



The relation between ethnic diversity and fear of crime: An analysis of police records and survey data in Belgian communities

Marc Hooghe^{a,*}, Thomas de Vroome^b

^a University of Leuven, Belgium

^b University of Utrecht, Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 27 October 2014

Received in revised form 27 October 2015

Accepted 12 November 2015

Available online 17 December 2015

Keywords:

Crime

Fear of crime

Ethnic threat

Community

Belgium

Police records

ABSTRACT

In the framework of intergroup threat theory, it is routinely assumed that the presence of immigrant groups in a local community could contribute to fear of crime among the majority population. This could be explained by a direct relation between ethnic diversity and some forms of crime, but it can also be expected that stereotypes toward specific groups of the population contribute to a perception of group threat. In this article it is assessed how the real and perceived presence of immigrant groups and the occurrence of criminal acts are related to fear of crime. The analysis is based on a combination of newly available official police records and survey data for local municipalities in Belgium. The results show there is no significant relation between reported crime and fear of crime. The community level of ethnic diversity is, however, significantly related to fear of crime. The findings suggest that applications of group threat theory should not only focus on economic and cultural threat, but also on the perceived impact of diversity on crime and safety.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Literature

Both in popular discourse as in political rhetoric, the presence of ethnic minorities and immigrant groups is often related to crime and fear of crime (Bianchi, Buonanno, & Pinotti, 2012; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). The majority population of a society shows a tendency to associate members of immigrant groups with specific forms of mostly violent crime, and anti-immigrant rhetoric in quite some cases focuses on the threat of crime that is associated with the presence of ethnic minorities (Chiricos, Hogan, & Gertz, 1997; Ceobanu, 2011; Hummelsheim, Hirtenlehner, Jackson, & Oberwittler, 2011; Jackman & Volpert, 1996). From a theoretical perspective, this is an interesting association as it shows that crime could be an important component of perceived intergroup threat (Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006). At least three different possible causal mechanisms can be distinguished in this relation. First, some research hints at the fact that specific ethnic groups tend to specialize in specific forms of crime (Beckley, 2013; Hawkins, 2011; Ousey & Kubrin, 2009). A possible relation therefore could be that ethnic minorities tend to specialize in those forms of crime, like the drugs trade, that have a stronger impact on fear of crime than forms of crime that are apparently being practiced more frequently by members of the majority group (Paoli & Reuter, 2008). Violent crime, street and drug-related offences are obvious culprits in this regard, while on the other hand various forms of white-collar crime that might be practiced more often by majority group members seem

* Corresponding author at: Centre for Citizenship and Democracy, Park Street 45, B-3000 Leuven, Belgium.
E-mail address: Marc.Hooghe@soc.kuleuven.be (M. Hooghe).

less strongly related to fear of crime and threat among the population (Gordon, 1990). A second plausible mechanism is based on the assumption that those who have high levels of social dominance orientation are more likely to associate visible minorities with crime and threat, even disregarding the evidence that is being offered by objective figures with regard to crime prevalence and victimization. In that case, fear of crime could be considered as a precursor for anti-immigrant sentiments (Barkan & Cohn, 2005). Finally, a third possible causal mechanism is that members of the majority group are more likely to see crime as disturbing and threatening if it is being committed by a member of a visible minority group (Sweeney & Haney, 1992). The assumption here is that the same act is experienced as more threatening when it is being practiced by a member of a visible minority than when the same act is being practiced by a member of the majority group. Self-evidently, we should also pay attention to the possibility that these three mechanisms occur simultaneously and might even reinforce one another. Both from a scientific as from a social point of view, however, it is highly relevant to determine how exactly we can explain a relation between ethnic diversity in society and fear of crime.

In this article, we mainly pay attention to the first and the second possible mechanism. In other words, we examine the relation between diversity and fear of crime as a test of the intergroup threat perspective, suggesting that the relation largely stems from prejudiced perceptions, while controlling for the possibility that violent crime could in fact be associated with immigrant concentration in some neighborhoods. We do not have any information on the perpetrators of criminal acts, as police records obviously do not contain information on the ethnic origin of all perpetrators. An alternative strategy is to rely on spatial data that allow us to ascertain whether, at the aggregate level, there is at least a correlation between the presence of ethnic minorities and the occurrence of specific criminal acts (Sampson, 2008; Hooghe, Vanhoutte, Hardyns, & Bircan, 2011). While taking into account both the actual level of crime and the presence of ethnic minorities in local communities, we ascertain whether the relation between diversity and fear of crime can be explained by the occurrence of anti-immigrant sentiments. This relation will be investigated using the results of a representative population survey in the northern Dutch speaking part of Belgium, where police records on crime and population records on the presence of ethnic minorities can be related to the attitudes expressed in the survey. It is important to note that we can rely on police data about registered crime, which can be located at the level of the community. As it is the first time the Belgian federal police has made these data available for scientific research, this allows us to move a step further than previous studies that did not have access to these data.

In the remainder of this article, we first review the literature on the relation between fear of crime and anti-immigrant sentiments, before we present data and methods. We close with some observations on why fear of crime is associated with the occurrence of anti-immigrant sentiments.

2. Group threat and feelings of unsafety

The feeling of group threat is a major determinant for anti-immigrant sentiments in Western Europe (Semyonov, Raijman, & Gorodzeisky, 2006). For the majority population, the influx of new ethnic groups could be considered as a threat to their dominant position, as it introduces new competitors in the competition over scarce resources. The subjective feeling of being threatened thus is a major component of the occurrence of tensions between ethnic groups in a diverse society (Quillian, 1995). A meta-analysis has shown that various forms of threat tend to contribute to the occurrence of anti-immigrant sentiments, and these threats can refer both to economic, realistic as symbolic issues. Security threat has been identified as one of the important elements within this framework (Riek et al., 2006). The perception of group threat can be economic, as immigrants are seen as competitors on the labor and the housing market, or are considered to be a potential burden for social security systems (Schlueter & Scheepers, 2010; Semyonov, Raijman, & Yom-Tov, 2002). In these cases, it is assumed that negative attitudes will be directed mainly toward immigrants originating from poor countries, or those having a weak position on the labor market. Other authors have emphasized that immigration might also lead to a feeling of cultural or symbolic threat, because immigrant groups challenge the cultural hegemony of the dominant majority within society (Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007). This feeling of threat is especially present when the cultural distance with immigrant groups is perceived to be larger, e.g., because of a different religious or cultural background. The fear of crime, furthermore, can also be considered an element of realistic threat, as members of the majority group have been shown to become more worried about crime and safety as a result of the presence of ethnic minorities in their communities (Chiricos, McEntire, & Gertz, 2001; Drakulich, 2013; Semyonov, Gorodzeisky, & Glikman, 2012; Solivetti, 2010; Wang, 2012; Wickes, Hipp, Zahnow, & Mazerolle, 2013).

Various arguments can be invoked to explain why there is such a strong association between ethnic diversity and the social discourse on crime and safety. A first possible mechanism is that specific groups within the ethnic minority population indeed would be more active in specific criminal activities. For some specific forms of crime, studies have shown clear differences with regard to the prevalence within ethnic communities, although it has to be noted that most of these differences can be explained by socio-economic background variables (McNulty & Bellair, 2003; Paoli & Reuter, 2008). On an overall level, however, most studies do not show a significant relation between the presence of ethnic minorities and the occurrence of crime within a society (Peterson & Krivo, 2005; Reid, Weiss, Adelman, & Jaret, 2005; Rumbaut & Ewing, 2007). Deprivation, a lack of collective efficacy, high levels of unemployment and the disruption of community ties have been shown to have a much stronger impact on crime rates (Hooghe et al., 2011; Reid et al., 2005). Studies actually show convincingly that, controlling for the most important correlates of crime rates, ethnic minority concentration in communities is actually strongly related to lower levels of violent crime (Martinez, Stowell, & Lee, 2010; Ousey & Kubrin, 2009; Reid et al., 2005; Sampson, 2008;

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7323759>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7323759>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)