

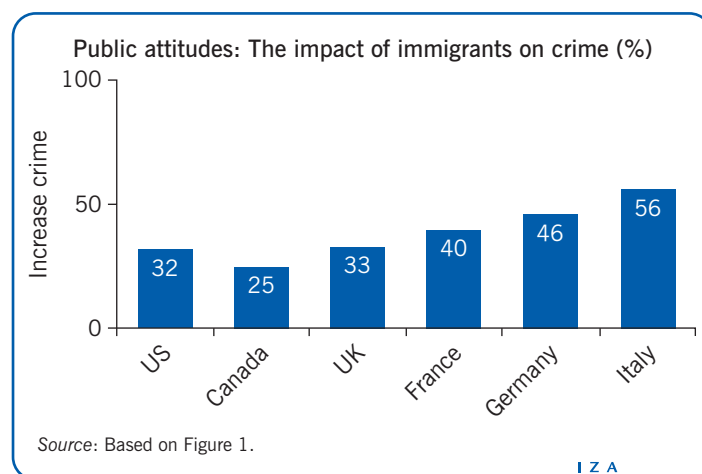
Crime and immigration

Do poor labor market opportunities lead to migrant crime?

Keywords: migration, immigration, crime, employment

ELEVATOR PITCH

Immigration is one of the most important policy debates in Western countries. However, one aspect of the debate is often mischaracterized by accusations that higher levels of immigration lead to higher levels of crime. The evidence, based on empirical studies of many countries, indicates that there is no simple link between immigration and crime, but legalizing the status of immigrants has beneficial effects on crime rates. Crucially, the evidence points to substantial differences in the impact on property crime, depending on the labor market opportunities of immigrant groups.



KEY FINDINGS

Pros

- + There is no evidence that immigration has caused a crime problem across countries.
- + Immigrants with good labor market opportunities appear no more likely to commit crime than similar natives.
- + Making sure that immigrants are able to legally find work appears to significantly reduce their criminal activity.

Cons

- Public concern over immigration includes a perception that immigrants increase the level of crime.
- Immigrants facing poor labor market opportunities are more likely to commit property crimes.

AUTHOR'S MAIN MESSAGE

There is no simple link between immigration and crime. Most studies find that larger immigrant concentrations in an area have no association with violent crime and, overall, fairly weak effects on property crime. However, immigrant groups that face poor labor market opportunities are more likely to commit property crime. But this is also true of disadvantaged native groups. The policy focus should therefore be on the crime-reducing benefits of improving the functioning of labor markets and workers' skills, rather than on crime and immigration per se. There is also a case for ensuring that immigrants can legally obtain work in the receiving country, since the evidence shows that such legalization programs tend to reduce criminal activity among the targeted group.