Immigrant Types and Their Relationship with Urban Crime Rates: A Cross-country Analysis Based on Socioeconomic and Cultural Background

Dawei Xu

The Prestige School, North York, Canada
dawei.xu@prestigeprivateschool.com

Abstract. In the context of globalization, population mobility is becoming increasingly frequent, which has aroused widespread concern about the impact of immigrants on urban society, especially its potential relationship with crime rates. This study aims to explore the relationship between immigrants and urban crime rates. The impact of immigrants on urban crime rates is highly dependent on the socioeconomic background of the immigrant group, the legal and political situation of their home country, and the city's own immigration management and social integration policies. The results of the study show that the relationship between immigrants and urban crime rates is not proportional. In other words, there is no significant statistical relationship between immigrants and urban crime rates, and in one case there is even a negative correlation. This conclusion stems from the strong desire of immigrants to integrate into society and the developed and stable economy of the city. To explore the relationship between immigration and crime rates, it is necessary to include variables of multiple dimensions.

Keywords: Immigration, Crime Rates, Social Integration, Socioeconomic Factors, Immigration Policy Introduction

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The issue between immigration and crime has become a hot topic of global concern. Due to the impact of globalization and humanitarian development, the cross-border flow of people has become a common phenomenon. Although accepting immigrants has made certain contributions to a country's economic globalization and humanitarianism, people always discuss issues related to public security and social stability.

1.2. Literature review

Most existing research focuses on a single region or even a specific country, lacking a global perspective and comparative findings across different regions. For example, the paper "I May Be an

Immigrant, but I Am Not a Criminal: Examining the Association Between the Presence of Immigrants and Crime Rates in Europe" examines the relationship between immigration and crime rates in 21 European countries [1]. The study shows a non-correlation between immigration and crime, indicating that immigration is unrelated to the three types of crime assessed in the paper. There are also studies that point out the relationship between the number of homicides and the concentration of immigrants in the United States, and they also find no correlation [2].

However, academic research on this relationship has not reached a consensus. Numerous studies have also pointed out that there is no simple causal relationship between immigrant population and crime rates, and in some cases, the influx of immigrants is associated with a decrease in crime rates. This makes it necessary to further explore the impact of different types of immigrants, such as refugees, talent imports, and illegal residents, on urban crime rates in different social contexts.

1.3. Research question and purpose

Based on literature research, this article examines the impact of immigration on crime rates in different countries and regions (Canada, Singapore, and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region). Canada, driven by humanitarian principles, is a major refugee-hosting country; Singapore is renowned for its high-caliber talent introduction; and Hong Kong SAR, due to its unique international political status and economic phenomenon, receives different types and volumes of immigrants than an independent nation. These three countries and regions were selected for this article because they differ in the types of immigrants they receive, their economic and cultural attractions for immigrants, and the policies of their central (or federal) governments.

2. Conceptual framework and methodology

2.1. Definition of the core concept of immigration types

The refugees referred to in this paper are those who are forced to give up their original nationality and seek asylum in other countries because of threats to their lives [3].

Generally speaking, the policies of developed immigration countries are more friendly to refugees from the Middle East, war-torn countries, and dictatorial and high-pressure countries, such as Afghanistan, North Korea, and Sudan. The formulation of these rules is more due to its humanitarian considerations rather than the actual needs of the country.

In a broad sense, talent introduction refers to people who have higher academic qualifications and abilities, or have stronger technical abilities, and who can create economic value for a country or region. They are workers with higher moral character or abilities in the overall human resources of society [4].

Its goal is to promote economic growth, enhance national competitiveness, and ensure the rapid integration of talents and stable social development by providing high-quality supporting services. Generally speaking, this policy will create more high-end jobs and provide more employment opportunities for local college students.

The crime rate is generally calculated as the number of crimes per 100,000 people and can be calculated using the following formula:

$$Crime\ rate = (total\ number\ of\ crimes\ during\ a\ specific\ period/total\ population) \times 100,000$$

This paper chooses official police data as its primary crime rate indicator because of its high standardization and sustainability, facilitating quantitative cross-national comparisons of cities. However, we are also aware of the potential limitations of this type of data, which may include "hidden crime", and this will be addressed in the evaluation section.

Using official data from different countries ensures direct comparisons of two distinct immigration models: refugee and talent recruitment. While data definitions and collection methods may vary slightly across countries, they remain the best available resource for exploring macro-trends and policy implications.

2.2. Research methodology

This paper will employ a mixed research method based on a literature review and analysis the primary sources of data are academic journals, government reports, data from international organizations, and official statistics from national police or judicial departments.

3. Case study I: refugee immigration and urban crime rates - the case of Canada

3.1. Background of Canada's refugee immigration policy

In 1988, Canada's Parliament passed the world's first "Multiculturalism Act" formally establishing Canada's multiethnic character [5]. To this day, the act still provides the legal framework for Canada's multiculturalism policy and is the primary choice for many refugees.

3.2. Analysis on the relationship in Canada

There is a strong correlation between socioeconomic disadvantage and criminal behavior. For refugees, failure to integrate smoothly into the labor market or access adequate educational opportunities can increase their risk of crime.

Refugees who are unable to obtain legal employment due to language barriers, insufficient qualification recognition, or discrimination may face severe economic hardship. In some cases, this extreme survival pressure may drive some individuals to commit property crime or other economically motivated crimes in order to survive. When migrants face poor labor market prospects or work restrictions, crime rates may increase.

When refugee communities are marginalized in education and employment, they may feel socially excluded and alienated. This feeling can weaken their identification with mainstream social norms, potentially increasing criminal behavior. Conversely, if refugees can obtain legal employment opportunities, especially if their status is legalized, their crime rates may drop significantly.

However, relevant studies have pointed out that there is no strong statistical relationship between the number of immigrants in Canada and the crime rate, and there is even a negative correlation [6].

The paper which named "The Relationship between Immigration and Crime in Canada: 1976-2011", examines whether changes in immigration within Canada are associated with changes in crime rates. The study covers Canada's census metropolitan areas (CMAs) and ten provinces from 1976 to 2011.

After rigorously controlling for multiple demographic and socioeconomic variables, the study found no universally positive correlation between immigrant population growth and changes in crime rates. Specifically, the empirical analysis showed that the relationship between changes in

immigrant population and changes in crime rates within Canadian Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs in short) and provinces was primarily statistically insignificant, or even negative.

4. Case study II: talent immigration and urban crime rates - the case of Singapore

4.1. Background of Singapore's talent introduction immigration policy

Singapore attracts talent based on its economic needs. As an island nation with limited natural and manufacturing resources, the country can only rely on the value created by its human resources if it wants to develop. "Talent first" is also one of Singapore's national strategies.

All the former Prime Ministers of Singapore, including Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Chok Tong, and Lee Hsien Loong, have emphasized that only by continuously introducing new talents can Singapore achieve sustainable development [7].

4.2. Analysis on the relationship in Singapore

Many highly skilled immigrants consider Singapore a long-term destination, aspiring to become permanent residents or even citizens. Consequently, they are more motivated to actively integrate into local society, abide by the law, and make positive contributions to the community, rather than creating conflict or engaging in illegal activities. These immigrants are often highly educated and possess a high level of professionalism and legal awareness, making them more likely to adhere to social norms and laws, thus reducing their likelihood of committing a crime. Highly skilled individuals typically enjoy stable, high incomes and experience less stress, making them less inclined to commit property crimes such as theft and fraud due to financial hardship.

The paper which named "Balancing Economic Growth and Social Cohesion: Singapore's Immigration Policy" examines the evolution of Singapore's immigration policies and its impact on economic development and social cohesion. Employing a process tracing approach, the study provides an in-depth analysis of key events, decisions, and policy changes, examining how these changes affected high-skilled and low-skilled immigrants and the contributions of these groups to different economic sectors [8].

While immigration supports economic growth by increasing the labor supply and fostering innovation, it also raises concerns among local residents about social cohesion, inequality, and national identity. While the Singapore government has responded by implementing stricter regulations and policies, these have had limited success. At the same time, the paper mentioned a specific case in which a Singaporean was fined and sentenced for making discriminatory remarks against the country. He believed that foreigners had caused "rising crime problems" in Singapore.

5. Case study III: limitations and specificity - the case of Hong Kong SAR

5.1. Background of population movements in Hong Kong

Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region of PRC and due to its unique and special history, it encompasses a diverse population of immigrants. According to 2021 Hong Kong government statistics, 38.3% of Hong Kong's population are immigrants (Those who come from Mainland China, Macao SAR and Taiwan Region, China are all included). Of this total immigrant population, 13% are international migrant workers or people born outside of the Hong Kong SAR (including Mainland China, the Macao SAR, and Taiwan Region, China) [9].

5.2. Analysis on the relationship in Hong Kong SAR

Mainland Chinese immigrants make up the majority of the total immigration population. Initially, new immigrants from mainland China may face challenges adapting to their new environment due to language barriers (Speak Cantonese often but not Standard Chinese), cultural differences (a blend of Chinese and Western/British lifestyles), and economic pressures (high housing prices and low pensions). Insufficient social support can lead some individuals to struggle, increasing their risk of petty crime. However, as they gradually integrate into society and secure stable employment, crime rates generally decline.

While the informal economy is not the majority of immigrants, some who work there may be more vulnerable to crime or in extreme cases to illegal activities due to job instability, lack of legal protection, or identity issues. This situation is often directly related to their socioeconomic status and circumstances.

Historically, British Hong Kong saw a large influx of mainland Chinese citizens between 1949 and the period of reform and opening up in mainland China. According to the Global Times in China, the exact number in detail is unknown, but it is estimated to be around one million, and this phenomenon lasted for 30 years. Therefore, the immigrant population in Hong Kong SAR between 2010 and 2024 is relatively a small number.

Related to the statistics from the Hong Kong Police Force and the Census and Statistics Office, the annual increase in Hong Kong's immigrant population has little to do with the overall crime rate. In 2001, the number of immigrants in Hong Kong reached 41,300, with a total of 73,008 crimes [10]. In 2024, the number of immigrants in Hong Kong was 18,200, and the number of crimes was approximately 45,315 [11]. From a statistical perspective, this is an inversely proportional relationship.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Main findings

A comprehensive analysis of the three case studies above reveals that, within the context of refugee and talent immigration, there is no significant correlation between immigration and crime rates. In the case of Hong Kong SAR, there is even a statistically inverse relationship. In Canada, while the acceptance of refugees may lead to a range of cultural or legal issues, no research indicates that an increase in the number of refugees in Canada significantly increases urban crime rates. In the case of Singapore, the influx of talent has fostered a stronger sense of belonging and a lesser desire to commit crimes. Of course, conflicts with local residents may lead to some petty crime. In the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, no detailed research indicates that immigration has contributed to rising crime rates there; it only suggests that it may trigger minor criminal incidents at the cultural and economic levels.

6.2. The contribution to the policy and related research

Based on the research findings, this article can provide policy recommendations for the formulation of immigration policies in relevant cities and countries. Furthermore, through objective literature research, it can inform government agencies or citizens of specific countries that the increase in immigration, whether refugees or talent introduction, has more benefits than disadvantages, as there is no evidence or current research indicating a positive relationship between immigration and crime

rates. Furthermore, the increase in talent immigration can promote the local economy and reduce unemployment, and accepting refugees can also win more international reputation.

6.3. Limitations of the research

While this study explored the relationship between immigration and urban crime rates by comparing Canada, Singapore, and Hong Kong, it still has several limitations.

First, this study was limited by data availability. While drawing on publicly available government statistics and professional academic literature, it lacked micro-level data that could directly link crime rates among different immigrant groups to their specific socioeconomic circumstances. For example, it was impossible to precisely distinguish between the differences in criminal behavior between talent and labor immigrants, particularly regarding minor crimes that are often overlooked by officials.

Second, this study primarily relied on qualitative analysis of secondary data, rather than empirical research or comprehensive data analysis. Therefore, it is impossible to establish a definitive causal relationship between immigration and crime rates. We can only analyze trends and correlations at a macro-conceptual and theoretical level. This makes it difficult to rule out other potential influencing factors.

Finally, this study focuses solely on Canada, Singapore, and Hong Kong. While these three countries offer unique representation, the findings here cannot be fully applied to other cities with different immigration policies and social structures. For example, the challenges faced by other large immigrant countries may differ significantly from those faced by city-states with extremely high population densities and limited land areas. Future research could expand the sample size to include a wider range of cities for comparative analysis.

6.4. Future research improvements and enhancements

This study, through case studies of Canada, Singapore, and Hong Kong, provides preliminary insights into the complex relationship between immigration and urban crime rates. However, this topic remains a subject for further exploration and future research could be further refined.

In-depth analysis of policy impacts, while this study provides a preliminary exploration of the role of immigration policy, future research could examine the impact of specific policy instruments, such as work visa types, social integration programs, language training, and legal aid. This would help identify policies that effectively reduce the crime risk of specific immigrant groups and facilitate the optimization of broader immigration programs and policies.

Combining qualitative and quantitative research methods can be enacted as well. Future research could integrate quantitative data, such as crime statistics and census data, with qualitative research (for instance, in-depth interviews with immigrant groups). Qualitative research can reveal the challenges immigrants face when adapting to new environments, such as discrimination, social exclusion, and economic hardship. These personal experiences cannot be captured by quantitative data, but are crucial for understanding the motivations behind crime.

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