

Immigration Status and Criminal Violence: How Much More Dangerous are Natives than Immigrants?

Abstract

The theory of immigration links migratory movements with seeking better standards of living, but could immigration be linked with people seeking the occasion to get involved in illegal activities? If so, are these criminals more violent than local criminals? In this paper we show that immigrants in Chile are, overall, significantly less prone to criminal activities than natives and that they also are significantly less violent. Only in the drug-related category do immigrants show higher probabilities of criminal behavior. These conclusions are contrary to some stereotypes held by local residents in many countries that observe criminal activities in immigrants and jump to inadequate conclusions

We test this in Chile, a country that after undergoing rapid growth over the past 20 years, has been subject to a large wave of immigration from neighboring countries. Immigrants already compromises over 3% of the workforce and are flowing in at increasing rates. We estimate a Multinomial Logit model on a data set of more than 33.000 inmates that covers the entire Chilean criminal population for 2008. To search into the relationship between immigrants, criminal behavior and the category of crime committed, we merge this data into an expanded sample that covers the whole Chilean population. In order to isolate this relationship, we control for several individual variables: education, age, income, city size and gender. We divide criminal activity in four: property crimes, violent crimes, drug related crimes and non-violent crimes. Our results show that the probability of committing a crime is significantly lower for immigrants versus nationals, that immigrants are less prone to all categories of crime except drug-related offenses and that there is a negative association between crime and education, age, current income and maternal income and a positive relation between crime and city size. These relations hold for immigrants and natives, but given that immigrants have already selected themselves positively crime-wise, the effect of these variables is smaller on immigrants.

Jorge R. Friedman (please mail to: Jorge.Friedman@usach.cl)
Profesor
Universidad de Santiago de Chile
Director Graduate Program in Financial Economics

Carlos F. Yevenes
Ma. Financial Economics
Researcher, Graduate Program in Financial Economics
Universidad de Santiago de Chile