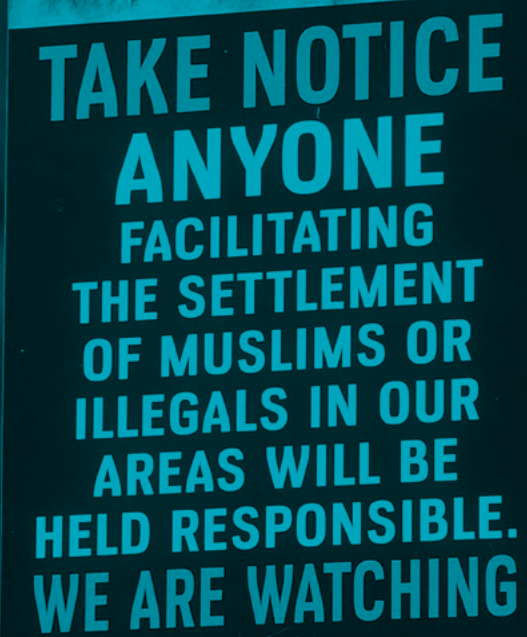


DISCUSSION PAPER



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A Constructed Fear Shaped by Stereotypes and Prejudices: The Migration-Crime Nexus

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**research
centre**

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“Prejudice is a burden that confuses the past, threatens the future, and renders the present inaccessible.”

Maya Angelou

Introduction

The perceived link between immigration and crime has persisted as a powerful narrative in both public discourse and political agendas, often overshadowing objective assessments of the complex social and economic contributions of immigrant populations. A common assumption suggests that immigrants are disproportionately inclined toward criminal behaviour, leading to a widespread belief that they commit crimes at higher rates than native-born citizens. This perception persists despite extensive research indicating that crimes committed by immigrants are neither more frequent nor more severe than those committed by natives. Nonetheless, incidents involving immigrant offenders tend to receive amplified media coverage, sparking stronger public reactions and reinforcing inimical stereotypes.

The intersection of immigration and crime is not merely coincidental. However, it has been strategically employed as a political tool, particularly by populist and far-right factions aiming to garner support through fear-based narratives. These groups frequently suggest a direct, causal, and inherent relationship between rising immigration levels and increased crime rates, citing this as justification for restrictive immigration policies and xenophobic sentiments. Such narratives tap into broader public anxieties about the social and economic “costs” of immigration, melding concerns over crime with apprehensions regarding resource scarcity, employment, and cultural integration. By framing immigration as a threat to public safety, these actors foster a climate of distrust and stigmatisation toward immigrant communities, ultimately diverting the discussion away from evidence-based policy solutions.

This politicisation of immigration and crime has far-reaching implications. In an era marked by the growing influence of far-right ideologies, the deliberate association of immigrants with criminality has the potential to erode social cohesion and fuel xenophobic sentiments within host societies. As this rhetoric becomes embedded in mainstream discourse, it not only undermines the integrity of both criminal justice and immigration systems but also risks normalising intolerance. Therefore, this transformation threatens to entrench divisive narratives that prioritise political gains over factual clarity, creating significant obstacles to developing fair and effective immigration and social policies. In such a polarised climate, the reduction of immigration to a matter of criminal risk stands as a grave challenge, reflecting and reinforcing broader currents of exclusionary nationalism that jeopardise democratic values and social stability.

Thus, it is crucial to prevent the exploitation of the immigration-crime nexus as a tool for the toxic political agendas of far-right movements. Equally important is moving beyond clichés to conduct robust counterarguments and engage in comprehensive societal and legal evaluations of the issue. In this context, this study aims not only to examine the relationship between immigration and crime but also to challenge the narrative that immigrants are inherently more prone to criminal behaviour. Instead, it aims to highlight that crimes committed by immigrants stem from the same underlying factors that apply to all individuals, irrespective of nationality or origin. Moreover, the study underscores how this issue has been detached from its legal framework and transformed into a political argument to serve populist agendas.

Crime as a Social Phenomenon

First, it is necessary to establish that the relationship between migration and crime emerges as a complex social phenomenon shaped by the interaction of two distinct societal processes, each influencing and moulding the other. In examining this relationship, the role of social norms and sociological perspectives becomes crucial. Indeed, the evolution of "crime" and "criminal behaviour" as fields of scientific inquiry has been grounded in sociology and criminology's approach to viewing crime not as an individualistic trait but as a socially constructed phenomenon. Thus, any analysis of the link between migration and crime must underscore that migration, like crime, is embedded within a broader social framework; the crimes involving immigrants are best understood within a social context that transcends individual acts. (Alpman & Yarci, 2018)

In this light, theoretical approaches to crime emphasise that criminality is not merely a matter of personal behaviour but is shaped by broader societal structures, norms, values, and socioeconomic conditions. These perspectives encourage a view of crime through the

lens of social factors such as income inequality, poverty, educational levels, social exclusion, stigma, gender, and urbanisation. When considering crime within the context of migration, additional elements such as race, ethnicity, cultural conflicts, immigrant status, and societal attitudes toward foreigners also become relevant. (Alpman & Yarci, 2018) In other words, while a range of social factors inherently influences crime itself, the migration-crime nexus introduces unique dynamics related to migration, which play critical roles in shaping this phenomenon.

In this regard, it is crucial to recognise that establishing an inherent, direct link between migration and crime overlooks the fundamentally social nature of crime itself, resulting in a flawed perspective. Crime is a concept shaped not by nationality but by the complex interactions between individuals and the society they inhabit. However, given the sensitive and often sensational nature of the topic, it is frequently stripped of its broader context and weaponised by xenophobic factions as a means of expressing racially or ethnically discriminatory agendas. Far-right movements, in particular, exploit the migration-crime narrative to



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advance their political objectives, deliberately distorting this issue to incite fear and justify exclusionary policies. By framing crime as an inherent characteristic of immigrant communities, these actors effectively sidestep the social and economic factors that contribute to crime. Instead, they emphasise an oversimplified narrative that aligns with broader anti-immigrant and nationalist rhetoric, fostering a climate where immigrants are scapegoated as a perceived threat to public safety and societal stability.

This approach manipulates the migration-crime discourse, removing it from its empirical and sociological foundations. Through selective and exaggerated portrayals

of immigrant-related crimes, these factions amplify public anxieties, reinforcing stereotypes and fuelling resentment toward immigrant communities. Such rhetoric does not merely misrepresent the issue; it also diverts attention from constructive solutions by embedding it within a polarised political agenda rather than addressing it through objective policy and social and legal reform. Ultimately, this manipulation deepens social divides, obscures the root causes of crime, and shifts the discourse away from a nuanced, contextually grounded understanding of both migration and crime as complex social phenomena.

Dispelling Stereotypes: A Statistical Perspective

Contrary to the perception that immigrants are predisposed to criminal behaviour, the reality is markedly different: immigrants exhibit a lower propensity for committing crimes compared to the native-born population.

Numerous studies and statistical data highlight that migrants tend to have lower crime rates compared to native-born populations, challenging common misconceptions fuelled by populist narratives.

For instance, the American Immigration Council has documented that undocumented immigrants in the United States exhibit significantly lower crime rates than U.S. citizens. Supporting this claim, a study by Ruben G. Rumbaut and Walter Ewing reveals that foreign-born males have lower arrest rates than their native-born counterparts. Furthermore, foreign-born individuals are incarcerated at less than half the rate of native-born Americans.

Data from the FBI, covering the period between 1990 and 2013, further corroborates these findings. During this time, the immigrant population in the U.S. tripled, yet violent crime rates decreased by 48%, while property crimes fell by 41%. Similarly, the American Community Survey (ACS) highlights that among males aged 18-39, the incarceration rate for immigrants stands at just 1.6%, compared to 3.3% for native-born males. (Tekin, 2021)

The trend is not confined to the U.S.; evidence from the United Kingdom and Europe points in the same direction. A study conducted in the U.K. between 2002 and 2009 demonstrated that immigrants did not increase property crime rates. (Bell & Fasoni & Machin, 2013) On the contrary,

migrant communities, including those from conflict zones such as Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan, showed a neutral or even positive impact on crime statistics. Additionally, Eurostat data indicates that most European migrants exhibit lower crime rates than the native-born population, particularly in countries with well-structured integration policies.

Recent studies add further weight to this argument. According to a 2020 analysis by the Pew Research Center, undocumented immigrants in the U.S. are less likely to commit serious crimes, such as homicides, than native-born individuals. In Germany, a 2022 report by the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) found that the majority of offences involving migrants were minor, and native-born citizens disproportionately committed severe crimes.

These statistics are far from coincidental. In this context, immigrants' tendency to refrain from engaging in criminal activities can be grounded in several fundamental factors, such as immigrant selection, official monitoring, family structure, and the fear of deportation. Collectively, these elements contribute to a profile wherein immigrants may inherently exhibit a lower inclination toward criminal behaviour.

Immigrant Selection Effect: Immigrants' lower propensity for criminal behaviour can partly be attributed to the selective nature of migration. Many immigrants move to host countries seeking better living conditions, safety, and economic opportunities. This self-selection process often favours resilient, hardworking

individuals with a solid motivation to adapt. Particularly in the case of economic migrants, those who choose to migrate are typically disciplined and determined to establish a stable life, making them less likely to engage in criminal activities that could jeopardise their goals. (Bui, 2009) Furthermore, host countries often adopt a selective approach to immigration, prioritising individuals who demonstrate these qualities before granting entry. These factors contribute to a demographic profile that is less inclined toward criminal behaviour. (Butcher & Piehl, 2015)

Official Monitoring: As another factor, immigrants are subject to stricter oversight and routine monitoring than native-born citizens. They undergo regular checks by immigration authorities and security forces, reinforcing a heightened sensitivity toward legal compliance. This continuous scrutiny motivates immigrants to adhere to laws and regulations, knowing that any legal infraction might draw immediate attention and threaten their residency status.

Family Structure: Many immigrants settle in host countries with their families, where familial bonds significantly reduce the risk of criminal behaviour. (Kubrin, 2013) Family structures provide essential social support that can deter individuals from engaging in crime. Furthermore, immigrant families often strive to maintain a positive impression within their new communities by leading or-

derly and productive lives. Studies have also shown that immigrant communities tend to have lower divorce rates, which can further contribute to social stability and reduce the likelihood of crime.

Fear of Deportation: Finally, for many immigrants, the risk of deportation is a powerful deterrent against criminal behaviour. Immigrants are acutely aware that any legal transgression could lead to removal from the country, disrupting their lives and possibly endangering their families' futures. This fear is particularly pronounced among undocumented immigrants, for whom the consequences of criminal activity are even more severe. The constant threat of deportation thus acts as a substantial disincentive to crime. (Butcher & Piehl, 1998)

Consequently, these factors collectively suggest that immigrants may be less likely to engage in criminal activities rather than being predisposed to criminal behaviour. (Kubrin, 2013) Far from the "criminal immigrant" stereotype, these individuals are frequently driven by strong incentives to comply with laws and integrate peacefully within their host societies. The structural conditions surrounding immigration thus not only encourage law-abiding behaviour but also illustrate how misconstrued narratives about crime and migration fail to account for the complexities and social realities of immigrant communities.

Challenging the Stereotype: Other Key Counterpoints

egory of "crime." While all crimes are unlawful acts, not all unlawful acts are considered crimes under the legal framework. A country's legal policies determine the distinction between what constitutes a crime and what is simply an unlawful act. In this context, many actions that are not classified as crimes in a narrow, technical sense, such as "the use of foreign language signage," "operating without a license," or "begging," are sometimes considered criminal offences when performed by immigrants. (Polat & Çiçek, 2023) This misclassification leads to the erroneous conclusion that immigrants are responsible for higher crime rates. While often subject to legal penalties, such actions are not inherently criminal and do not reflect the more severe offences typically associated with crime statistics.

Therefore, by including these acts in crime data, studies and statistics inaccurately inflate the crime rates among

immigrant populations, perpetuating the stereotype that immigrants are more prone to criminal behaviour. This failure to distinguish between actual crimes and administrative violations unfairly skews the public perception of immigrants and their involvement in crime. Consequently, it is essential to evaluate the types of offences included in crime statistics critically and recognise that not all unlawful acts committed by immigrants should be counted as crimes.

The following important factor contributing to the higher crime rates associated with immigrants, in comparison to natives, is the differential treatment they often receive from law enforcement, particularly in terms of arrest rates. Research indicates that immigrants are more likely to be arrested for the same or similar offences when compared to their native counterparts. This disparity in arrest rates can

be attributed to several factors, including bias in policing, increased surveillance of immigrant communities, and the legal and social status of immigrants. (Kizmaz, 2018)

Immigrants, particularly those who are undocumented or in precarious legal situations, are often more visible to law enforcement agencies due to their status and may be subject to heightened scrutiny. This increased attention can result in a higher likelihood of arrest for relatively minor infractions or offences that may not result in arrest if committed by natives. Furthermore, cultural, racial, or ethnic biases may play a role in the over-policing of immigrant communities, where law enforcement may be more prone to apprehending individuals from these groups.

Finally, the fear of deportation among immigrants can lead to an increased willingness to cooperate with authorities in ways that natives might not, which can sometimes lead to arrests that would not otherwise occur. The legal status of immigrants often makes them more vulnerable to the criminal justice system, as they are more likely to face harsher penalties for offences, regardless of their severity. Thus, the apparent higher crime rates among immigrants may be partially a result of the systemic biases and differential treatment they face within the criminal justice system rather than an indication of a higher propensity for criminal behaviour. Hence, disparities faced by foreigners within the justice system can be considered one of the reasons behind the heightened association of immigrants with crime when analysing the relationship between migration and criminality.

Bias in the Justice System

Additionally, the tendency to associate immigrants with crime is further rooted in public bias, which focuses not only on the victimisation aspect of crime but also on the costs associated with its commission and punishment. (Butcher & Piehl, 1998) In this sense, the connection between migration and crime is often framed in terms of the following factors:

Causing Congestion in the Legal Sector:

One argument posits that immigrants may contribute to rising crime rates by displacing natives from legal job opportunities, effectively "crowding them out" of the lawful labour market and pushing them toward illegal sectors. Suppose immigrants take low-wage jobs or become reliant on social welfare systems. In that case, low-skilled natives may face increased economic pressures, heightening the likelihood of their involvement in criminal activities for survival. (Waldinger, 1996) This line of reasoning assumes that the presence of immigrants reduces opportunities for natives, thereby driving up crime rates within the native population. According to this assumption, areas with high concentrations of immigrants are naturally expected to experience elevated crime rates due to these socioeconomic pressures.

Disproportionate Apprehension and Conviction:

Immigrants may also be more likely to be apprehended or convicted for crimes than natives. This could occur because immigrants are often unfamiliar with the legal system of their host country or be-

cause they find themselves in the criminal justice system due to immigration violations. Thus, the legal vulnerabilities of immigrants—such as their lack of knowledge about local laws or their status as undocumented individuals—make them more susceptible to arrest and conviction, creating a false impression that immigrants are more involved in criminal activities than natives.

Longer Sentences and Less Likely Parole:

Finally, immigrants may serve longer prison terms than natives. This can occur for several reasons, such as receiving longer sentences or being less likely to be granted parole. This disparity in sentencing may be attributed to a range of factors, including biases in the legal system, the lack of adequate legal representation for immigrants, or their heightened vulnerability due to their legal status. (Wortley, 2009) As a result, immigrants may face harsher penalties compared to their native counterparts, reinforcing the perception that they contribute to higher crime rates. (McShane, 1987)

These factors combined contribute to the notion that immigrants are inherently more criminally inclined without taking into account the broader socioeconomic and systemic issues that shape their interaction with the criminal justice system. Therefore, addressing this misconception requires a nuanced understanding of how legal, economic, and social structures intersect with immigrants' experiences.

The Role of Society and Policy in Migrant Criminalisation

Although a certain degree of positive correlation can be observed between the presence of immigrants and crime rates, attributing high crime rates in areas with large immigrant populations solely to their presence oversimplifies the issue. This correlation arises from a complex interplay of factors, many extending beyond the immigrants themselves and implicating broader societal and institutional actors. Understanding these dynamics requires a nuanced examination of how structural inequalities, flawed policies, and societal biases contribute to the perception and reality of crime in migrant communities.

Economic Drivers of Crime

Economic disparities and related factors are significant elements influencing immigrant involvement in crime, particularly property crimes. (Merton, 1938, 1968; Agnew, 1992; Reid, 2005) The inability to secure stable employment, along with limited access to housing and social services, creates conditions of economic precarity for immigrants, which in turn increases their vulnerability to criminal behaviour. (Thomas, 2011; Wortley, 2004) Indeed, research has shown that when impoverished immigrant groups are relocated to relatively affluent neighbourhoods, their rates of arrest and criminal involvement decrease significantly. (Shaw & McKay, 1942) This finding underscores that not "foreignness" triggers criminal behaviour.

Moreover, it strengthens the argument that economic factors are universal drivers of crime, affecting individuals regardless of their origin. In other words, the adverse economic conditions that often push immigrants toward crime are equally relevant to host populations facing similar economic hardships, leading them to also engage in criminal activities.

Thus, while economic challenges contribute to the criminalisation of immigrants, presenting this issue as if it were unique to them reinforces harmful stereotypes and fuels anti-immigrant propaganda. This narrative conveniently ignores the broader structural failures—particularly those of governments and policymakers—that create and sustain these economic difficulties. Indeed, in many cases, political leaders have capitalised on the economic frustrations of host communities by redirecting their anger toward immigrants rather than addressing the systemic flaws in economic policies. For example, Europe's recent decline in economic prosperity has often been accompa-

nied by rhetoric blaming immigrants for job losses, wage suppression, and strained social services. Such rhetoric deflects public dissatisfaction from policymakers and deepens social divisions, enabling governments to avoid accountability for their economic mismanagement. By subtly endorsing these biases, governments can deflect criticism of their policies, unjustly scapegoating immigrants for broader societal problems.

Broken Policies, Broken Lives: Integration Challenges Sparke Crime

One of the pedestal factors contributing to migrant involvement in crime is the failure of integration policies implemented by states, which are often unable to adequately address the unique challenges migrants face. While there is no inherent connection between migration and criminality, it is evident that crime rates tend to rise when migrants are placed in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and face social and economic exclusion. The failure to integrate migrants into society, whether through a lack of support systems, insufficient access to resources, or systemic discrimination, creates an environment where crime becomes a more likely outcome.

Indeed, recent immigrants initially tend to have much lower criminal involvement than the general population, as they do not arrive with a predisposition to crime. (Piopiunik & Ruhose, 2017) Many studies suggest that if immigrants had the right tools to successfully integrate into society, including access to education, stable employment, and social support, their involvement in criminal activities would be significantly lower. (Çıplak, 2012) In other words, migrants who face social isolation, joblessness, homelessness, and insecurity are more vulnerable to criminal behaviour. (Balçioğlu, 2001) This confirms that criminality is not inherently tied to their migrant status but is instead a consequence of their exclusion from mainstream society.

Consequently, the hostile environments within migrant communities, often characterised by social disorganisation and a lack of social support, are significant contributors to increased crime rates. Research indicates that individuals who receive social support are less likely to engage in criminal activities. In contrast, those who lack support are more prone to seeking illegal means to achieve their



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goals. For example, Cullen (1994) noted that individuals receiving social support are less likely to commit crimes.

As Lowenkamp, Cullen, and Pratt (2003) highlight, a lack of local friendship networks, peer supervision, and community organisation involvement also emerges after migration and contributes to higher crime rates.

Moreover, factors such as acculturation challenges, language barriers, and limited access to social services, healthcare, or education further exacerbate the marginalisation of migrants. These structural challenges place migrants in a state of hopelessness and strain, which can push them into criminal activities. Migrants facing these difficulties are often caught in a cycle of anomie, where systemic barriers thwart their aspirations, leading some to turn to crime as a means of survival.

At this point, the role of policymakers in addressing these issues is crucial. Without adequate integration programs, the cycle of poverty, alienation, and criminal behaviour will persist. Governments must recognise that the conditions in which migrants live—shaped by insufficient support, discriminatory practices, and a lack of access to essential services—are significant determinants of their social outcomes, including criminal involvement. To reduce crime

rates among migrants, states must focus on fostering inclusion, improving social services, and ensuring equal opportunities for all members of society, regardless of their origin.

In conclusion, while it is true that some migrants become involved in criminal activities, attributing this solely to their migrant status oversimplifies the issue and ignores the broader structural and systemic factors at play. Host states and societies shape the environments contributing to such outcomes. Economic inequality, failed integration policies, social exclusion, and the lack of support systems are all factors that exacerbate vulnerabilities and push migrants toward criminal behaviour. Migrants are not inherently predisposed to crime; rather, it is the combination of adverse circumstances, policy failures, and societal neglect that often leads to such outcomes. Dismissing these complexities by framing migrants as naturally inclined to crime not only perpetuates harmful stereotypes but also absolves policymakers and host communities of their role in addressing these challenges. A more nuanced approach, which addresses the root causes of crime and fosters inclusive societies, is essential for justice and social cohesion.

Distorted Findings, Divisive Agendas: How Migration-Crime Studies Fuel Xenophobia and Political Narratives

Academic studies and data analysing the relationship between migration and crime emerge as another significant factor underlying the disproportionate attribution of criminal responsibility to migrants and the rise of prejudices within society. (Stowell & Martinez, 2007)

These studies often portray immigrants as inherently predisposed to criminal behaviour and as contributors to rising crime rates, thereby suggesting a causal link. However, upon closer scrutiny, it becomes evident that many of these studies, despite being labelled as "scientific," lack credibility and reliability. This credibility erosion stems from the methodological flaws of the studies and the arguments shaped by political motivations, extending beyond their academic objectives.

A critical issue affecting the accuracy of these studies is the challenge of adequate sampling in settlements where the migrant population is often too small to be accurately represented. This limitation complicates attempts to generalise findings, leading to studies that may rely on questionable assumptions. Another significant source of measurement error arises from shifting definitions of metropolitan and central city boundaries. Migrants residing in rural areas adjacent to metropolitan regions are sometimes categorised within urban crime data, which can skew findings and inflate the perceived impact of migrants on metropolitan crime rates. Additionally, many urban areas experience a relatively stable rate of migrant inflow. When this constant rate is not accounted for as a fixed effect in research designs, it impedes the ability to draw reliable conclusions. (Butcher & Piehl, 1998)

Furthermore, technical issues in studies examining drug-related crimes—a category often associated with immigrants—highlight the difficulty of acquiring consistent data. (Mears, 2002) Ethical obligations, such as medical confidentiality and doctors' duty to respect patient privacy, limit the availability of accurate data on drug use. This lack of reliable information hampers efforts to counteract stereotypes linking migrants to drug-related offences and further complicates a precise understanding of migration and crime. These methodological limitations cast doubt

on the scientific rigour and reliability of studies asserting a causal relationship between migration and crime rates.

On the other hand, in addition to these technical limitations, some studies linking migration to crime appear to be influenced by underlying political motivations, serving as subtle tools to advance xenophobic narratives. Such research, rather than upholding objective scientific inquiry, may be designed to align with far-right ideologies, framing migrants as threats to social order and safety. By selectively presenting data or amplifying unrepresentative cases, these studies contribute to the manipulation of public perceptions regarding migrant populations. These works acquire an undue aura of credibility when cloaked in academic language, which may mask their intent to stoke fear and mistrust toward migrants. This not only perpetuates stereotypes but also aids far-right politicians in their efforts to legitimise restrictive immigration policies and fuel societal division. In effect, these studies function as agents of influence, embedding bias under the guise of rigorous analysis and strengthening the agendas of those who seek to capitalise on xenophobic sentiments for political gain. The broader impact is a dangerous erosion of trust in objective academic research, as well as an environment where xenophobia and exclusionary policies gain mainstream acceptance to the detriment of social cohesion and evidence-based discourse.

Fear as a Political Weapon: The Far-Right's Manipulation of Migration-Crime Nexus

The migration-crime nexus has been clouded by biases, misinformation, and misrepresentations, often driven by politicised narratives rather than factual assessments. These distortions have far-reaching political consequences, providing fertile ground for the far-right to exploit public anxieties and fears. By framing migration as a direct cause of criminality, far-right actors have strategically manipulated this narrative to bolster their populist rhetoric, using it as a tool to advance exclusionary policies and solidify their political agendas. This weaponisation of the nexus underscores the intersection of fear, politics, and prejudice in shaping public discourse on migration.

Manufactured Fear and Political Benefits

By framing migrants as a threat to public safety, far-right actors tap into societal insecurities and prejudices, creating a scapegoat for broader societal issues. This artificial narrative not only distracts from structural and systemic challenges but also fuels xenophobic sentiments, enabling the far-right to strengthen its voter base. For example,

during his bid for the 1996 Republican presidential nomination, Pat Buchanan ran advertisements suggesting that illegal immigrants were responsible for rising crime rates and economic burdens on Americans. He declared, "Most come without job skills. Crime explodes. And, who pays the cost of their health care and welfare? You do." Such rhetoric underscores how anti-migrant sentiment is cleverly intertwined with broader economic and cultural fears to garner public support. (Butcher & Piehl, 1998)

Linking "Illegal" Status to Criminality

The far-right rhetoric frequently exploits the vulnerable legal status of undocumented immigrants, often equating "illegal migration" with criminality. This conflation effectively shifts the narrative from nuanced discussions of migration policies to simplistic, fear-based arguments. For example, California's Proposition 187 linked illegal immigration not only to welfare costs but also to rising crime rates, labelling undocumented migrants as inherently criminal. (Butcher & Piehl, 1998) This approach overlooks the complexities of



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migration and disregards international legal frameworks designed to protect refugees fleeing persecution. Furthermore, by equating procedural irregularities in migration with inherent criminality, it perpetuates a stigmatising narrative. The term "illegal immigrant," which remains controversial within international law, is often used by xenophobic rhetoric to equate migrants with criminality, suggesting that their status—derived from not following specific national entry procedures—naturally links them to crime and guilt. This portrayal seeks to establish a false connection between migration and criminal behaviour, reinforcing harmful stereotypes.

An important point to highlight at this juncture is that the accusatory and unjust approach towards undocumented migrants serves as a starting point, from which the rhetoric and policies can gradually extend to legal migrants and, eventually, to all foreigners within host states. In other words, the targeting of undocumented immigrants, who are often more vulnerable due to their precarious legal status, acts as a gateway for broader xenophobic rhetoric. Suppose counterarguments and protective measures are not developed. In that case, these discriminatory attitudes will inevitably expand, endangering not only the rights of legal migrants but also undermining societal cohesion and human rights in general. This progression demonstrates the inherent risk of using marginalised groups as scapegoats, as it creates a dangerous precedent that can spread to other segments of the population, further eroding the foundations of social and legal equality.

Reducing the Migrant-Crime Nexus through Welfare and Inclusion

While there is no evidence to support any correlation between immigration and crime, evidence suggests that effective integration policies and welfare initiatives can help distance migrants from any illegal activities. Research consistently shows that in regions with inclusive policies and strong social support systems, migrants tend to have lower crime rates compared to native populations.

For example, in Texas, language courses, vocational training, and community support networks have been found to reduce crime rates among migrants by fostering socio-economic inclusion. Similarly, in Germany, language and vocational programs not only integrate migrants into the economic and social fabric but also decrease their involvement in crime, especially through community-driven projects targeting young migrants.

Racist and Discriminatory Underpinnings

From another perspective, one could argue that the far-right frequently exploits the migration-crime nexus as a strategic tool to further broader racist and exclusionary agendas. While ostensibly critiquing the involvement of migrants in criminal activity, these movements simultaneously advance other xenophobic concerns, such as fears related to language, cultural integration, and economic burdens. This dual-purpose rhetoric is carefully crafted to criticise migrant "criminality" while subtly perpetuating discriminatory sentiments against migrants more generally. By framing migration as inherently linked to crime, the far-right not only seeks to undermine the social legitimacy of migrants but also uses the issue as a vehicle to propagate broader narratives of cultural and racial threats. In this way, the debate over migration and crime becomes a convenient vehicle for reinforcing xenophobic views, disguising them under the guise of legitimate concern for societal safety and cohesion.

Ultimately, this manipulation of the migration-crime discourse serves as a vehicle for advancing an exclusionary political agenda, where the alleged criminality of migrants is merely a façade for promoting a broader anti-immigrant sentiment.

Countries like Sweden and Canada further demonstrate the positive impact of integration, where job placement programs and inclusive welfare services contribute to lower crime rates. In the Netherlands, neighbourhood-level initiatives to promote cohesion and prevent segregation have effectively reduced tensions and bolstered community safety.

These examples show that comprehensive integration policies play a crucial role in reducing any potential criminal behaviour, emphasising that the welfare and inclusion of migrants benefit both the individuals and the wider community.

Conclusion

To sum up, while the involvement of migrants in criminal activities is an undeniable reality, this phenomenon stems not from their foreignness or nationality but from their shared human condition with locals. Migrants, like native populations, are capable of criminal behaviour, yet they are often disproportionately stigmatised as inherently more criminal. This perception is rooted in societal stereotypes rather than empirical evidence. Academic studies and statistical data consistently demonstrate that migrants do not exhibit higher levels of criminality, either qualitatively or quantitatively, compared to native populations.

It is also essential to recognise that the structural and social factors pushing migrants toward criminal behaviour—such as economic marginalisation, social exclusion, and lack of access to resources—play a significant role in their involvement in crime. Addressing these root causes would not only reduce crime rates among migrant populations but also foster greater social cohesion. Nevertheless, these complexities are often overshadowed by unreliable and manipulative studies and data that bolster political narra-

tives targeting migrants. Such narratives reinforce societal biases and stereotypes, fuelling unfounded fears. Furthermore, policymakers frequently exploit these stereotypes, deflecting accountability for broader structural or policy shortcomings onto migrants, thereby perpetuating misconceptions.

Tackling this issue requires a dual approach: exposing the unscientific and prejudiced foundations of the migrant-crime narrative while simultaneously addressing the underlying social and economic conditions that contribute to migrant involvement in crime. It is imperative to dismantle the injustices and hostility directed at migrants by challenging stereotypes through robust academic research and public discourse. In an era marked by rising xenophobia and the growing influence of far-right ideologies, this effort is particularly critical. If such biases and structural problems remain unaddressed, societal harmony, peace, and the democratic values underpinned by human rights will face significant threats. Upholding these pillars is essential for ensuring a just and inclusive social order.



(Kıbrıs Vakıflar İdaresi - Anadolu Agency)

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