

RETHINKING CRIME AND IMMIGRATION

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Open Doors Don't Invite Criminals

By Robert J. Sampson

CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

LAW enforcement officials, politicians and social scientists have put forward many explanations for the astonishing drop in crime rates in America over the last decade or so, and yet we remain mystified. Studies have shown that while each of the usual suspects — a decline in crack use, aggressive policing, increased prison populations, a relatively strong economy, increased availability of abortion — has probably played some role, none has proved to be as dominant a factor as initially suggested.

Perhaps we have been overlooking something obvious — something that our implicit biases caused us not to notice. My unusual suspect is foreigners: evidence points to increased immigration as a major factor associated with the lower crime rate of the 1990's (and its recent leveling off).

Consider what sociologists call the "Latino paradox": Hispanic Americans do better on a range of various social indicators — including propensity to violence — than one would expect given their socioeconomic disadvantages. My colleagues and I have completed a study in which we exam-

Robert J. Sampson is a professor of sociology at Harvard.

ined violent acts by almost 3,000 males and females, ranging in age from 8 to 25, from 1995 to 2003. The study selected whites, blacks and Hispanics (primarily Mexican-Americans) from 180 Chicago neighborhoods ranging from highly segregated to very integrated. We also analyzed data from police records, the Census and a separate survey of more than

Is increased immigration behind the drop in crime?

8,000 Chicago residents who were asked about the characteristics of their neighborhoods.

Surprisingly, we found a significantly lower rate of violence among Mexican-Americans than among blacks and whites. A major reason is that more than a quarter of all those of Mexican descent were born abroad and more than half lived in neighborhoods where the majority of residents were also Mexican. Indeed, the first-generation immigrants (those born outside the United States) in our study were 45 percent less likely to commit violence than were third-generation Americans, adjusting for fam-

ily and neighborhood background. Second-generation immigrants were 22 percent less likely to commit violence than the third generation.

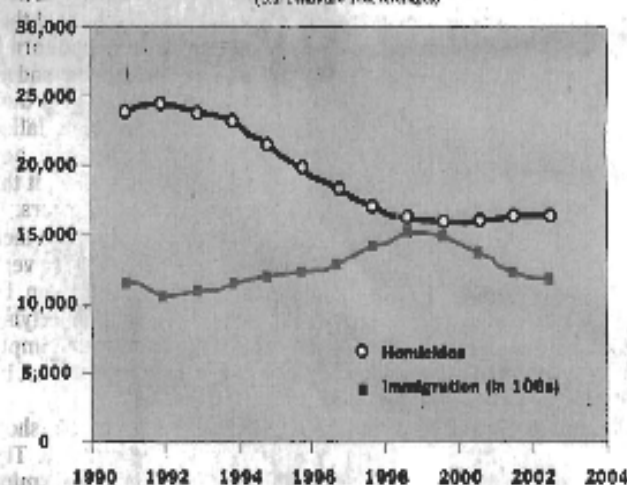
This "protective" pattern among immigrants holds true for non-Hispanic whites and blacks as well. Our study further showed that living in a neighborhood of concentrated immigration is directly associated with lower violence (again, after taking into account a host of factors, including poverty and an individual's immigrant status).

Now consider that immigration to the United States rose sharply in the 1990's, especially from Mexico and especially to immigrant enclaves in large cities. Overall, the foreign-born population increased by more than 50 percent in 10 years, to 31 million people in 2000. A report by the Pew Hispanic Center found that immigration grew most significantly in the middle of the 90's and hit its peak at the end of the decade, when the national homicide rate plunged to levels not seen since the 1960's. Immigrant flows have receded since 2001, while the national homicide rate leveled off and seems now to be creeping up.

The emerging story goes against the grain of popular stereotypes. Among the public, policymakers and even academics, a common expectation is that a concentration of immigrants and an influx of foreigners drive up crime rates, because of the assumed propensities of these groups

Immigration Flows and Homicide Trends

(U.S. Deaths & Year Averages)



Sources: Pew Hispanic Center, United States Department of Justice

to commit crimes and settle in poor, presumably disorganized communities. This belief is so pervasive, studies show, that the concentration of Latinos in a neighborhood strongly predicts perceptions of disorder no matter what the actual amount of crime and disorder.

Yet our study found that immigrants appear in general to be less violent than people born in America, particularly when they live in neighborhoods with high numbers of other immigrants. We are thus witnessing a different pattern from early 20th-century America, when growth in immi-

gration from Europe was linked with increasing crime and formed a building block for what became known as "social disorganization" theory.

In today's world, then, it is no longer tenable to assume that immigration automatically leads to chaos and crime. New York is a magnet for immigration, yet it has for a decade ranked as one of America's safest cities. Border cities like El Paso and San Diego have made similar gains against crime. Perhaps the lesson is that if we want to continue to crack down on crime, closing the nation's doors is not the answer. □

Dear Professor Sampson:

I met your article with not merely a chuckle, but guffaws - uncontrollable, hysterical laughter. On what planet did you study sociology — Buck Rogers' Mongo?

I have never read a collection of convoluted "statistics" and fabricated claptrap such as you espouse — not in my 65 years — that even BEGAN to approach the level of absurdity you puff. I don't know from where you get your alleged facts, but I lived with your precious Mexican Americans in Phoenix Arizona. I regularly witnessed drunken brawls, defecation in public streets, destruction of public property, violent fights with knives, guns and machetes, assault on innocents, a level of burglary and theft never before seen (until Mexicans moved into the area)...

Six or eight decades ago, BEFORE criminal, indigent Mexicans began to fill our cities and towns, immigrants were studious, energetic, eager to assimilate and peaceful. They CONTRIBUTED to this nation. Today's immigrants, however, especially Mexicans, are generally lazy, criminal, have no intention of assimilating, are uneducated beyond perhaps mid grade school, have no trade, and are here for what they can suck from the lifeblood of our country.

You and your Ivy League-educated ilk live in a counterfeit utopian sphere of fantasy and lunacy. Your hot air would fill all of the balloons at the New Mexico balloon fest, leaving enough to launch the next space shuttle!

WHAT SCHOLARS KNOW

“The major finding of a century of research on immigration and crime is that...immigrants nearly always exhibit lower crime rates than native groups.”

(Martinez & Lee 2000, *NIJ Report*)

THE NATURE OF CRIME: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

On Immigration and Crime

by Ramiro Martinez, Jr., and Matthew T. Lee

The connection between immigration and crime is one of the most contentious topics in contemporary society. These discussions are not new, as debates on the issue date back more than 100 years. A general point on which both pro- and anti-immigration writers agree is that, as we enter the new millennium, the latest wave of immigration is likely to have a more important impact on society than any other social issue. In this essay, we survey the vast body of theoretical and empirical works on the relationship between immigration and crime in 20th-century America. Throughout, we include new writings as well as older, sometimes neglected works. We discuss three major theoretical perspectives that have guided explanations of the immigration/crime link: opportunity structure, cultural approaches, and social disorganization. We also examine empirical studies of immigrant involvement in crime. We conclude with a review of public opinion about immigrants, especially as it relates to immigrants and crime, and then provide original data on the connection between public opinion and immigrant crime.

There are important reasons to believe that immigrants should be involved in crime to a greater degree than native-born Americans. For example, immigrants face acculturation and assimilation problems that most natives do not, and immigrants tend to settle in disorganized

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PUBLIC OPINION ON IMMIGRATION & CRIME

- Regardless of time period, public opinion is that immigration and crime are causally linked (Simon 1985, 1987, 1993)
- 2006 General Social Survey- “Does more immigrants cause higher crime rates?”
 - 25% said “very likely”
 - 47% said “somewhat likely”

THE POWER OF PLACE: Immigrant Communities and Adolescent Violence

Scott A. Desmond*

Purdue University

Charis E. Kubrin

George Washington University

Despite popular assumptions, criminologists have long recognized that crime rates are lower for various immigrant groups than for similarly disadvantaged African Americans. What accounts for this paradox? In this study, we consider the role of neighborhood context, specifically, the concentration of immigrants within a community, as a protective factor responsible, in part, for lower

CONCLUSION

The main finding of this study is immigrant concentration in a community reduces adolescent violence. Youths that reside in neighborhoods with large numbers of foreign-born and non-English speaking residents report fewer acts of violence, controlling for a host of individual-level and neighborhood predictors. We also find that this effect is

OXFORD

Social Problems

Exploring the Connection between Immigration and Violent Crime Rates in U.S. Cities, 1980–2000

Graham C. Ousey, *College of William & Mary*

Charis E. Kubrin, *George Washington University*

A popular perception is that immigration causes higher crime rates. Yet, historical and contemporary research finds that at the individual level, immigrants are not more inclined to commit crime than the native born. Knowledge of the macro-level relationship between immigration and crime, however, is characterized by important gaps. Most notably, despite the fact that immigration is a macro-level social process that unfolds over time, longitudinal macro-level research on the immigration-crime nexus is virtually nonexistent. Moreover, while several theoretical perspectives posit sound reasons why over-time changes in immigration could result in higher

Our analyses yielded a number of key findings. First, unlike the long-held popular view that immigration is a major factor contributing to higher crime rates, our results suggest the opposite.

on average, cities that experienced increases in immigration from 1980 to 2000 experienced a decrease in violent crime rates. Second, while our results show the measure of illicit drug

Immigration and the Changing Nature of Homicide in US Cities, 1980–2010

Graham C. Ousey · Charis E. Kubrin

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Abstract

Objectives Previous research has neglected to consider whether trends in immigration are related to changes in the nature of homicide. This is important because there is considerable variability in the temporal trends of homicide subtypes disaggregated by circumstance. In the current study, we address this issue by investigating whether within-city changes in immigration are related to temporal variations in rates of overall and circumstance-specific homicide for a sample of large US cities during the period between 1980 and 2010.

Methods Fixed-effects negative binomial and two-stage least squares (2SLS) instrumental variable regression models are used to analyze data from 156 large US cities observed during the 1980–2010 period.

Results Findings from the analyses suggest that temporal change in overall homicide and

The Power of Place Revisited: Why Immigrant Communities Have Lower Levels of Adolescent Violence

Charis E. Kubrin¹ and Scott A. Desmond²

Abstract

Contrary to popular opinion, scholarly research has documented that immigrant communities are some of the safest places around. Studies repeatedly find that neighborhood immigrant concentration is either negatively associated with crime and delinquency or not related to crime and delinquency at all. Less well understood, however, is why this is the case. A critical limitation of existing research is the exclusion of measures that capture the intervening processes by which immigrant concentration influences crime and delinquency. The current study begins to address this gap in the literature. We use data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health to examine the relationship between neighborhood immigrant concentration and adolescent violence and to assess the extent to which social capital and personal and vicarious victimization may account for this relationship. Contrary to our expectations, social capital and personal and vicarious victimization do not mediate the relationship between neighborhood immigrant concentration and

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IMMIGRATION AND HOMICIDE IN URBAN AMERICA: WHAT'S THE CONNECTION?

Charis E. Kubrin and Graham C. Ousey

ABSTRACT

Purpose – Despite the commonly held stereotype that immigration and crime go hand in hand, there are but a few studies that examine the relationship between immigration and crime across macro-social units, including neighborhoods, cities, and metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs). Even fewer focus on homicide, particularly homicide disaggregated by motive and circumstance. The current study addresses this shortcoming by examining the relationship between immigration and homicide across large cities in the United States.

Methodology – We extend prior work by disaggregating homicide into different “types” based upon motive and circumstance to determine whether immigration is linked not only to overall homicide rates but also to specific types of lethal violence that some suggest may be higher in places where immigrants are more prevalent.

Process – How does the larger community context within which immigrant neighborhoods are situated condition the immigration-crime relationship? Building on the existing literature, this study examines the relationship between immigrant concentration and violent crime across neighborhoods in Los Angeles and Chicago—two cities with significant and diverse immigrant populations. Of particular interest is whether neighborhoods with high levels of immigrant concentration that are situated within larger immigrant communities are especially likely to enjoy reduced crime rates. This was found to be the case in Chicago but not in Los Angeles, where neighborhoods with greater levels of immigrant concentration experienced higher, not lower, violent crime rates when located within larger immigrant communities. We speculate on the various factors that may account for the divergent findings.

Keywords immigration, crime, neighborhoods, spatial analysis

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Hiromi Ishizawa is an assistant professor of sociology at George Washington University. Her research interests are in social demography, immigration, and urban sociology. A current research project examines the effect of political context on various measures of immigrant

CHAPTER 19

IMMIGRATION AND CRIME IN U.S. COMMUNITIES

Charting Some Promising New Directions in Research

CHARIS E. KUBRIN AND GLENN A. TRAGER

CHAPTER 23

IMMIGRATION AND CRIME

CHARIS E. KUBRIN

Why Some Immigrant Neighborhoods Are Safer than Others: Divergent Findings from Los Angeles and Chicago

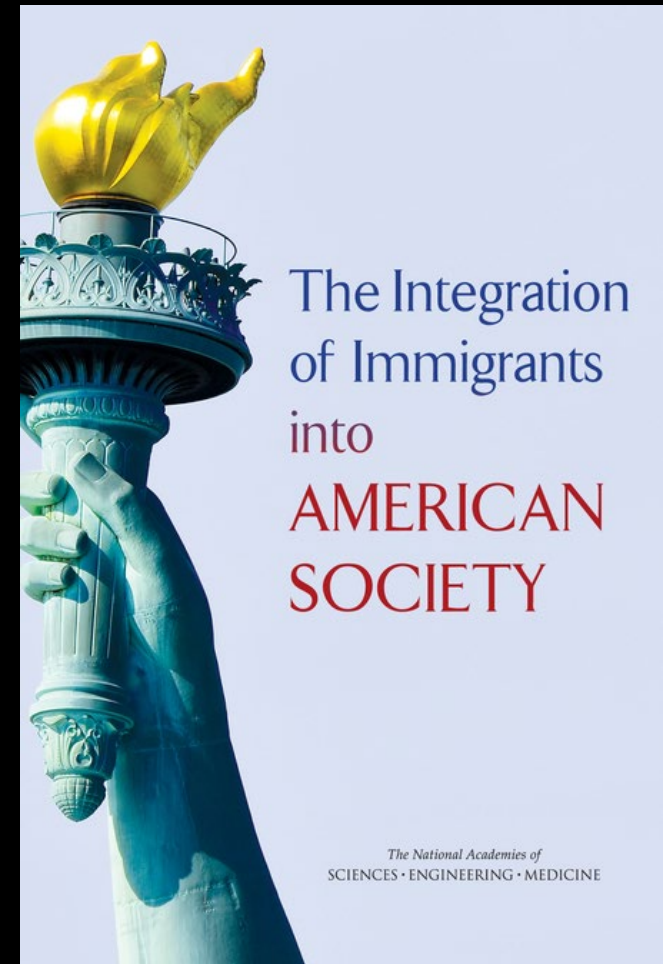
By CHARIS E. KUBRIN and HIROMI ISHIZAWA

In a widely cited (and contentious) *New York Times* op-ed published in 2006, criminologist Robert Sampson identified what he claims was largely responsible for the crime drop in U.S. cities during the 1990s. He downplayed the “usual suspects” offered up by criminologists, such as changing police practices, increased incarceration, shifting drug markets, gun control efforts, and economic opportunity and argued instead that, in attempting to understand why crime rates declined, “we have been overlooking something obvious—something that our implicit biases caused us not to notice” (March 11, 2006, p. A-27). His “unusual suspect” was foreigners. Drawing from his

HISTORICALLY, immigrants have disproportionately taken the blame for many of society’s problems. It is claimed that they steal jobs from hard-working native-born Americans, they drain America’s health care and educational resources, and perhaps most problematically, they cause higher crime rates. This blame is often based on false assumptions and stereotypes. Concerning perceptions of immigrant crim-

NATIONAL ACADEMIES OF SCIENCES REPORT

“The consistency with which studies find that areas with greater concentrations of immigrants have lower rates of crime is simply stunning. This finding, according to the collective literature, holds true for various measures of immigrant concentration as well as for different types of crime; in cross-sectional as well as longitudinal analyses of the immigration-crime nexus.”



IMMIGRATION & CRIME META-ANALYSIS

- 1) What is the overall average immigration-crime relationship? Is it positive or negative? Is it a strong relationship or one that is weak?
 - Relationship between immigration and crime is weak; null or negatively associated
- 2) Are differences in study characteristics related to any variation in findings on the immigration-crime relationship? How do certain characteristics of studies impact study findings?
 - Strongest negative findings for most complete studies and those with longitudinal design



Immigration and Crime: Assessing a Contentious Issue

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Abstract

Are immigration and crime related? This review addresses this question in order to build a deeper understanding of the immigration-crime relationship. We synthesize the recent generation (1994 to 2014) of immigration-crime research focused on macrosocial (i.e., geospatial) units using a two-pronged approach that combines the qualitative method of narrative review with the quantitative strategy of systematic meta-analysis. After briefly reviewing contradictory theoretical arguments that scholars have invoked in efforts to explain the immigration-crime relationship, we present findings from our analysis, which (a) determined the average effect of immigration on crime rates across the body of literature and (b) assessed how variations in key aspects of research design have impacted results obtained in prior studies. Findings indicate that, overall, the immigration-crime association is negative—but very weak. At the same time, there is significant variation in findings across studies. Study design features, including measurement of the dependent variable, units of analysis, temporal design, and locational context, impact the immigration-crime association in varied ways. We conclude the review with a discussion of promising new directions and remaining challenges in research on the immigration-crime nexus.

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CRIMINOLOGY

ARTICLE

DOES UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRATION INCREASE VIOLENT CRIME?*

MICHAEL T. LIGHT , TY MILLER

First published: 25 March 2018 | <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9125.12175>

* Additional supporting information can be found in the listing for this arti ... [More](#) ▾

* A previous version of this article was presented at the 2017 American So ... [More](#) ▾

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TOOLS



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Abstract

Despite substantial public, political, and scholarly attention to the issue of immigration and crime, we know little about the criminological consequences of undocumented immigration. As a result, fundamental questions about whether undocumented immigration increases violent crime remain unanswered. In an attempt to address this gap, we combine newly developed estimates of the unauthorized population with multiple data sources to capture the criminal, socioeconomic, and demographic context of all 50 states and Washington, DC, from 1990 to 2014 to provide the first longitudinal analysis of the macro-level

Race, Ethnicity, and Social Control: Immigration Today

Fall Quarter 2019

Tues, Thurs 12:30-1:50pm

HG 1800

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Class website available for enrolled students at: <https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/19410>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines key issues in race, ethnicity and social control through the lens of immigration today. It provides students with a foundation for understanding key concepts including race/ethnicity, immigration, globalization, and crime. The course focuses on several substantive areas including immigrants as criminals, immigrants as victims, immigration and crime control, immigrants' perceptions of crime and the criminal justice system, public discourse and public perception on immigration and crime, public policy related to immigration and crime, and finally, human rights issues. These issues will be explored in the United States as well as globally from a comparative perspective, focusing on several non-U.S. locales including Cuba, Mediterranean, South Africa, Southeast Asia, and more.

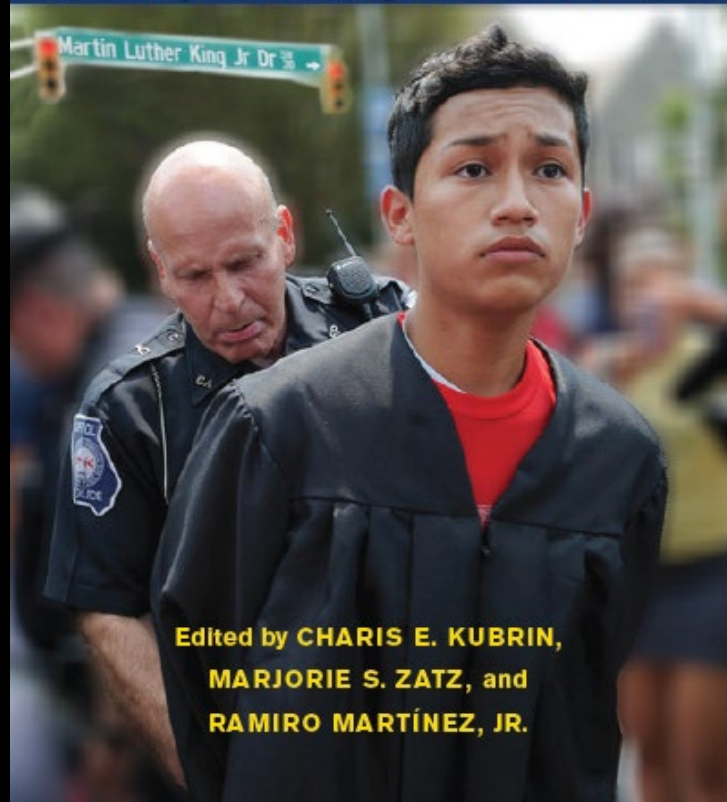
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This course has been designed with 3 goals in mind: (1) *to provide students with a foundation* to study race, ethnicity, immigration and social control in the global context, highlighting key areas of substantive interest and importance; (2) to help students develop *critical thinking skills*, with particular emphasis on how to critique existing research in the area; and (3) to teach students to *become smart consumers* of news reports, political rhetoric, and public discussion about race, ethnicity immigration, crime, and the law.



PUNISHING IMMIGRANTS

POLICY, POLITICS, AND INJUSTICE



Punishing Immigrants: Policy, Politics and Injustice

(New York University Press)

- 1) Uncover and identify unanticipated and hidden consequences of immigration policies and practices here and abroad;
- 2) Illuminate layered realities of immigrants' lives and describe varying complexities surrounding immigration and crime, law and victimization;
- 3) Situate themes within larger context of immigration and social control—new modes of control in post 9/11 era.

NIJ GRANT: NEW DIRECTIONS IN RESEARCH ON IMMIGRATION & CRIME

- Limitations in existing research:
- 1) Research lumps immigrants together and neglects important within-group differences
 - Racial/ethnic groups; emigration region; neighborhoods where immigrants co-locate once in U.S.; citizenship status; motive for migration; level of assimilation
 - How robust is the immigration-crime relationship? What are the appropriate ways to capture varied effects of immigrant groups on neighborhood crime rates? Does citizenship status matter? How does motive for migration impact how immigration and crime are associated? What about levels of assimilation? Which immigrant groups have crime reducing effects in neighborhoods? Which have crime enhancing effects? How best can researchers conceptualize and measure the ecology of immigrant communities?

NIJ GRANT: NEW DIRECTIONS IN RESEARCH ON IMMIGRATION & CRIME

- 2) Little understanding of how broader context, including where immigrants settle as well as immigration-related policies and practices, condition immigration-crime relationship
 - Destination context; immigration enforcement (policies and practices)
 - How does the broader context into which migrants settle condition the local immigration-crime relationship? How does immigration enforcement condition the relationship between immigration and crime? Does aggressive immigration enforcement discourage crime victims from coming forward? Do “sanctuary cities” attract crime-prone immigrants, reducing public safety overall?

IMPLICATIONS

- Little gained in crime control by enacting harsh, restrictive, exclusionary immigration policy
- “...Immigrants to the United States appear to have similar or lower rates of crime as those of citizens—an established finding for legal immigrants and the most plausible hypothesis for illegal immigrants. It is thus not legitimate to blame the street crime problem on immigration and to suggest that major reductions in crime in the United States will follow from any proposed changes to immigration policies” (Gottfredson and Hirschi 2020:183).
- Prevention (not just punishment)
 - Alleviate strains of disadvantage, poverty, unemployment

BARRIERS TO ACADEMIC/JOURNALIST RELATIONSHIP

- Warring timelines
 - Journalists on perpetual deadline
 - Academics have many milestones
- Journalists want neat soundbite
 - Social science research is highly nuanced
- The Academic Dilemma
 - We want our work to make a difference but...
 - No training
 - Institutional mindset
 - Little to no incentive for media coverage

Thank you!

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