

NOTHING FAKE HERE: DEBUNKING THE IMMIGRATION/CRIME MYTH

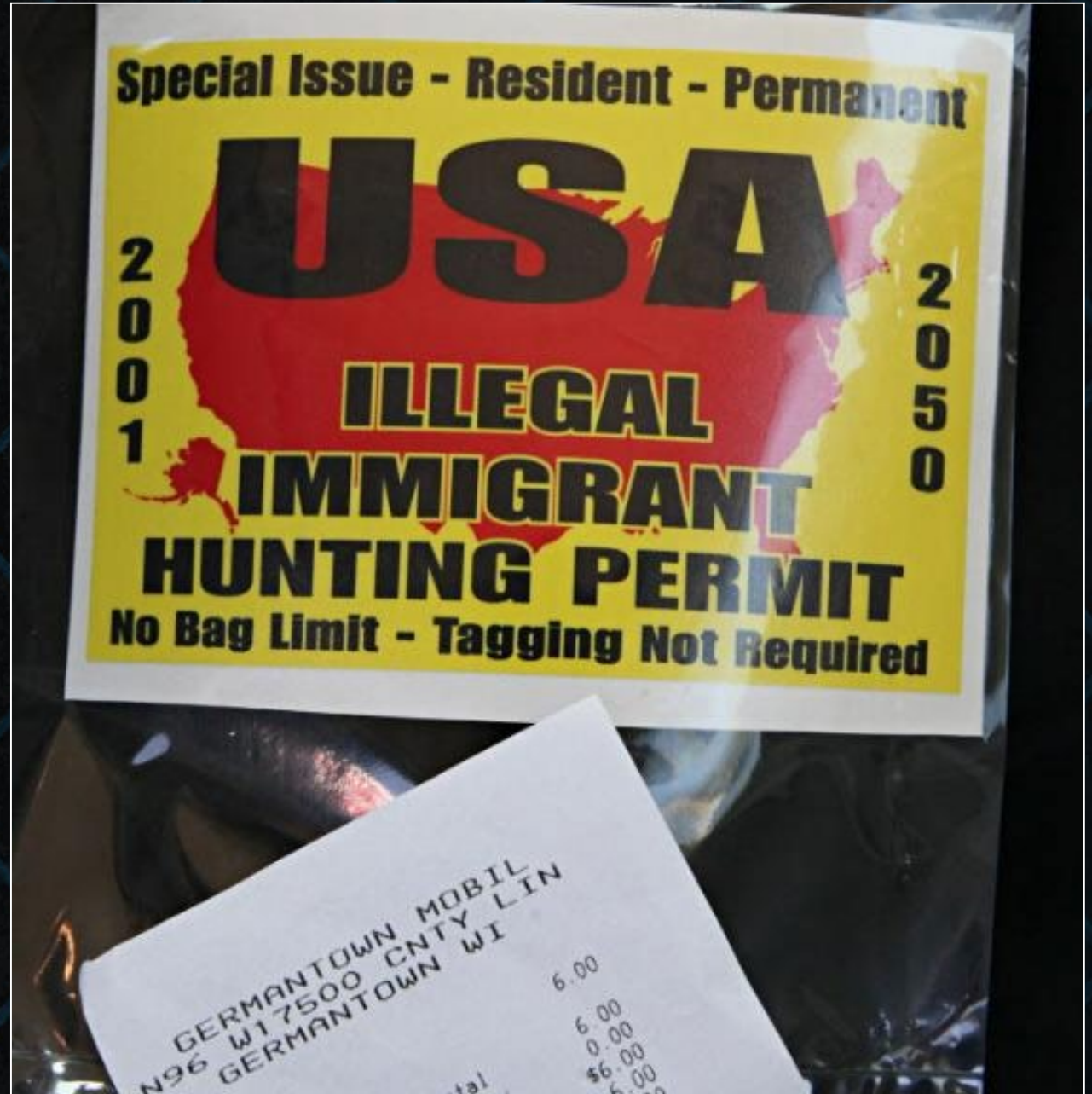
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Keynote Address – Southwestern Social Science Association

April 15, 2021

**STICKER SOLD AT
MOBIL IN
GERMANTOWN, WI**



IMMIGRATION & CRIME

Very contentious.

Perception that immigration predicts increasing crime rates (macro-level) and that immigrants commit more crime (micro-level).

Much more work in the macro area, largely because of the lack of micro-level data.

Only a few studies contain such data, but they are based on community samples, with little offending experience and no predictive variables.

LIFE COURSE CRIMINOLOGY

Focus on **continuity and change** in offending patterns over time.

Studies the **influences and experiences occurring early in life** that leave an important mark on development in general, and longitudinal offending in particular.

One important factor is the **context in which persons reside and mature**.

SEGMENTED ASSIMILATION THEORY

1st Gen immigrants carry cultural traditions and norms with them as they migrate to the U.S., but 2nd Gen immigrants are caught between the traditions of the old world invested in by their parents and that of the American mainstream inhabited by their peers.

1st Gen is buffered from criminogenic influences whereas the 2nd Gen is confronted with negotiating their fidelity and belonging.

Those able to balance the dueling demands and slowly absorb into the mainstream are more likely to ascend up the social ladder of success.

Others who are less successful at finding a balance between the old and new worlds find themselves going downward—assimilating into deviant countercultures in resource deprived communities.

The expectation that assimilation and disadvantage will interact to increase the risk of detrimental outcomes, including crime, among the more assimilated residing in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

PROGRAM OF RESEARCH

Data constraints have hampered solid empirical research on the immigration-crime link, especially at the individual-level.

Over the past twenty years, I've been involved in four studies that have been able to gather data on immigration status, both legal and illegal, to help provide empirical evidence on this issue.

Our research makes use of both adolescent offender and general population samples.

And has been published in leading social science journals, including journals in criminology, adolescence, and migration studies.

PATHWAYS TO DESISTANCE

Pathways to Desistance Study (Philadelphia & Phoenix).

n = 1,061 native-born

n = 210 second generation immigrants

n = 83 first generation immigrants

Over 84 months we observe whether patterns of offending, and the correlates that may distinguish them, operate differently across immigrant generations.

Also collected information on:

- Ethnic identity - "I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to." (*strongly disagree to strongly agree*)
- Assimilation - "I speak English." (*not at all to almost always*)

Collectively, this study offers the first investigation of whether adjudicated immigrants are likely to be persistent offenders.

DATA ON IMMIGRATION

n = 1,061 native-born
n = 210 2nd Gen immigrants
n = 83 1st Gen immigrants

PHOENIX, AZ
Largest group of 1st Gen
immigrants is of Mexican ancestry
(61.8% of the 1st Gen subsample)

41% BLACK

19% WHITE

15% HISPANIC

4% OTHER

PHILADELPHIA, PA
Second largest group of 1st Gen
immigrants is of Puerto Rican ancestry
(26.6% of the 1st Gen subsample)

STUDY 1 (*Journal of Youth & Adolescence*)

Is immigrant generation associated with the prevalence and/or frequency of offending?

Does immigrant status act as a risk or protective factor for membership in specific offending trajectories?

Do assimilation and disadvantage intersect to distinguish high-rate, persistent offenders?

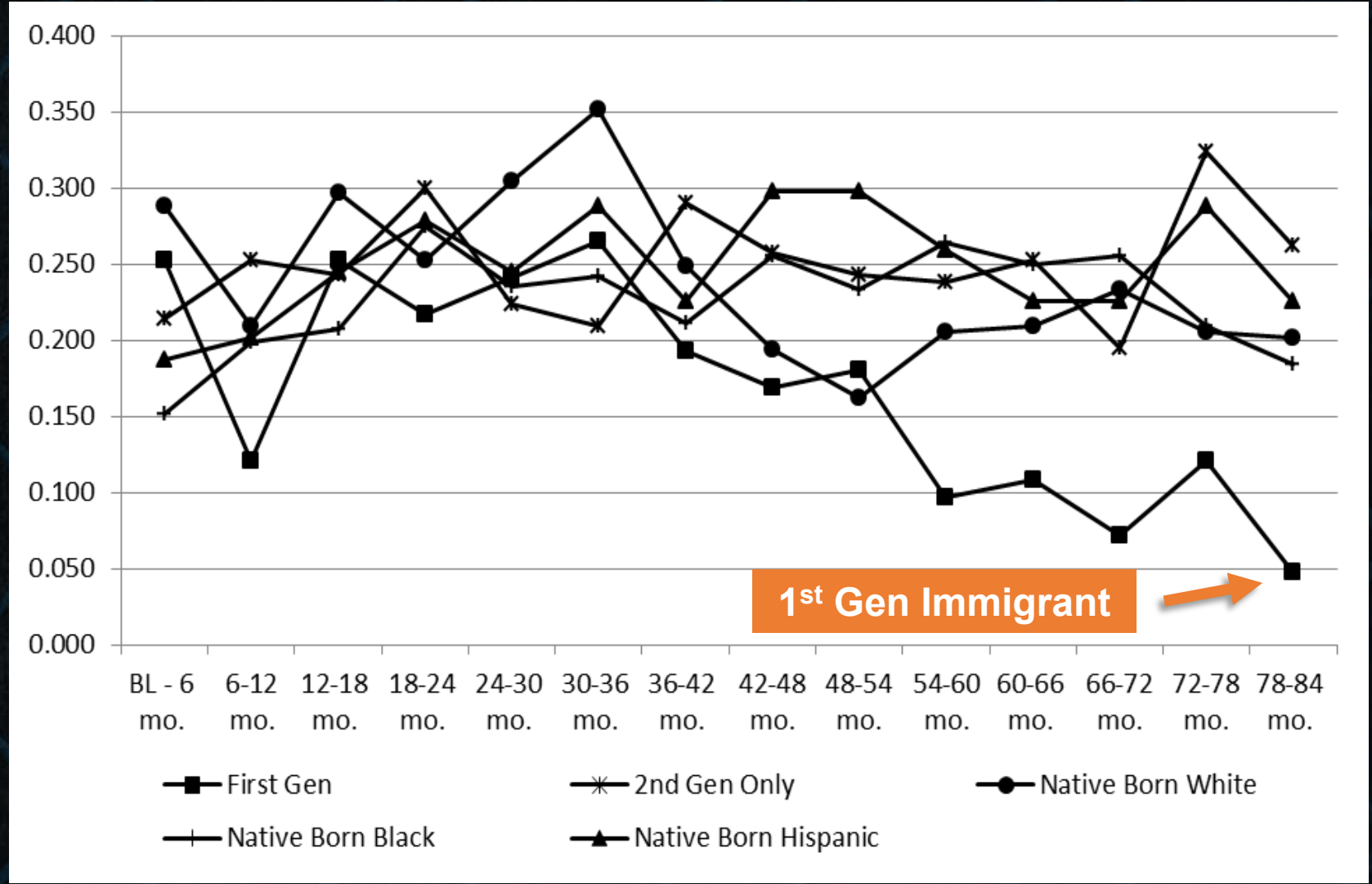
STUDY 1: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

First generation immigrants are less likely to be involved in serious offending and to evidence persistence in offending, and appear to be on a path toward desistance much more quickly than their peers.

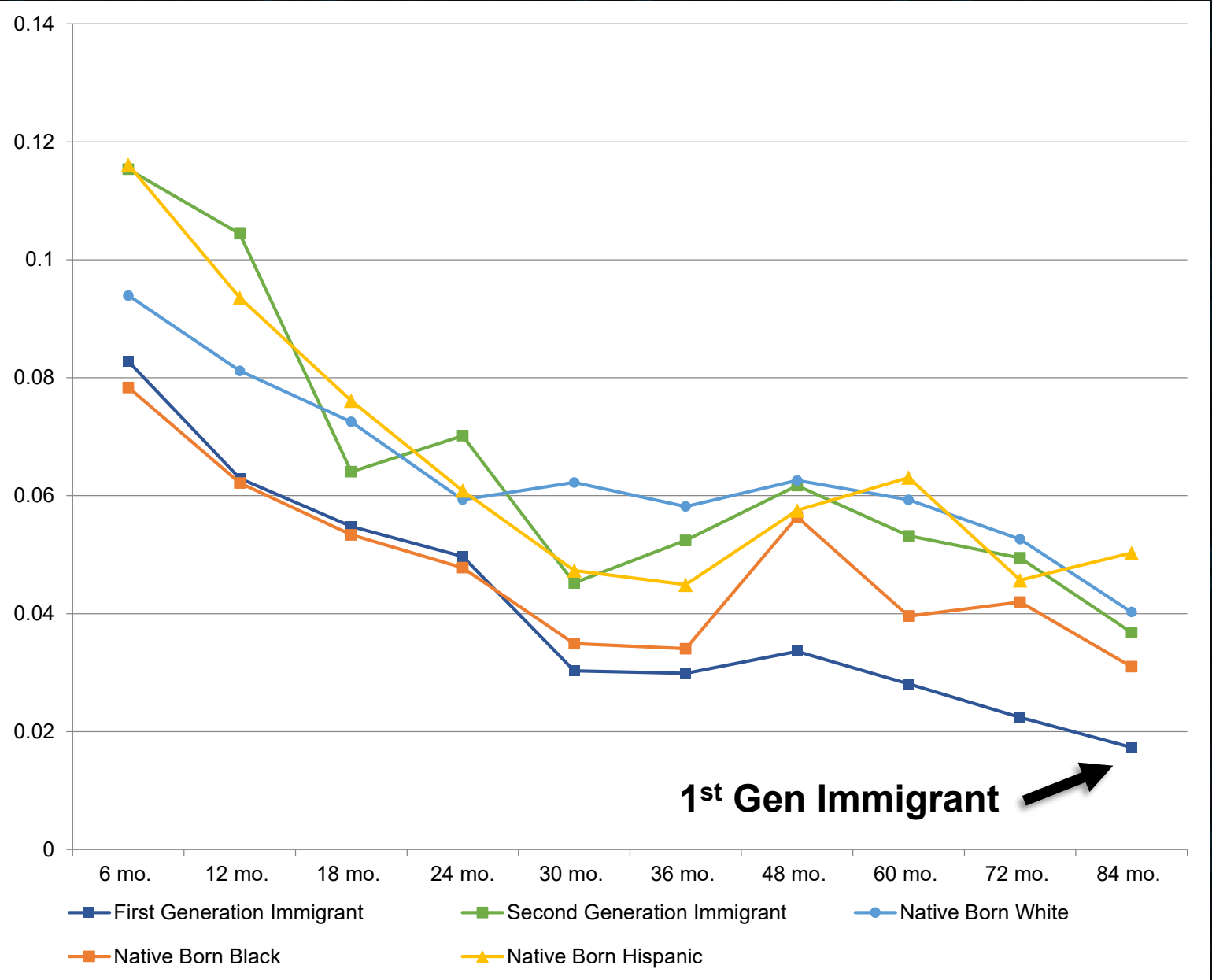
Assimilation and neighborhood disadvantage operate in distinct ways across generational status and relate to different offending styles.

The risk for persistent offending is greatest among those with high levels of assimilation who reside in disadvantaged contexts, particularly among the second generation youth in the sample.

AVERAGE RATE OF OFFICIAL REPORTS OF ARREST BY IMMIGRANT AND NATIVE-BORN STATUS



**AVERAGE RATE OF
SELF-REPORTED
OFFENDING BY
IMMIGRANT AND
NATIVE-BORN STATUS**



STUDY 2: WHAT UNDERLIES THESE DIFFERENCES? (*Crime & Delinquency*)

Legal socialization: the internalization of law, rules, and agreements among members of society, and the legitimacy of authority to deal fairly with citizens who violate society's rules.

What adolescents see and experience through interactions with police, courts, and other legal actors shapes their perceptions of the relation between individuals and society.

Evidence that legal socialization shapes:

- (a) cooperation with legal actors, and
- (b) compliance with law.

UNPACKING LEGAL SOCIALIZATION

Legitimacy

Quality possessed by an authority, a law, or an institution that leads others to feel obligated to obey its decisions and directives.

Legal Cynicism

Occurs when people perceive the law (and police in particular) as illegitimate, unresponsive, and ill-equipped to ensure public safety.

Social Costs of Punishment

Problems in school, home, etc. with respect to police arrest.

Legitimacy

Tends to lower crime, **legal cynicism** tends to increase crime, **social costs** tend to deter offending.

FIRST, SECOND, NATIVE-BORN DIFFERENCES

1

1st gen tend to hold on to the cultures and norms of their home-country and retain several personal and social “protective” factors that promote law abiding behavior.

2

New immigrants often come to the U.S. in order to escape the problems, typically financial, of their home countries, in pursuit of the freedoms and the promise of a better life in America.

3

Their social and political values are compatible with the moral underpinnings of American laws.

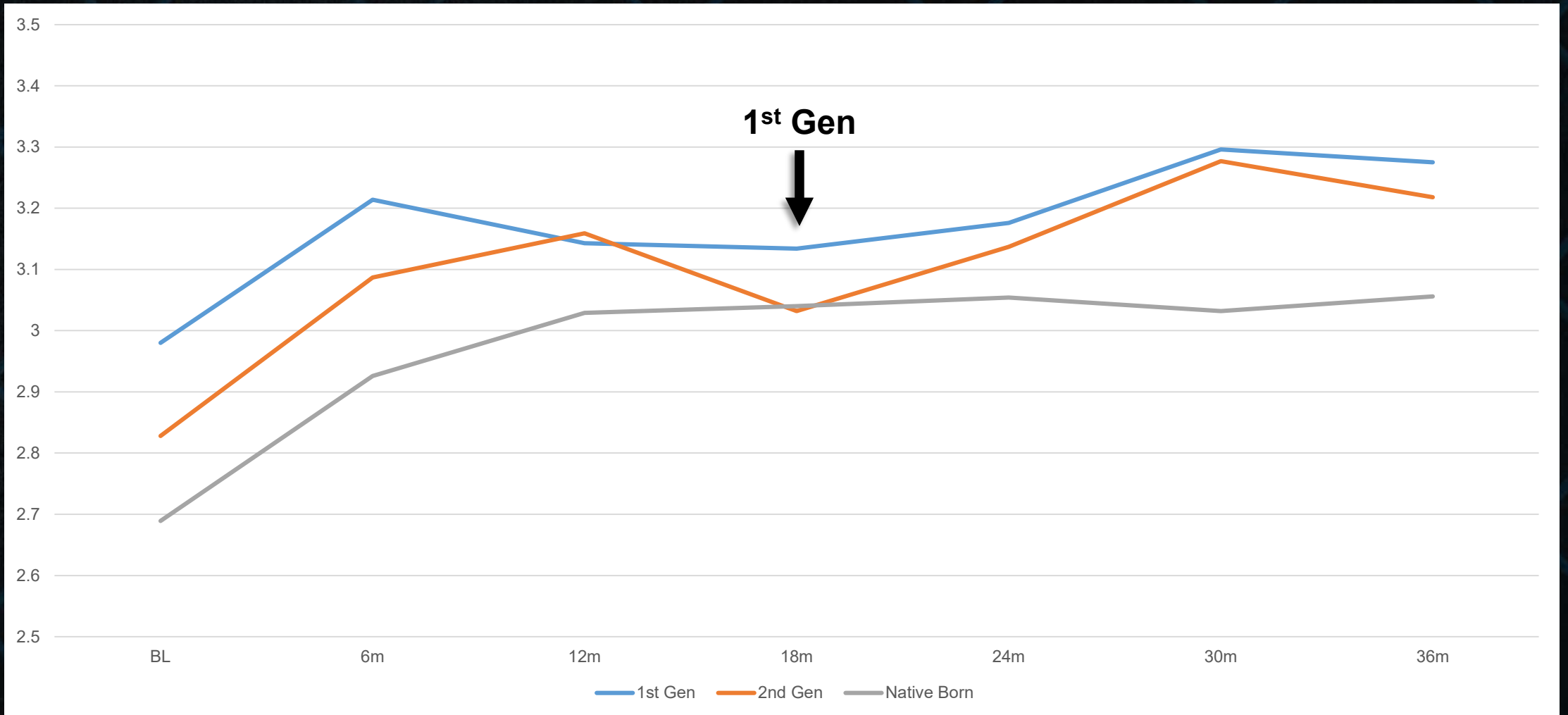
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They may also come to the U.S. to avoid personal or family danger from crime and economic exploitation from corrupt or ineffective governments in their native societies.

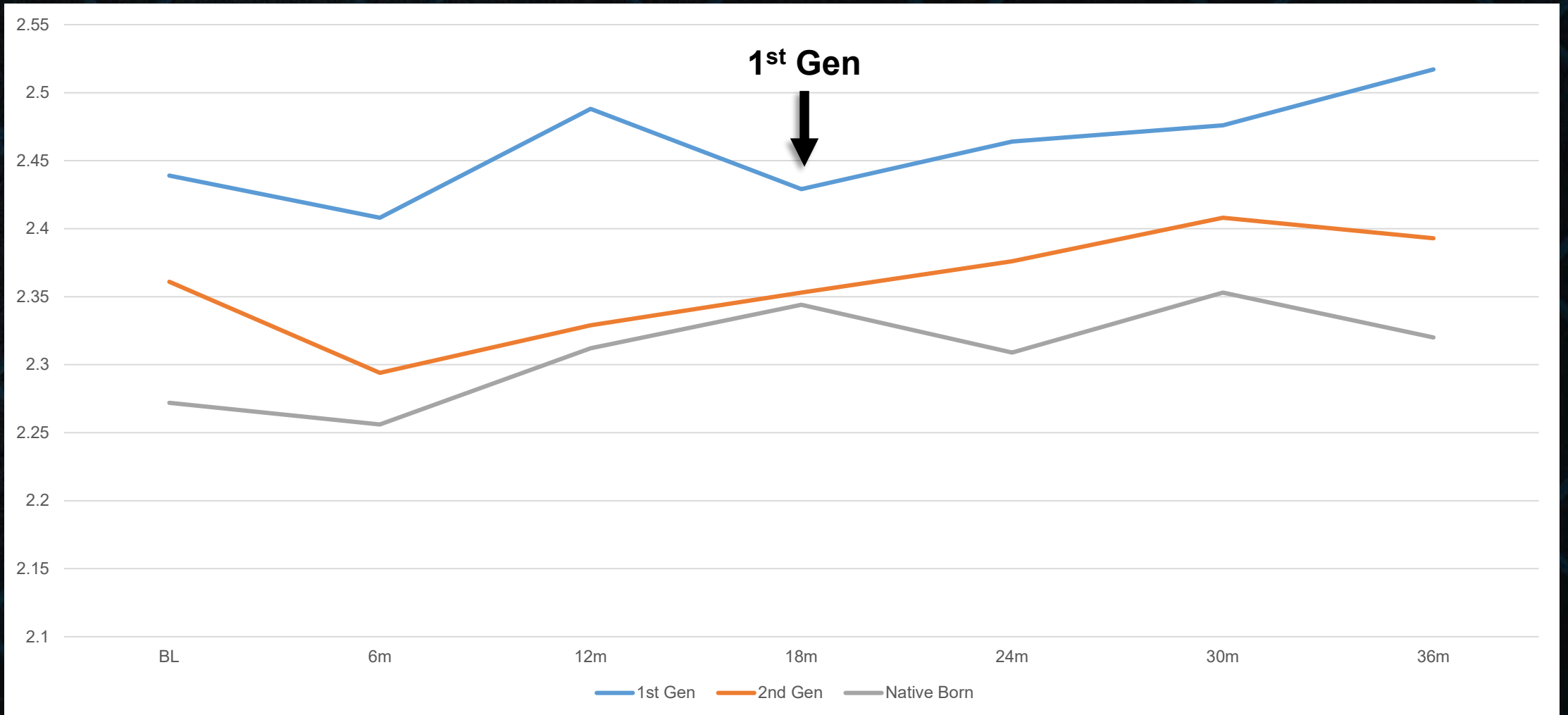
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Foreign-born immigrants view police “in the destination country as superior to their counterparts back home thus elevating the level of trust in the police among first-generation immigrants...”

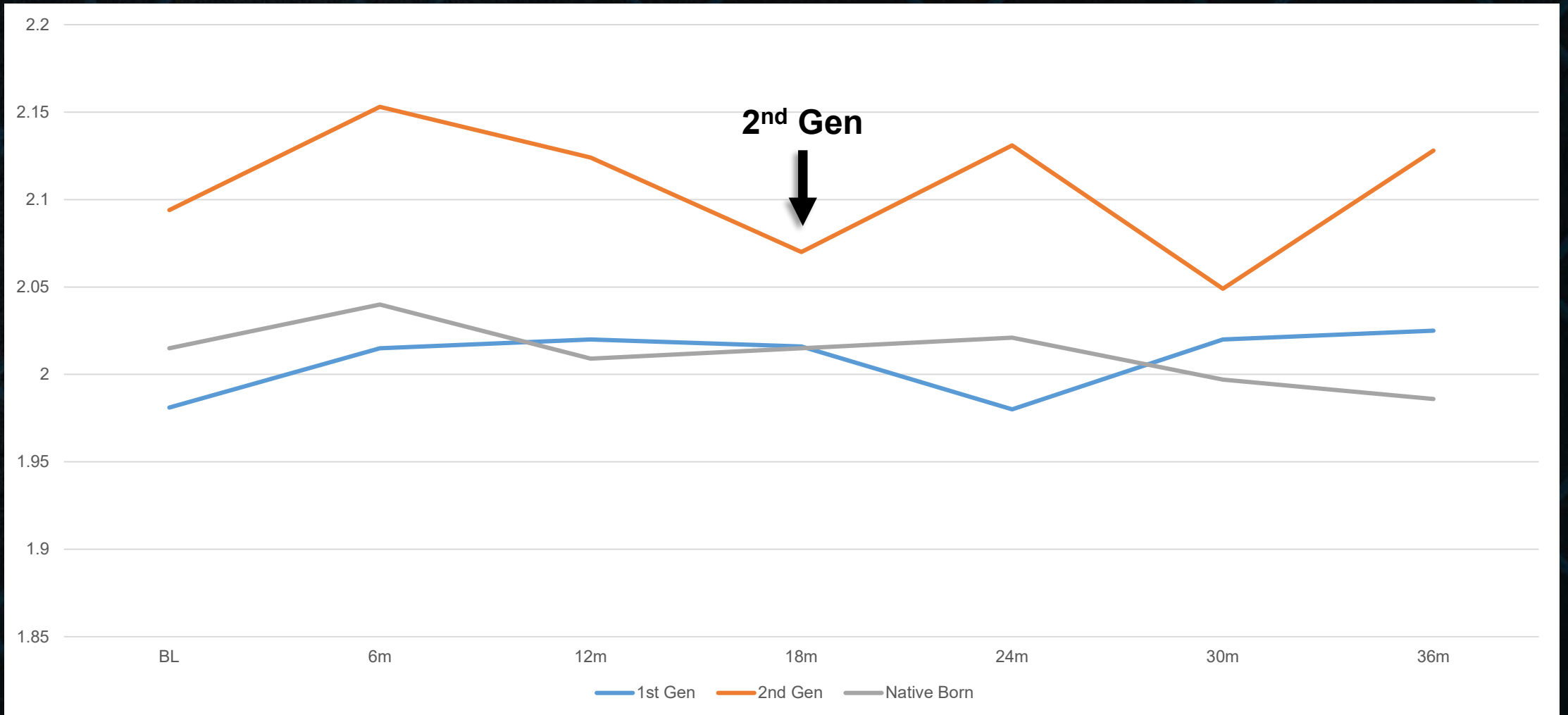
SOCIAL COSTS OF PUNISHMENT



LEGITIMACY



LEGAL CYNICISM



STUDY 3: IS THERE CRIME REPORTING BIAS BY IMMIGRANT GENERATION? (*Journal of Quantitative Criminology*)

Investigated whether the lower levels of crime finding was influenced by differential crime reporting practices across first, second, and third-plus generation immigrants.

If all youth similarly under- or over-report their involvement in crime, then comparisons across groups are not affected by this difference.

Compared wave-specific rates of convergence

- 0 arrests reported in both self-reports and official reports; 1 arrest reported in both self-reports and official reports

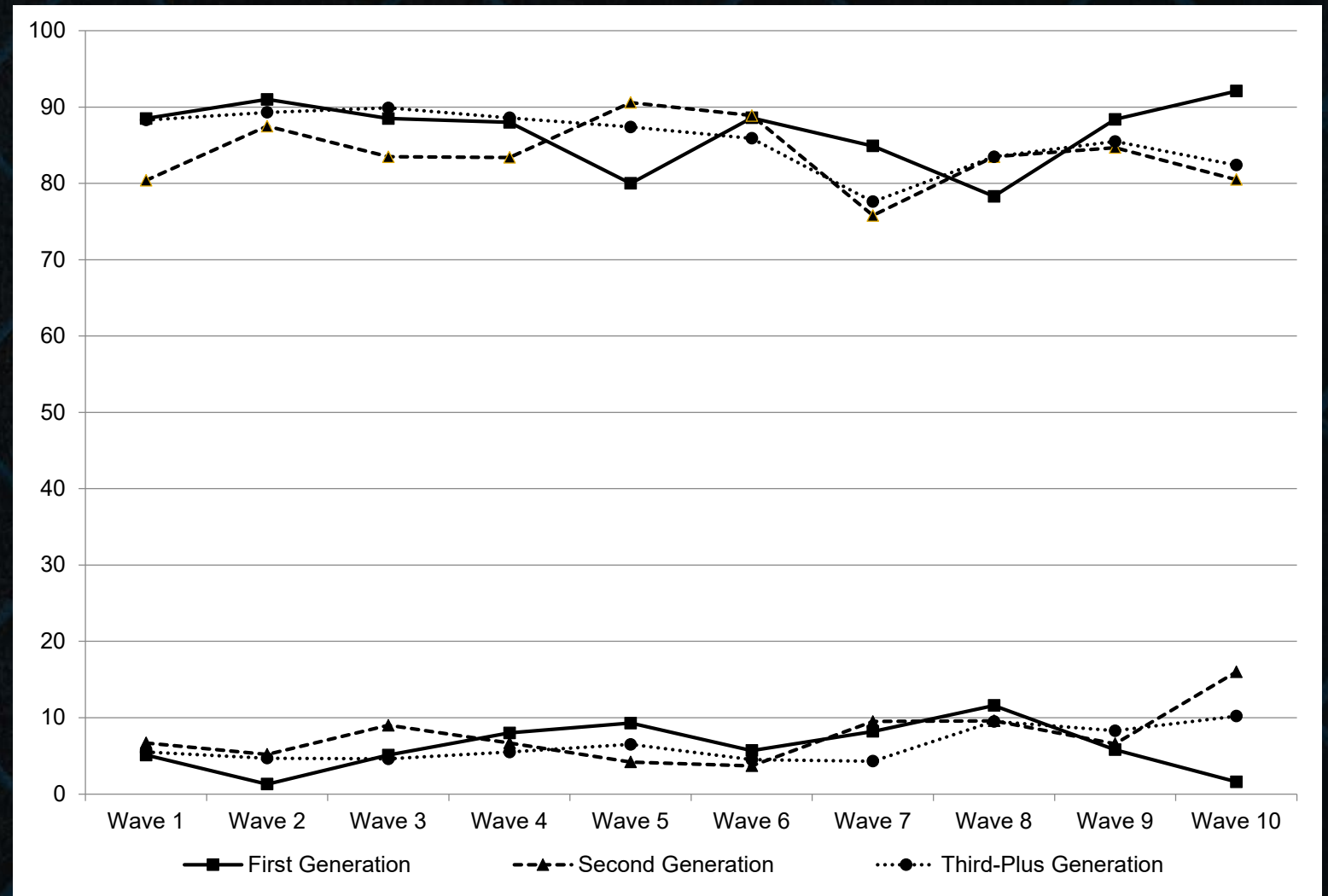
and divergence

- a self-reported arrest but no official recorded arrest; and vice versa

across arrest reporting measures.

**CONVERGENCE
IN SR & OFFICIAL
ARRESTS**

**UNDER-REPORTING
OF ARRESTS**



STUDY 3: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Found a high correspondence between self-reports of arrest and official reports of arrest.

Found a very high degree of similarity regardless of immigrant generation.

Found no evidence of systemic crime reporting bias among foreign-born, first-generation immigrants compared to their US-born peers.

First-generation immigrants are characterized by lower levels of offending that are NOT attributable to a differential tendency to under-report their involvement in crime.

2016 estimates



PEW RESEARCH CENTER

STUDY 4: OFFENDING AMONG UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS (*Migration Letters*)

In the U.S., there are wide estimates of unauthorized/undocumented immigrants, from 11 million to 30 million.

Although some believe that undocumented immigrants commit much crime, almost no data exists on this topic.

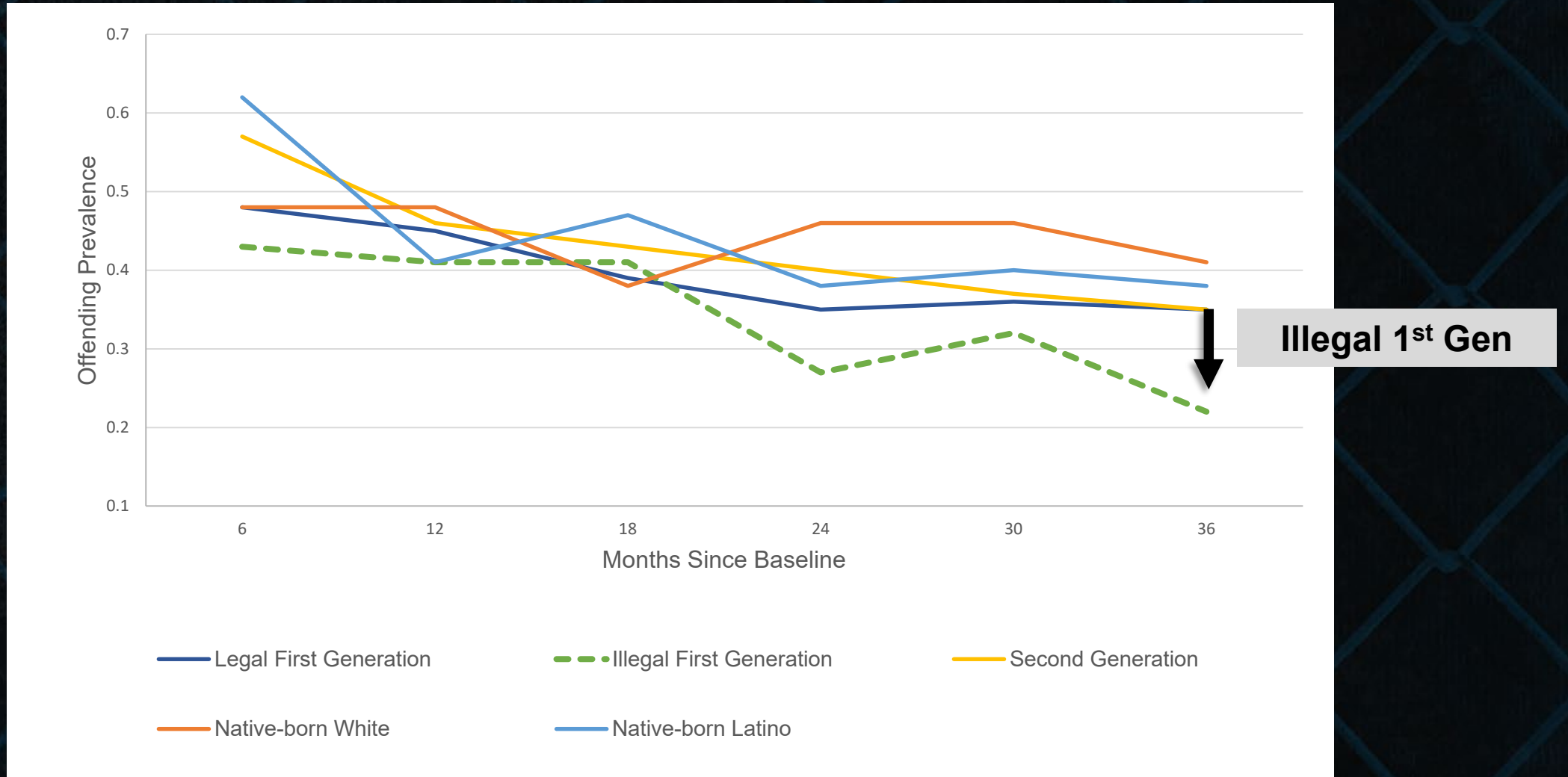
We use data from the Crossroads Study, a 3-site (PA, LA, Southern CA) longitudinal study of male, first-time juvenile arrestees followed for 3 years.

We use data only from Southern CA because that is where most the immigrant youth are located.

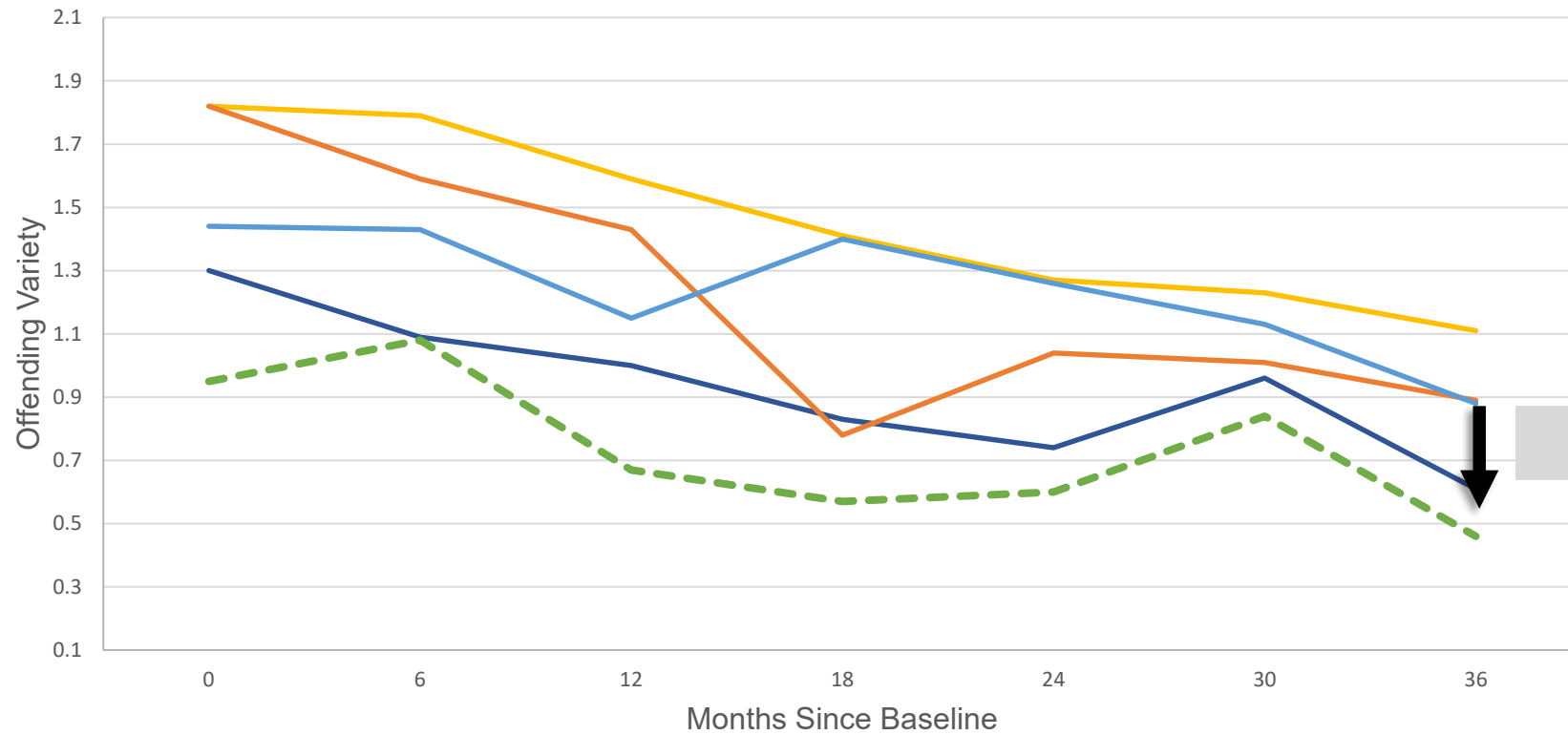
We also use both official record and self-reported offending over seven-waves of data (3 years).

Compare offending patterns for undocumented immigrant, documented immigrant, and US-born youth in transition into young adulthood.

TOTAL OFFENDING PREVALENCE (SR)



TOTAL CRIME OFFENDING VARIETY (SR)



Illegal 1st Gen

Legal First Generation

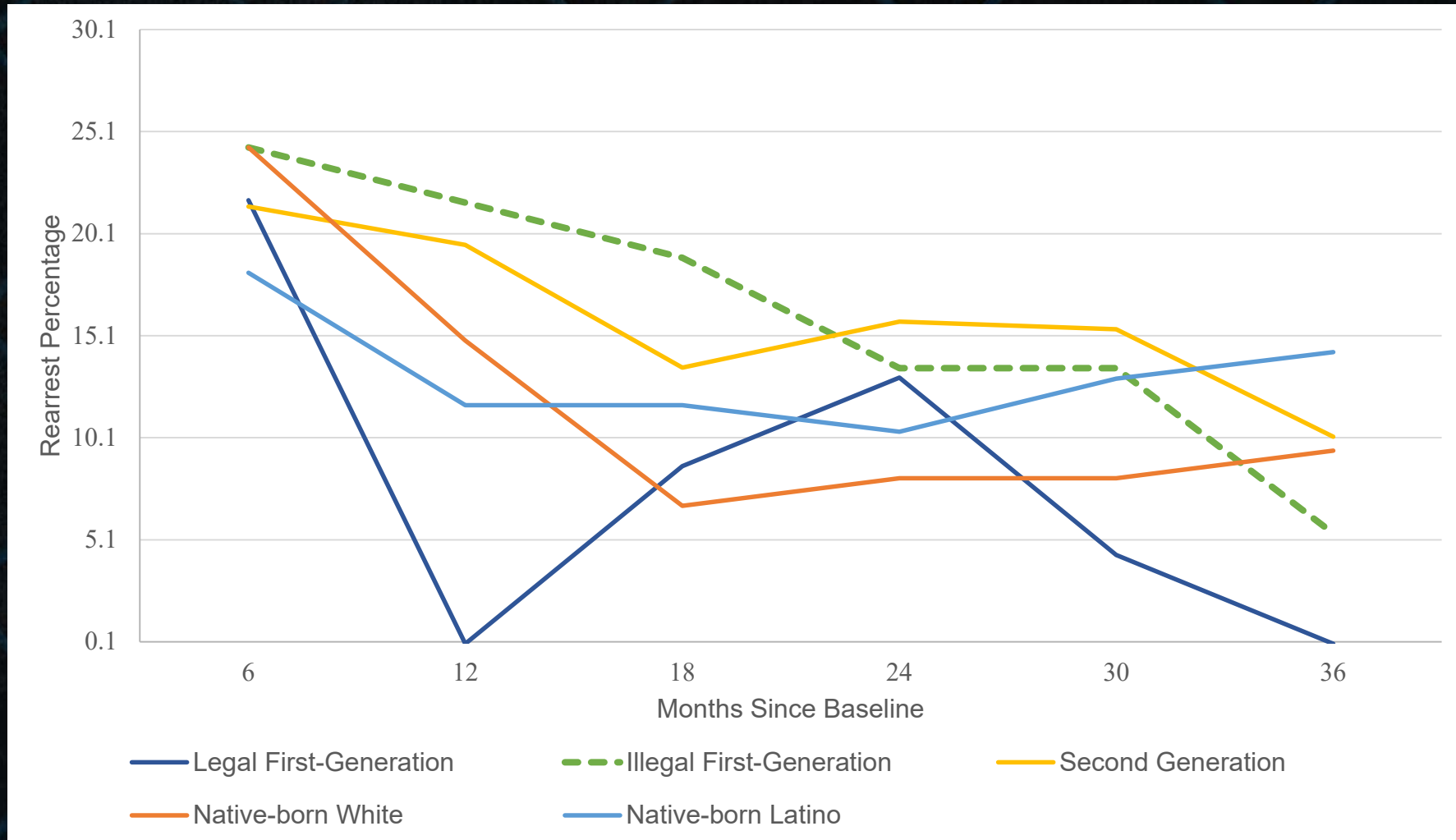
Illegal First Generation

Second Generation

Native-born White

Native-born Latino

RE-ARREST PREVALENCE (OFF)



STUDY 4: TAKE-AWAYS

Compared to documented immigrants and US-born peers, undocumented immigrants report engaging in less crime prior to and following their first arrest.

Conversely, official records reflect a marginally higher level of re-arrest among undocumented immigrants, particularly in the months immediately following the first arrest.

This divergence in findings warrants focused consideration to disentangle whether the difference is due to differential involvement in crime, differential treatment in the justice system, or a combination of factors.

STUDY 5: NARRATIVES OF PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION AT US-MEXICAN BORDER POINTS OF ENTRY (*Deviant Behavior*)

Gathered data from several hundred young adults to examine their perceptions regarding their experiences with Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the largest law enforcement agency in the US, at US-Mexican border points of entry.

Respondents were asked:

“When crossing the U.S.-Mexico border at a border checkpoint...”

1

...have you ever been treated differently than those around you?

2

...have you ever witnessed someone around you being treated differently than everyone else?

3

...have you or someone around you ever been harassed or mistreated by an individual in authority?

4

...have you or someone around you ever been treated differently by an individual in authority based on race, ethnicity, or country of origin?

STUDY 5: MAIN FINDINGS

Participants reported perceptions and experiences of discrimination based on physical appearance, language differences, and nationality.

Colorism/Mexican features, English proficiency, foreign accent, Mexican vs. American nationality.

- “Being a light skin Mexican-American man, I get mistaken for looking White. Other family members are considerably darker than I and often sometimes are not treated as well as myself.”
- “The darker shade of brown [a border-crosser’s skin is], the ruder the [OFO] officer behaves.”
- “Sometimes for simply having Hispanic features, you may be treated differently.”
- “My parents are always treated different just because of their lack of the English vocabulary....didn’t sound American enough.”
- “Cars with license plates from Mexico will be questioned more and almost always sent to get their vehicles checked.”

Participants also described border officials engaging in routine law enforcement behaviors, including poor policing practices to include: heightened scrutiny and interrogation, person/vehicles searches, rude behavior/harassment.

- “After finding three brand new Apple iPhones lying on my car’s backseat, the OFO officer mistakenly thought I was trying to bring the phones into the U.S. without properly declaring them to Customs, but the phones had been purchased in the U.S., and therefore did not need to be declared to Customs upon reentry.”
- “[OFO officers] looked at every White person’s drivers license for a few seconds and gave it back, but to the Mexicans they had to take out their passports, their luggage, and be searched head to toe.”
- “My friends were kept at the checkpoint for more than 8 hours by the authority or officers even though my friends had all the required documents to enter the U.S.; they had their passports and I-20s. But they were still kept there waiting and the officers checked them physically and also had their phones checked. They were asked if they had any Muslim friends.”
- “The story of my mom not yet being a citizen and all three of us siblings being American struck a curiosity in the officers that something was off, so they would ask us and my mom [to] sing the national anthem or [answer] history questions which none of us knew because we were small and not that far along in history or being able to memorize important events.”
- “One of my friends needs to buy contraceptive pills in [Mexican border city] for a treatment, so when she came back to the U.S., one of the officers told her ‘It’s too bad that you don’t want to make babies here in the U.S.’”

STUDY 6: IMMIGRATION CONCENTRATION AND RE-OFFENDING

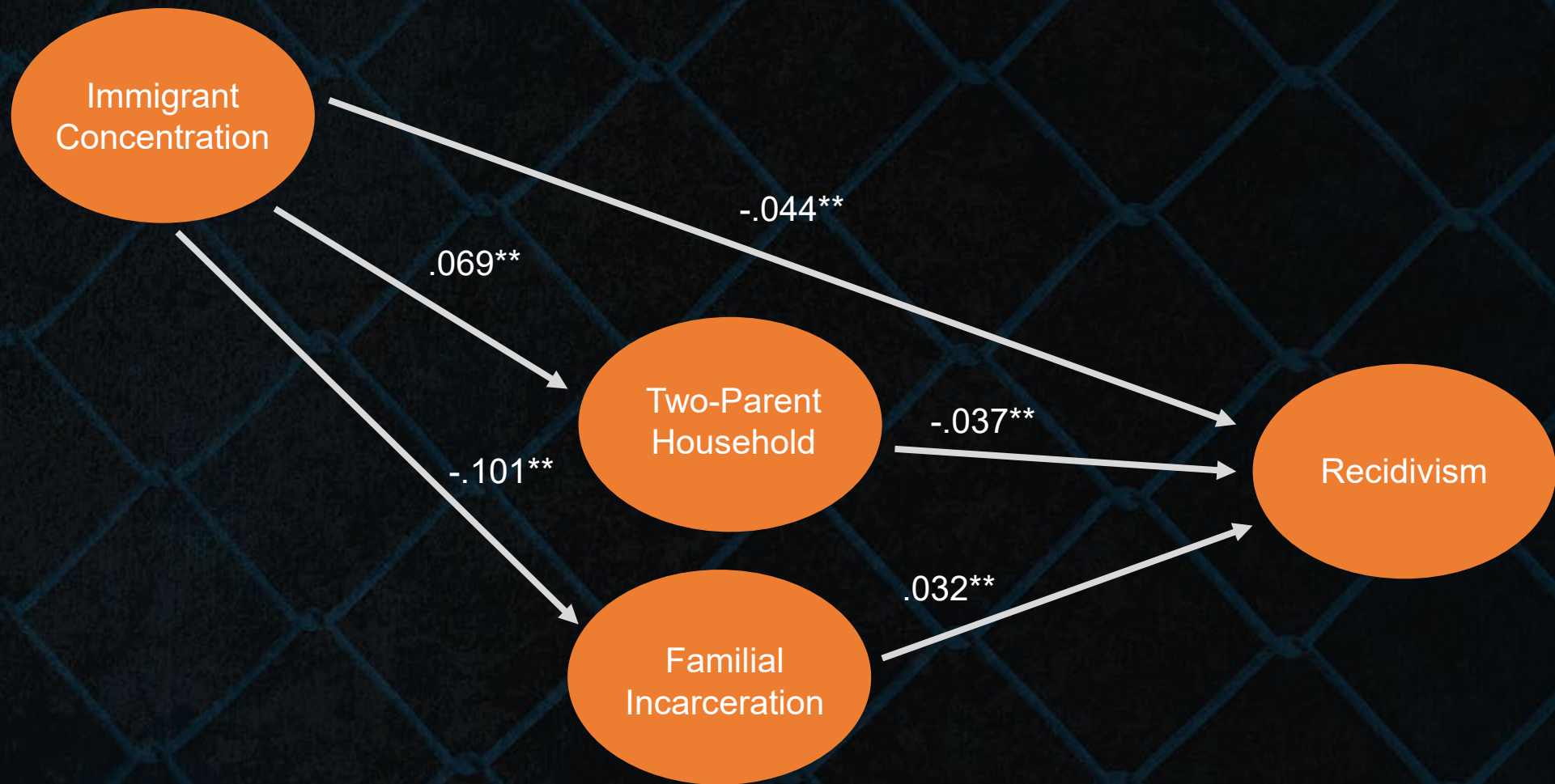
Research Question 1:

Does immigrant concentration lead to lower patterns of re-offending among juvenile youth when they leave facilities?

Research Question 2:

Does immigrant concentration lead to a better social ties/familial environment (i.e., higher presence of two-parent households and less familial incarceration)?

To examine these questions, multi-level data from more than 26,000 youthful offenders from the State of Florida were used to examine the direct and indirect relationship of immigrant concentration on recidivism.



STUDY 6: TAKE-AWAYS

First, immigrant concentration had a direct and protective effect on juvenile recidivism.

Second, immigrant concentration had additional indirect effects on juvenile recidivism, by increasing two-parent households and protecting against familial incarceration.

Finally, and importantly, these findings held even after controlling for a set of correlates that are typically and strongly related to criminal activity.

YOU KNOW YOU'VE HIT A NERVE WHEN...

OPINION

Coulter: Every pro-immigration claim a lie

Ann Coulter

Published 5:54 p.m. CT July 15, 2015



(Photo: Special to The Clarion-Ledger)



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In the wake of Kate Steinle's murder at the hands of an illegal immigrant, mass immigration advocates have begun a campaign of lies in defense of their cheap labor. "Studies show," they say, that immigrants commit LESS crime than the native population.

Inasmuch as the vast majority of post-1970 immigrants — legal immigrants — are poor, non-white and come from countries with far worse crime rates than our own, that's at least counterintuitive.

The main evidence cited in support of the claim that immigrants commit less crime than Americans is a moronic point about cities with a lot of immigrants seeming to have low crime rates. *Check and mate, Mr. Trump!*

The “New York sure seems safe to me!” argument is like the “Saturday Night Live” sketch of Bill O’Reilly arguing that New York has more people than California.

•Bill O'Reilly: You also say that California has more people than any other state. I say New York state has more people — tell me where I'm wrong!

•Thomas Woodward: (confused) Um ... well ... Bill ... actually, California is the most populous state.

•Bill O'Reilly: I don't know, counselor. I live in New York, and I walk down the streets every day, and there's people everywhere! You can't move! You know what I mean? Last week, I was in California, went to the beach in Malibu. Nobody! Practically empty. So, for my money, New York's got more people. Probably New Jersey, too.

COULTER'S COMMENTS

“

The second main line of attack on the idea that immigrants are committing prodigious amounts of crime are the apocryphal “studies.”

The two researchers whose work is cited over and over again for the proposition that immigrants are less criminal than Americans are **Alex Piquero**, criminology professor at the University of Texas at Dallas, and **Bianca Bersani**, sociology professor at the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

Pew cites their studies – and everyone in the media cites Pew, leading to headlines like these:

“UT Dallas prof finds immigrant kids less likely to commit serious crimes, re-offend” – *The Dallas Morning News*

“UMass Boston Prof: Stereotype of ‘Criminal Immigrant’ Doesn’t Hold Up” – Targeted News Service

“Surprise! Donald Trump is wrong about immigrants and crime” – *The Washington Post*

Curiously, we are never shown the actual studies, but simply told – with some heat – “studies show!”

I looked up some of these alleged studies last weekend. They’re all hidden behind ridiculous Internet paywalls. I was often only the sixth person to read them.

”

BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE...

“

It turns out that neither Piquero nor Bersani compared immigrant crime to “the overall population” – as the British Guardian recently claimed in an article purporting to prove Donald Trump wrong. Rather, they compare immigrants’ crime rate to the crime rate of America’s most criminally inclined subgroups.

Thus, for example, once you get past the paywall, you will find that Piquero and Bersani’s joint study, “Comparing Patterns and Predictors of Immigrant Offending Among a Sample of Adjudicated Youth,” used as its base group “adolescents who were found guilty of a serious offense.”

THAT’S NOT A REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE OF AMERICANS! It’s a representative sample of teenagers who are convicted criminals.

Instead of looking at “studies,” how about we just count the number of immigrants arrested, convicted and imprisoned in America?

Even if the immigrants’ crime rate were the same as “the overall population” – and it’s not – we’re supposed to be admitting immigrants who are better than us, not “six of one, half dozen of the other.”

Why? Because we’re picking them. If the food in your refrigerator is rotten, you don’t go out and buy more rotten food on the grounds that it’s no more rotten than the food you already have. This is the new food you’re picking and you’re paying for.

Instead, we’re bringing in legal immigrants – forget illegals – who are way more criminal than us, notwithstanding phony studies no one bothers to read.

”

GETTING OUR WORK OUT THERE

Public Criminology

Media interviews (newspapers, TV, radio)

- NPR, Associated Press
- NBC News Latino
- Various podcasts throughout the US
- Local and national TV/radio
- Research quoted in major newspapers (*Chicago Tribune*, *New York Times*, *Dallas Morning News*, etc.)
- Op-eds in *LA Times*, *Dallas Morning News*, *Kansas City Star*, *Des Moines Register*, *USA Today*, etc.



CURRENT RESEARCH

Examining predictors of immigrants' confidence

- Using data from World Values Survey of over 5,000 persons in 34 nations.
- Preliminary results show that immigrants with resident citizenship have higher confidence in the police.
- As well, feelings of trust in neighborhood and sense of community lead to higher confidence in the police.
- The homicide rate of the country leads to lower confidence in the police, but more transparency leads to more confidence in the police.

Examining how new (Muslim) migrants navigate their re-location in Melbourne, Australia

- Do they assimilate OR can they change the culture of the area (and if so, what is the threshold needed).

Examining differences in punishment for homicide by classification status of immigrants

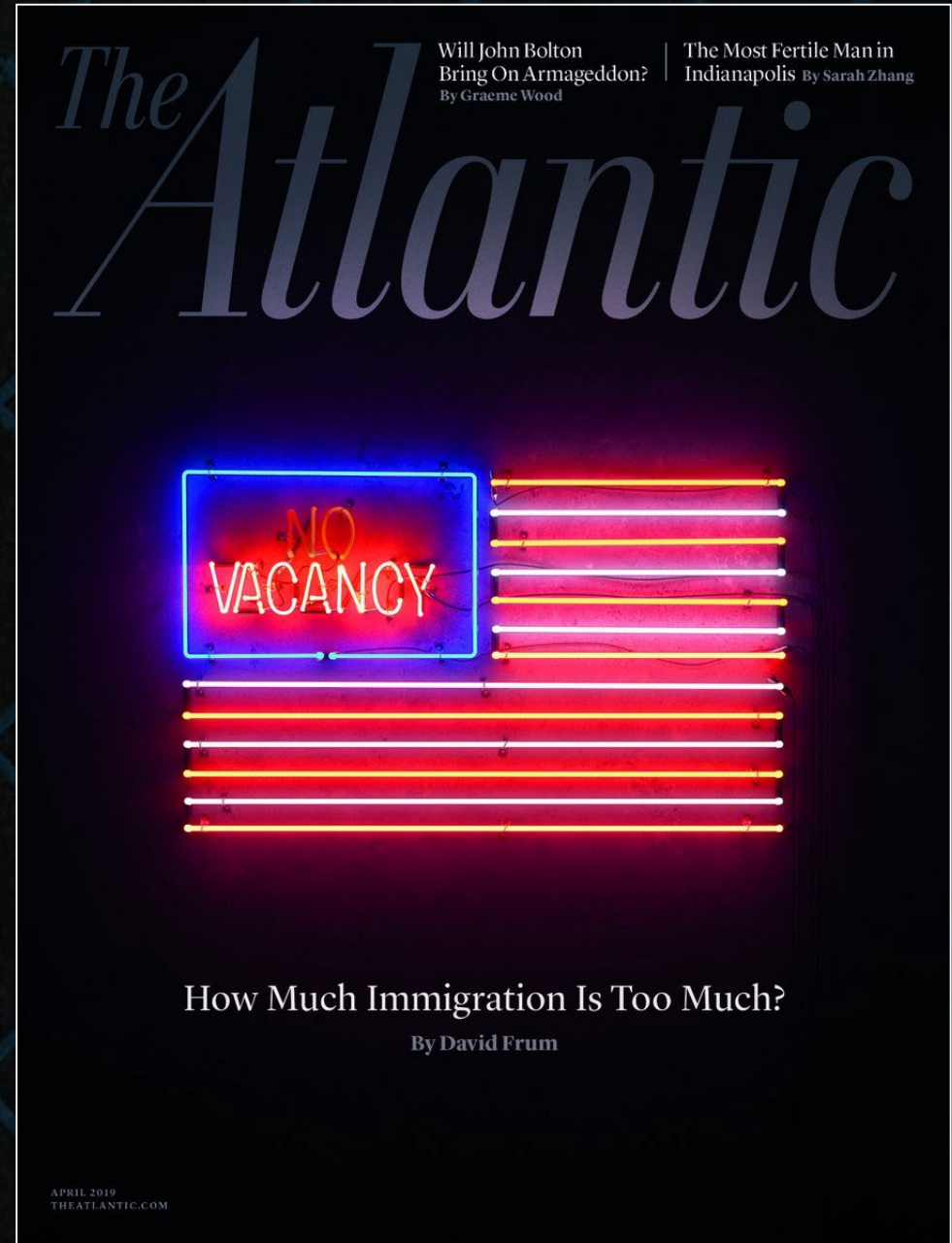
- Using data from Texas Department of Criminal Justice
- Preliminary results show that native-born US citizens are incarcerated for homicide at higher rates than all other immigrant group classifications, including: ICE confirmed foreign citizen and unauthorized immigrant.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

One of the major challenges the US faces is how to **reshape immigrant perceptions** to fit the facts. This challenge only grows in importance as the U.S. experiences continued increases in the Latinx and foreign-born populations that will transform the U.S. into a majority-minority country by the year 2044.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

COVER OF *THE ATLANTIC*, APRIL 2019 ISSUE



CLOSING THOUGHTS

We should not be so naïve to believe that our work, in isolation, will **alter any public policy or discourse** emanating from those individuals who purposely mischaracterize immigrants' and their offending proclivities. All that researchers can do is to **continue to gather the best available data and conduct the best possible research** to help inform public opinion and at least be part of the policy conversation.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Perhaps the only national emergency or crisis is not one on the southern border between Texas and Mexico, but instead the **crisis lies within those individuals who turn a blind eye to the science.**

Those are the minds that we need to liven up.

ANY QUESTIONS



DO YOU HAVE?

memegenerator.net