215
$25,000-49,999								0.178	0.134	1.772
$50,000-99,999								-0.037	0.135	0.076
$100,000+								0.016	0.159	0.010
Free Trade										33.059
Harmful								0.563	0.098	33.046
Other								0.325	0.299	1.181
Recession								0.537	0.108	24.816
New Immigrants										
Some new immigrants										
Only a few new immigrants										
Almost no new immigrants										
Change-Community										
A little										
Not at all										
Change-America										
A little										
Not at all										
Immigration Impact										
Burden on our country										
Other/Neither/Both										
Ideology										
Conservate										
Moderate										
Liberal										
Very liberal										
Resistance to Societal Change										
Views of Immigrants										
Fear of Victimization										
Nagelkerke R-Square	0.076							0.148		
Ch-square	129.747							259.544		
-2 LL	2869.43							2739.63		
df	17							29		
p	<.001							<.001		
Classification %	62.4							66		

($b = -.540$, $Exp(B) = .583$) and 'Other' religions ($b = -.456$, $Exp(B) = .634$) were less likely to believe this. There were also regional differences as well, as those from the South were significantly more likely to believe immigrants increase local crime rates ($b = 444$, $Exp(B) = 1.560$). However, Model 1 explained very little variation in the outcome (7.6%).

Table 2 (continued)

Variable	Model 2				Model 3						
	95% C.I. for Exp(B)							95% C.I. for Exp(B)			
	p	Exp(B)	Lower	Upper	B	SE	Wald	p	Exp(B)	Lower	Upper
Constant	0.000	0.195			-4.775	0.581	67.484	0.000	0.008		
Region	0.019						3.348	0.341			
Midwest	0.366	1.147	0.852	1.546	0.143	0.175	0.667	0.414	1.154	0.819	1.626
South	0.003	1.504	1.146	1.973	0.247	0.160	2.370	0.124	1.280	0.935	1.753
West	0.115	1.271	0.943	1.712	0.296	0.177	2.790	0.095	1.344	0.950	1.901
Age	0.038						7.611	0.055			
30-44	0.442	1.115	0.845	1.472	-0.203	0.165	1.520	0.218	0.816	0.590	1.128
45-59	0.032	1.358	1.027	1.797	-0.285	0.167	2.919	0.088	0.752	0.542	1.043
59+	0.774	0.959	0.718	1.279	-0.468	0.172	7.390	0.007	0.626	0.447	0.878
Female	0.003	0.753	0.627	0.905	-0.025	0.111	0.053	0.819	0.975	0.784	1.212
Race/Ethnicity	0.000						2.265	0.519			
Black, Non-Hispanic	0.000	0.549	0.400	0.752	-0.012	0.188	0.004	0.950	0.988	0.684	1.427
Hispanic	0.002	0.636	0.480	0.842	0.186	0.172	1.162	0.281	1.204	0.859	1.689
Other	0.898	1.022	0.728	1.437	0.233	0.203	1.322	0.250	1.263	0.848	1.879
Education	0.000						9.613	0.022			
Some College	0.021	1.337	1.044	1.712	-0.031	0.148	0.044	0.834	0.969	0.725	1.296
High School	0.000	1.891	1.469	2.435	0.341	0.152	5.061	0.024	1.407	1.045	1.894
Less than High School	0.139	1.304	0.918	1.852	-0.089	0.205	0.189	0.664	0.915	0.611	1.368
Religion	0.034						1.729	0.630			
Catholic	0.103	0.811	0.631	1.043	-0.190	0.147	1.665	0.197	0.827	0.620	1.104
Agnostic/Atheist/Nothing Specific	0.020	0.731	0.561	0.952	-0.012	0.162	0.006	0.941	0.988	0.719	1.358
All Else	0.035	0.692	0.491	0.974	-0.037	0.205	0.033	0.856	0.964	0.645	1.440
Married	0.140	0.927	0.837	1.025	-0.056	0.060	0.855	0.355	0.946	0.840	1.064
Media	0.000						7.854	0.164			
CNN	0.185	1.215	0.911	1.621	0.226	0.167	1.837	0.175	1.254	0.904	1.739
Fox News	0.001	1.627	1.232	2.149	0.127	0.166	0.587	0.444	1.136	0.820	1.572
Public Television	0.003	0.575	0.398	0.831	-0.354	0.220	2.582	0.108	0.702	0.456	1.081
Other	0.004	0.605	0.429	0.854	-0.027	0.204	0.017	0.896	0.974	0.652	1.453
Do not watch television news	0.429	1.121	0.845	1.486	0.172	0.169	1.035	0.309	1.188	0.853	1.655
Internet Access	0.913	1.016	0.768	1.344	-0.043	0.162	0.070	0.791	0.958	0.697	1.316
Household Income	0.360						0.670	0.880			
$25,000-49,999	0.183	1.195	0.919	1.552	0.038	0.154	0.060	0.806	1.039	0.768	1.404
$50,000-99,999	0.783	0.964	0.740	1.254	-0.081	0.155	0.269	0.604	0.923	0.680	1.251
$100,000+	0.922	1.016	0.744	1.386	-0.012	0.181	0.005	0.946	0.988	0.692	1.409
Free Trade	0.000						3.752	0.153			
Harmful	0.000	1.756	1.449	2.128	0.214	0.114	3.511	0.061	1.239	0.990	1.550
Other	0.277	1.383	0.770	2.484	0.300	0.351	0.733	0.392	1.350	0.679	2.687
Recession	0.000	1.711	1.385	2.114	0.015	0.129	0.013	0.909	1.015	0.788	1.306
New Immigrants							1.644	0.650			
Some new immigrants					-0.178	0.172	1.065	0.302	0.837	0.597	1.173
Only a few new immigrants					-0.222	0.185	1.449	0.229	0.801	0.557	1.150
Almost no new immigrants					-0.209	0.188	1.233	0.267	0.812	0.562	1.173
Change-Community							1.413	0.493			
A little					-0.150	0.154	0.946	0.331	0.861	0.637	1.164
Not at all					-0.217	0.188	1.333	0.248	0.805	0.557	1.164
Change-America							13.633	0.001			
A little					-0.306	0.128	5.712	0.017	0.736	0.573	0.946
Not at all					-0.777	0.223	12.159	0.000	0.460	0.297	0.712
Immigration Impact							29.474	0.000			
Burden on our country					0.751	0.139	29.312	0.000	2.118	1.614	2.780
Other/Neither/Both					0.356	0.209	2.915	0.088	1.428	0.949	2.149
Ideology							1.608	0.807			
Conservate					0.071	0.215	0.109	0.741	1.074	0.704	1.636
Moderate					0.021	0.211	0.010	0.922	1.021	0.675	1.545
Liberal					-0.141	0.254	0.308	0.579	0.868	0.528	1.429
Very liberal					0.146	0.333	0.193	0.661	1.158	0.602	2.224
Resistance to Societal Change					0.115	0.013	76.973	0.000	1.122	1.094	1.151
Views of Immigrants					0.208	0.034	37.786	0.000	1.231	1.152	1.316
Fear of Victimization					0.068	0.036	3.574	0.059	1.070	0.998	1.148
Nagelkerke R-Square					0.405						
Ch-square					794.126						
-2 LL					2205.05						
df					45						
p					<.001						
Classification %					76.4						

With the addition of the Media, Household Income, Internet Access, and economic anxiety variables, Model 2 was also significant ($\chi2 = 259.5$, $df = 29$, $p < .001$). Again, 'Region', 'Female', 'Race/Ethnicity', 'Education', and 'Religion' were all significantly associated with the outcome measure. Women were less likely to believe immigrants were associated with increases in crime ($b = -.283$, $Exp(B) = .753$), as well as Black

(b = −.600, Exp(B) = .549) and Hispanic respondents (b = −.453, Exp(B) = .636), in comparison to White respondents. However, those with less than a high school diploma were no longer significantly more likely to believe immigrants were associated with more crime. Those with only a high school degree and even those with some college experience were still more likely to belief this myth, nonetheless (b = .637, Exp(B) = 1.891; b = .290, Exp(B) = 1.337). Those who classified themselves as Atheist, Agnostic, or nothing specific (b = −.313, Exp(B) = .731) and 'Other' religions (b = −.369, Exp(B) = .692) were still less likely to believe that immigrants were associated with less crime. The same regional distinction for those living in the South was evident (b = .408, Exp(B) = 1.504), and those that were between the age of 45–59 were now significantly more likely to also believe immigrants increase crime (b = .306, Exp(B) = 1.358), as compared to those aged 18–29.

'Media' was significantly associated with the outcome measure (Wald = 54.220, $p < .001$), with those who watched Fox News (b = .487, Exp(B) = 1.627) were more likely to think immigrants were associated with crime, whereas those who watched public television (b = −.554, Exp(B) = .575) or some other platform were not (b = −.502, Exp(B) = .605); all in comparison to those who watch broadcast network news.

Individuals who thought that free trade agreements were harmful were also significantly more likely to believe immigrants increase crime in local communities (b = .563, Exp(B) = 1.756) as compared to those who think they are beneficial, and respondents who believed the U.S. was still in a recession were also more likely to believe immigrants are associated with increases in crime (b = .537, Exp(B) = 1.711). The variance explained in the outcome with the addition of these variables almost doubled (14.8%).

In order to assess the impact of these aforementioned variables on the perceived immigration-crime link, it is important to take into account perceptions about immigrants' presence in and impact on local communities and society at large, as well as respondent perceptions and beliefs about immigrants, fear of victimization, and changes to society. These measures comprised the more 'internally held beliefs' category. Model 3 also demonstrated significant model effects ($\chi2 = 794.1$, df = 45, $p < .001$), and explained 40.5% of the variance in the outcome measure. The addition of these measures resulted in 'Region', 'Age', 'Female', 'Race/Ethnicity', 'Religion', 'Media' and the economic anxiety measures falling out of significance.

With the inclusion of these variables, education lost a large portion of its explanatory power, with only those with a high school diploma being significantly more likely- as compared to those with at least a bachelor's degree- to believe immigrants increase crime (b = .341, Exp(B) = 1.407). Those that believe that immigrants are changing America only 'a little' or 'not at all' were also significantly less likely to believe immigrants were associated with increases in crime (b = −.306, Exp(B) = .736; b = −.777, Exp(B) = .460). Respondents who felt that immigrants were a burden on society were close to two times more likely to believe immigrants were associated with increases in crime (b = .751, Exp(B) = 2.118). Surprisingly, political ideology was *not* a significant predictor of the outcome measure. Nonetheless, two of the three indices were significantly associated with the view that immigrants increase local crime. Individuals that were more resistant to societal change were more likely to believe immigrants increased local crime (b = .115, Exp(B) = 1.122). Each increase on the scale was associated with a 12.2% increase in odds of positively associating immigrants with increases in crime. Similarly, those who held less favorable views of immigrants were

also more likely to think immigrants negatively impact local crime (b = .208, Exp(B) = 1.231). Each increase on this scale was associated with a 23.1% increase in odds of positively associating immigrants with increases in crime. Fear of victimization was only marginally significant, however.

The results demonstrate that personal views and beliefs about immigrants, immigration, and a resistance to a changing society – not economic anxiety or differences across identity groups- were more important in explaining differences in perceptions of the immigrant-crime link. However, level of education was important. In fact, it seems that the variables included in Model 3 explains the lion's share of the variance in the outcome measure. In terms of model capacity to determine membership in the two groups of interest, the analyses demonstrated an excellent level of discrimination overall (.837 Area under the ROC curve (95% CI, .820–.853)).

Discussion

For the past several decades, scholars and practitioners have wrestled with the immigration and crime debate. This attempt has led to the emergence of two opposing views concerning the immigration and crime linkage. While one school of thought believes that the presence of immigrants increases crime, the other argues otherwise; suggesting a negative relationship between the two factors. While the debate about immigration and crime is still ongoing with new voices (politicians and media outlets) joining in, the current analysis did not aim to explore whether immigration reduces or increases crime. Instead, the analysis focused on examining the role of public perceptions in the relationship between immigration and crime. Primarily, the study investigated the factors that cause variations in people's thinking about the immigration and crime link. Apart from its practical policy implications, the analysis offers insight into why Americans will form and embrace certain beliefs about immigrants. This is important because perceptions influence policy, albeit indirectly.

There are several reasons why the populace may *not* believe immigrants increase crime. First, there is evidence suggesting that immigrants make substantial economic contributions to their host country and that this population can cause a significant positive change in their local communities (Garrett, 2006, Luu, 2017; Saxenian, 2002). Also, immigrants take care of the undesirable jobs in the community that native-born citizens would not otherwise do. Another reason is that immigrants establish small-scale businesses that promote community growth and offer employment opportunities to members of the community. Despite the economic boom that is associated with immigration, some people believe immigrants make little to no change in their local communities. Fortunately, people with such viewpoints also believe that the presence of immigrants *does not* increase crime. To understand these complexities, we can revisit the vulnerability perspective of immigration, which, to paraphrase, argues that the immigrant population is a vulnerable population in the host country (see for example Aday, 2002; Derose, Escarce, & Lurie, 2007). Compared to the native-born population, immigrants have a greater risk of poor health, mental, and psychological issues, and above all, have limited access to healthcare services (Flaskerud & Winslow, 1998; Lucas, Bar-Anderson, & Kington, 2003). The logic is that, due to these vulnerabilities and limitations, immigrants may not only be incapacitated to make any

meaningful contribution in the society but may also be harmless in the community. This line of reasoning derived from the vulnerability perspective might explain why a segment of the native-born population believes immigrants do not increase crime in the local community.

To achieve the study's objective, several weighted binary logistic regression analyses were conducted, and these analyses revealed interesting and surprising findings about why people may think immigrants commit fewer or more crime. Only hypotheses #4 and 5 obtained support from these analyses; in that general views of immigrants and resistance to societal change operated in their predicted directions in terms of explaining perceptions of immigrant criminality. However, other unpredicted findings are of note. For instance, those who believe immigrants are not changing their way of live or America in any meaningful way do not consider immigrants as more crime prone. This finding held even for those who believed immigrants *do* change America a little. This is all in comparison to those who believe immigrants change America 'a lot'; thus the two other camps are significantly less likely to fall victim to this myth of immigrant criminality. This finding supports the intergroup conflict and demographic hypotheses.

Perceptions about whether people believe immigrants commit more crime was also found to vary based on whether one believes immigrants are a burden to the host country or not. Those who believed immigrants are a burden tend to associate the group with increasing crime rates. The common belief here would be that these may be individuals who feel threatened by the presence of immigrants due to perceived fear of economic and social competition over limited resources. Per the group conflict thesis, competition (whether real or perceived) is a major source of negative sentiments expressed by natives toward foreigners (Esses et al., 2001). However, the economic anxiety variables did not find support in this study, so the assertion that individuals fear immigrants due to economic competition is unfounded here, and this finding (or lack of) partially supports prior research (Wang, 2012). This is also in line with the contention that economic contexts do not influence perceptions of immigrants' impact on crime (Ceobanu, 2011), even if they do influence perceptions of immigrants in general. Nonetheless, those who *already had* less favorable views of immigrants, as well as those who feared societal change were more inclined to believe immigrants increased crime.

These findings may be more in line with the notion that fear of foreigners rather than an actual fear of crime or economic concerns is what is driving perceptions of the immigrant-crime link (Ceobanu, 2011). This is consistent with the social disorganization and the intergroup contact perspectives as the items within this index focused on perceptions of work ethic, family values, and linguistic factors. For example, the social disorganization perspective holds that new immigrants challenge existing value structures and social ties, and the intergroup contact perspective maintains that demographic change may strain communities that are already beseeched by racial/ethnic tensions. Another contention is that those who already hold negative ideations about immigrants- in seeing them as a social burden and having more negative views of them in general (i.e. views of immigrants index)- also think they contribute to increased crime rates. Thus it seems that generally negative stereotypes about immigrants coincide with the belief that immigrants increase crime; a view that is more in line with the intergroup contact and demographic perspectives employed here. For example, views of

immigrants are often predicated on citizen's views of immigrant-related crime, culture, economic security, or their burden on the welfare system (Burns and Gimpel, 2000; Chandler and Tsai, 2001; Espenshade, 1995; Espenshade and Calhoun, 1993; Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2010; Mayda, 2006; Neal and Bohon, 2003; Sydes et al., 2014), and even linguistic factors (Chandler and Tsai, 2001; Espenshade and Calhoun, 1993).

Also of note is that the analyses did not find that new immigrants to an area influenced one's perceptions. This seemingly conflicts with the intergroup contact position discussed above (see Escandell & Ceobanu, 2009; Dixon, 2006; McLaren, 2003; Stangor, Jonas, Stroebe & Hewstone, 1996), in that the most contact one has with 'others' the less likely they will be to hold negative views about that group. This finding also conflicts with that assertion that size of immigrant population influences perceptions; in that the greater the number of immigrants in a host nation, the stronger the anti-immigration sentiments expressed by the native-born population will be (see Kunovich, 2004; Gijsberts, Hagendoorn & Scheepers, 2004; Semyonov, Rijman & Gorodzeisky, 2006). While this assertion was not supported in this study, the measure focusing on immigrant size (e.g. 'New Immigrant') only deals with *perceived* changes to the immigrant population within one's community. Even though this metric does not rely on actual census-like numbers on or changes to the immigrant populace within a given community, it does still measure *perceived* change; which is arguably a better metric for understanding one's perceptions of a given subgroup since it only matters that the perceptions are so, not that the actual changes occurred. Within the context of this study, the view that immigrants contribute to increases in local crime *is* a negative view since it is almost uniformly untrue (see Introduction). However, respondents felt that immigrants were changing their local community less than what was occurring on a national scale (see Table 1). Thus, it is not surprising to find non-significance for the 'Change-Community' variable, while 'Change-America' *was significant.* Essentially, individuals feel immigrants do not change their communities as much as what they perceive is occurring on a national level, and thus do not perceive that immigrants increase crime as much. Even for those who do believe immigrants are changing society at the national level 'a little', respondents still believe they do not increase local crime rates. Those that think America is changing 'a little' or 'not at all' were *both* significantly less likely to think immigrants increase local crime rates as compared to those who think America is changing 'a lot' due to immigration. It seems this results in a form of perceptual displacement, in that people believe local crime rates are *not* impacted by even some change to the national landscape, while those that feel America is changing a lot believe the reverse. All of this in the face of a non-significant finding for immigrants changing local communities. These findings lend partial support to the social disorganization and intergroup contact and demographic perspectives.

The various indices indicate that those who think negatively of immigrants, are more resistant to socio-cultural and political changes in society, and believe immigrants are a burden on America are more likely to think immigrants contribute to increases in crime. These findings depart from prior research findings in that this study found no support for the racial/ethnic, economic, or size of immigrant group hypotheses within the larger competition and conflict perspectives (see review above). While previous research examining issues related to immigration and immigrants has observed the critical role that individual characteristics play in the formation of attitudes, behavior, and

sentiments towards foreigners (Coenders et al., 2008, Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014, Higgins et al., 2010), such findings were not replicated here. These studies have argued that anti-immigration views vary mostly by age, socio-economic status, gender, race, and ideological orientation. Findings from the current analysis also do *not* corroborate this argument once contextual level and perception-related variables were examined. While this observation negates previous positions on this issue, it also calls for further and thoughtful examination of the importance of demographic variables in shaping people's opinions about immigrants. This is also why the intergroup contact perspective only attains partial support via these analyses.

The sole demographic variable that was significant was that of education. The only significant contrast was for those with only a high school diploma, in that these respondents were significantly more likely to believe immigrants increase crime as compared to their college degree holding counterparts. Thus, those with a high school diploma but no college experience are likely less exposed to immigrant populations, and can thereby find it difficult to to alter their perceptions in this area. Nonetheless, it is odd that those with *less* than a high school education are not significantly different, given the assumption that more education decreases the likelihood that one falls prey to this myth. More importantly, the more internal belief variables that were included in the models, the less important education became. Of all the variables from the first model, only education retained its significance; demonstrating that the internal belief measures mediate the influence of education and other identity-level measures (e.g. religion, race, gender, age, etc.). Thus, demographics may not matter as much as scholars think they do; it is more about internal beliefs and values.

Recommendations and Study Limitations

Overall, research on perceptions of immigrants lacks the ability to disaggregate effects by demographic, environmental, and contextual factors. Some researchers have used more nuanced polls to assess citizen perceptions of specific groups of immigrants, however. For example, one study focused on student perceptions of Arab immigrants to understand in-group identification and identity (Lyons et al., 2010). Nevertheless, this does not survey the perceived link between immigrants and crime. To date, most research in these areas does not fully unpack the factors that influence or drive anti-immigrant attitudes, either in relation to perceptions of crime, or how attitudes within a given community influence or drive community-level offending; such as hate crime. Given the data, this study was unable to address these questions.

Another limitation of this body of research is the inability to unpack different immigrant groups' perceptions. Research instead dichomotimizes native-born vs. immigrant perceptions, which leaves certain social groups' feelings about other specific social groups out; including the role of political, social, environmental, and demographic factors (Pew Research Center, 2015). However, some scholars have come close (Burns and Gimpel, 2000; Espenshade and Calhoun, 1993; Espenshade and Hempstead, 1996; Mayda, 2006; Neal and Bohon, 2003).

Moving forward, researchers should turn their attention to perceptions of immigration at the societal- *and* individual-levels. This is because popular support for

immigration at the group level is predicated on cultural perceptions, whereas popular support for immigrants on an individual level is sometimes driven by economic anxieties (Iyengar et al., 2013). This is not always the case though, as was found (or not found) in this study, and since comparative research has found that economic contexts do not influence perceptions of immigrants' impact on crime (Ceobanu, 2011). The question as to the role of these perceptions in _causing_ crime or victimization remains unanswered. Developmental psychology studies found that changes in anti-immigrant attitudes in adolescents is affected by empathy concern (Miklikowska, 2017b); parents, peers, and intergroup friends; and that empathy concern partially mediates the effect of parents, peers, and intergroup friends, and those with more immigrant friends have less anti-immigrant attitudes (Miklikowska, 2017a). This is not shocking, but it relates to the aforementioned intergroup contact thesis. Again, future researchers should examine this link more extensively, as the data herein was limited in its ability to measure true relations between respondent and immigrant communities.

Similarly, the mean age for this study was 50.9 years old, with the median being 52. The median age of the U.S. population was 38 years old as of 2016 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017); thus are sample population was much older than the rest of the U.S. population. This may have biased our results as the data indicate that those that were older were more likely to believe immigrants increased crime; as roughly 12% of 18–29 years old, 19% 30–44 years old, 32% of 45–59 years old, and 36% of those above 59 years of age, respectively, thought immigrants increased crime. Future studies should try to replicate this study on a more representative age distribution, if plausible. While sampling weights help to mitigate bias, having a more representative sample in terms of age would likely be a very important factor in increasing the reliability of the survey.

Research on crime and immigration has also shown that native-born perceptions of immigration and immigrants are useful for understanding what factors affect citizen beliefs about the immigrant-crime relationship, even though immigrants and their children commit less crime their native-born counterparts (for a review, see: Bersani, 2014; Bersani et al., 2014; Jennings et al., 2013; Ousey and Kubrin, 2018). On the other hand, research on immigrant victimization has produced mixed results, with victimization being highly dependent on the type of crime or other environmental or contextual factors (see Barranco, 2013; Luo & Bouffard, 2016; Peguero, 2013). Level of acculturation is also important as it can be a risk factor. For example, acculturation is positively associated with Hispanic adolescent violent victimization, despite this relationship being mediated by delinquent peers (Gibson and Miller, 2010).

Whether community-level perceptions of immigrants impacts offending, and victimization reporting, remains untested. However, studies on citizen perceptions of immigration typically rely on national polling questions that lack nuance and focus on whether citizens _think_ immigrants contribute to crime or not. This is the major limitation of this study; especially since the question is only asked in one modality (i.e. instead of several questions on immigrants and crime). Since this was a national-level poll that focused on perceptions of immigrant criminality, it was also impossible to discern whether respondent views were conditioned by actual community crime rates or increases in local crime. Future researchers should attempt to control for this variable as well.

Also of note is that the outcome measure used was collapsed from four to two categories. While the basis for doing so was justified- low cell counts across the four outcomes- and collapsing the response gave the study more parsimony (i.e. Yes/No outcome measure), this manipulation may have taken away some of the interpretive value of the study, in that there may be important true differences between those who responded 'very well' and those who responded 'somewhat well'. Nonetheless, this alteration was necessary, given the data and overarching research questions. Future studies would benefit from adopting more nuanced survey questions relating to the immigrant-crime link, or would benefit from adding multiple questions on the perceived immigration-crime link so that researchers can examine whether any evasive subtleties exist as to this perception.

Since this study deviates from what the prior literature has discovered, especially as it relates to the lack of significance for the economic anxiety or identity/demographic-level variables, future studies should focus on whether respondents' perceptions about their own financial situations or their views on current race, gender, or religious relations mediate the immigrant-crime perception. The economic anxiety variables in this study were not specific to the individual's own reality, and were instead very general in scope. While the inclusion of household income helps to mitigate this lack of specificity, future studies would benefit from more robust economic questions. The same is true of individuals' perceptions of race relations; as was included in Higgins et al. (2010) study. Unfortunately, this study was unable to account for such perceptions, despite being able to include significantly more perception-level measures via the various indices (see Appendix A.). Furthermore, it is impossible here to determine whether individuals' negative beliefs and/or stereotypes of immigrants precede, follow from, or are influenced by the belief that immigrants cause crime to go up. Thus, only correlations amongst beliefs and value systems can be acknowledged here, and any statements within this study are *not* causal in nature.

While education was found to be an important indicator, it lacks a lot of explanatory power once the personal belief variables are included and even still, only having a high school diploma- not less than a high school diploma- was significant. This extent to which education reliably predicts the belief that immigrants increase local crime rates needs to be further replicated, given the semi-conflicting results. Nonetheless, pursuant to the recommendation proffered by Higgins et al. (2010), there should be educational programs across the country to educate people on the immigrant-crime narrative myth. These educational programs can hopefully help to address the misconceptions about immigration and crime. Whether these programs are grass-roots educational outreaches or are embedded as part of the public education curriculum is for practitioners to decide. Our research indicates that educating individuals *earlier* rather than later in life will likely yield more fruit in combatting the promulgation of this myth. It is hoped that these types of programs can also indirectly mitigate the extent to which people harbor negative views of immigrations and/or immigration, as well as their innate resistance to external change. While these measures all exerted independent effects on the outcome measure used, the extent to which negative views of immigrants (including the belief that they are a burden on America) and the belief that they are *more* criminal that the general citizenry can be combatted by these programs will need to be studied and tested.

However, it *can be* said based on the findings that those who are more resistant to societal change are also more likely to believe immigrants increase crime. Nonetheless,

future researchers should examine the temporal ordering of these beliefs, if possible, to discern whether contact with immigrant populaces mediates these beliefs or the relationships amongst fear of victimization or resistance to societal change and the idea that immigrants increase crime. Researchers should also test for the effect of ethnic/racial identity on perceptions of immigrants, as there is evidence that ethnic identity is associated with support for xenophobic immigration policies (Major et al., 2018). Lastly, future research would benefit from studying whether any of these findings vary by respondent nationality (e.g. comparative research), immigrant nationality or religion, or are mediated by a respondent's views of different identity groups (e.g. Asians vs. Hispanics). The same request goes for legal status as well, since this study was unable to disaggregate findings by whether the respondent was an immigrant themselves or whether their views varied for documented versus undocumented immigrants. Since this study did not obtain any significant findings related to the effect of identity (i.e. race, gender, age, etc.) on perceptions, future studies should try to replicate these findings for robustness.

Determining whether individuals who already have these beliefs select 'into' these media platforms *or* are influenced by these media platforms or modes of information distribution (i.e. internet) is beyond the scope of this study. While this study did not reveal any significant effects for ideology, or media (in model 3), policymakers and media personnel should be wary of these findings. The finding of non-significance for *Media* is of note. Thus, even Fox News and CNN were *not* significantly different from broadcast network news in terms of viewer beliefs about immigrant criminality. This could be problematic, as viewers of broadcast networks news, CNN, and Fox News still believed immigrants increase crime near or above the average rate for the study (39, 36, 57%, respectively). While there was a big difference between CNN and Fox News, these contrasts were still not significantly different, after controlling for all other variables. Again, determining the temporal ordering of viewership and belief formation is impossible given the data, but the findings make it difficult to discern the true impact of media viewership on the belief that immigrants increase crime. Future studies should try to further parse out the study of media impact on the maintenance of this myth.

Conclusion

Perceptions about immigrants have largely been driven by people's sentiments and feelings, and such feelings are usually based on media portrayal of who an immigrant is. Unfortunately, these sentiments and feelings become the main drivers of national immigration policies. For several years now, criminological research has continuously dispelled the belief that the presence of immigrants upsurges crime rates at both the local and national levels, and while this observation has been received by many, there are some in the community that have refused to accept that immigrants are not the cause of community crime problems. In this study, we did not attempt to explain whether immigrants increase crime or act as buffers to crime. However, we aimed to explain the rationale behind people's thinking about the immigration and crime linkage. The observations made in our analysis examined the role of the media, fear of victimization, perceived economic contribution of immigrants, as well as demographic factors and the

perception that immigrants are a societal burden, in explaining why some people may believe immigrants increase crime.

Overall, the findings offer partial support for the social disorganization and intergroup contact perspectives, with the latter receiving the most support. No real support for the economic competition hypotheses (e.g. conflict perspectives) was found and the racial/ethnic threat hypothesis- which is part of the intergroup contact perspective, failed to attain support too. Put simply, individuals' beliefs and values and fear of change are associated more with their views on immigrant criminality that other factors. Furthermore, the finding that those that are more resistant to social and cultural change within America are more likely to believe this myth of immigrant-criminality, informs both policymakers' and the media's ability to dispel these beliefs by understanding the convergence of these fears and the myth of immigrant criminality. The policy implications of these findings are robust, and following the recommendation by Higgins et al. (2010), there should be educational programs at both local and national levels to educate people that immigrants are not criminals by nature and that, they do not increase crime rate. These "mind-changing" educational programs will, in the long run, help to address the misconceptions about immigration and crime, and may hopefully in turn, lead to more effective immigrant assimilation and community relations.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Statement of Competing Interests   We have no conflicting or competing interests at this time.

Survey Questions

Free Trade

1. Which of the following statements comes closest to your own view – even if neither is exactly right?:

    a. Free trade agreements with other countries are mostly helpful because they open markets for U.S. companies and allow Americans to buy goods more cheaply ('0')
    b. Free trade agreements with other countries are mostly harmful because they send jobs overseas and drive down wages ('1')

Recession Question.

2. Do you think the country's economic recession is over, or do you think the economy is still in a recession?

    a. Recession is over ('0')
    b. Still in a recession ('1')

Resistance to Societal Change Index.

3. Now, read each statement and please say if you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree or completely disagree with each one (Scale ranges from 9 to 36):

    a. The American way of life needs to be protected against foreign influence

        i.   Completely disagree ('1')
        ii. Mostly disagree ('2')
        iii. Mostly agree ('3')
        iv. Completely agree ('4')
    b. The idea of America where most people are not white bothers me

        i.   Completely disagree ('1')
        ii. Mostly disagree ('2')
        iii. Mostly agree ('3')
        iv. Completely agree ('4')
    c. The values of Islam are at odds with American values and way of life

        i.   Completely disagree ('1')
        ii. Mostly disagree ('2')
        iii. Mostly agree ('3')
        iv. Completely agree ('4')
    d. We should make a serious effort to deport all illegal immigrants back to their home countries

        i.   Completely disagree ('1')
        ii. Mostly disagree ('2')
        iii. Mostly agree ('3')
        iv. Completely agree ('4')
    e. It bothers me when I come into contact with immigrants who speak little or no English

        i.   Completely disagree ('1')
        ii. Mostly disagree ('2')
        iii. Mostly agree ('3')
        iv. Completely agree ('4')
    f. It is important to keep fighting against laws and cultural changes that conflict with my values, even if most other Americans disagree.

        i.   Completely disagree ('1')
        ii. Mostly disagree ('2')
        iii. Mostly agree ('3')
        iv. Completely agree ('4')
             Now, we would like to get your views on some issues that are being discussed in the country today. Do you favor or oppose the following:

g.   Building a wall along the U.S. border with Mexico

    i.   'Strong oppose ('1')
    ii.   Oppose ('2')
    iii.   Favor ('3')
    iv.   Strongly favor ('4').

h.   Passing a law to prevent Syrian refugees from entering the U.S.

    i.   'Strong oppose ('1')
    ii.   Oppose ('2')
    iii.   Favor ('3')
    iv.   Strongly favor ('4').

i.   Temporarily banning Muslims from other countries from entering the U.S.

    i.   'Strong oppose ('1')
    ii.   Oppose ('2')
    iii.   Favor ('3')
    iv.   Strongly favor ('4').

Fear of Victimization Index.

4.   And thinking about concerns that people may have, how worried are you that you or someone in your family will (Scale 2–8):

a.   Be a victim of terrorism

    i.   Very worried ('1')
    ii.   Somewhat worried ('2')
    iii.   Not too worried ('3')
    iv.   Not at all worried ('4')

b.   Be a victim of a violent crime

    i.   Very worried ('1')
    ii.   Somewhat worried ('2')
    iii.   Not too worried ('3')
    iv.   Not at all worried ('4')

View of Immigrants Index.

5.   In general, how well do you think each of the following describes immigrants coming to the U.S. today? (Scale ranges from 3 to 12):

a.   They are hardworking

    i.   Very well ('1')
    ii.   Somewhat well ('2')

    iii.   Not too well ('3')
    iv.   Not at all well ('4')

  b.   They make an effort to learn English

    i.   Very well ('1')
    ii.   Somewhat well ('2')
    iii.   Not too well ('3')
    iv.   Not at all well ('4')

  c.   They have strong family values

    i.   Very well ('1')
    ii.   Somewhat well ('2')
    iii.   Not too well ('3')
    iv.   Not at all well ('4')

New Immigrants

6.   Do you live in a community with many new immigrants, some new immigrants, only a few new immigrants, or almost no new immigrants?

  a.   Many new immigrants ('1')
  b.   Some new immigrants ('2')
  c.   Only a few new immigrants ('3')
  d.   Almost no new immigrants

Immigration Impact.

7.   Which of the following statements comes closest to your own view – even if neither is exactly right?

  a.   Immigrants today strengthen our country because of their hard work and talents ('1')
  b.   Immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs, housing and health care ('2')
  c.   Other/Neither/Both ('3')

Change-Community.

8.   How much, if at all, do you think immigrants today are changing your COMMUNITY and way of life?

  a.   A lot ('1')
  b.   A little ('2')
  c.   Not at all ('3')

Change-America.

9. How much, if at all, do you think that immigrants today are changing AMERICAN SOCIETY and way of life?

    a. A lot ('1')
    b. A little ('2')
    c. Not at all ('3')

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