

The Integration of Immigrants into **AMERICAN SOCIETY**

ISSUE BRIEF: Crime

The United States prides itself on being a nation of immigrants, and it has a long history of absorbing people from across the globe. Today, one of every four members of the U.S. population is either an immigrant or has a parent who is an immigrant. How well they are successfully integrating is an important and pressing question.

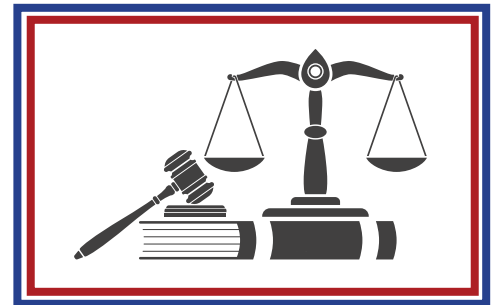
A panel of experts appointed by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine examined the available evidence to assess how immigrants are integrating into U.S. society in a range of areas—education, employment and earnings, language, and health, among others. The committee's findings are presented in its report, *The Integration of Immigrants into American Society* (2015). The report concludes that across all measurable outcomes, current immigrants and their descendants are integrating into U.S. society.

One facet of integration examined in the study was the relationship between immigration and crime rates. A large body of evidence reveals that, contrary to what many Americans believe, immigrants are much less likely to commit crimes than the native-born. In addition, the presence of large numbers of immigrants in a neighborhood seems to lower crime rates.

Immigrants Have Lower Crime Rates than the Native-Born

A large body of research has investigated how crime rates among immigrants compare with crime rates among native-born Americans. These studies have found that crime, arrest, and incarceration rates are lower among immigrants. This finding about immigrants' lower rates of crime appears to apply over decades and to all racial and ethnic groups of immigrants.

In one study, researchers compared incarceration rates for foreign-born and U.S.-born men, ages 18-39, and found that the incarceration of the foreign-born was one-fourth that of the native-born. Another study compared the U.S.-born and foreign-born incarceration rates in the 2000 Census by racial and ethnic groups and found dramatic differences. Foreign-born Hispanic men had an incarceration rate that was one-seventh that of U.S.-born Hispanic men. An extensive review of the scientific literature concluded "...the major finding of a century of



research on immigration and crime is that immigrants...nearly always exhibit lower crime rates than native groups.”¹

Neighborhoods with Higher Immigrant Populations Have Less Crime

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between immigration and urban violent crime in the United States. All of the studies found that the more immigrants live in an area, the lower the crime rate tends to be. Using a wide range of methods, data, and levels of aggregation, these studies have also found that the crime drop observed between 1990 and 2000 can be partially explained by increases in immigration. Research has not yet uncovered *why* higher immigrant concentrations are associated with less crime in neighborhoods; more research is needed to reach a definitive conclusion on the mechanisms involved in the well-documented association of immigration with lower crime rates.

Over Generations, Crime Rates Grow Close to Those of Native-Born

The individual-level association between immigrants and lower likelihood of committing crimes appears to wane across generations. Immigrants’ children who are born in the United States have higher rates of judicial offending than the immigrant generation does. Still, crime rates among the second generation are generally lower than or very similar to the crime rate of the native-born in general.

The risk of incarceration rises not only for the children of immigrants but also for immigrants themselves, the longer they reside in the United States. Research has found that assimilated immigrants—those who have been in the United States longer, those who are more fluent in English, those who are likely to be naturalized citizens, and those who are more highly acculturated to the United States—have higher rates of criminal involvement compared to unassimilated immigrants. The reasons for these changes in the crime rate over time and generations are still unknown.

This issue brief is one in a series prepared by the Committee on Population based on the report *The Integration of Immigrants Into American Society*. The study was sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Russell Sage Foundation, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services of the Department of Homeland Security, and the National Science Foundation, with additional support from the National Academy of Sciences Kellogg fund. Any findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the study committee and do not necessarily reflect those of the sponsors.

¹Martinez, R., Jr., and Lee, M.T. (2000). On immigration and crime. In National Institute of Justice, *Criminal Justice 2000 Volume 1. The Nature of Crime: Continuity and Change* (NCJ #182408, pp. 485-524). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.