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ASSESSING THE EFFECTS OF RECENT IMMIGRATION ON SERIOUS PROPERTY CRIME IN AUSTIN, TEXAS

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ABSTRACT: In this article the authors examine the impact of recent immigration on rates of serious property crime across communities in Austin, Texas. The greater Austin foreign-born population has increased by more than 580 percent since 1980, and Austin is considered a "preemerging" immigrant gateway city to the United States. The changing population dynamics in Austin provide an excellent opportunity to study the effect of recent immigration on crime in a target destination for recent immigrants. Although interest in the relationship between violent crime and immigration to new locales is evidenced by recent studies that show less favorable outcomes for Latinos in new destinations, little attention has been directed to the relationship of recent immigration with serious property crime in new destinations. Negative binomial regression models with corrections for spatial autocorrelation indicate that recent immigration is not associated with an increased rate of burglary, larceny, or motor vehicle theft once important structural predictors of crime are controlled for. Keywords: immigration, crime, communities, social ecology, social disorganization

Public opinion would suggest that recently arrived immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants, represent a substantial criminal threat (Chávez 2008; Longazel 2013; Ousey and Kubrin 2009). This belief tends to be strongest among native-born individuals, especially those with an inflated view of the relative size of the immigrant

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Sociological Perspectives, Vol. 56, Issue 4, pp. 647–672, ISSN 0731-1214, electronic ISSN 1533-8673. © 2013 by Pacific Sociological Association. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, at http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/sop.2013.56.4.647. population (Chiricos 2011; Wang 2012). Contributing to these beliefs, politicians have at times been guilty of flatly misrepresenting evidence on the extent of immigration, and the extent of crime committed by newly arrived immigrants (Casey 2006; Hagan and Phillips 2008; Sampson 2008), a perception that in turn exerts considerable influence on public policy related to the entire process of immigration (Chávez 2001; Hagan and Palloni 1999; Lee 2003; Martinez and Valenzuela 2006; Massey and Pren 2012; Rumbaut 2009).

But while such arguments may have strong emotional appeal, they are refuted empirically. Since the early 1990s, as the immigrant population (especially the undocumented population) increased sharply to historic highs, the rates of violent crimes and property crimes in the United States decreased significantly, in some instances to historic lows—as measured both by crimes reported to the police and by national victimization surveys (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics 2012). Moreover, data from the census and a wide range of other empirical studies show that for every ethnic group without exception, incarceration rates among young men are lowest for recent immigrants, even those who are the least educated (Rumbaut 2005; 2008; 2009). Even popular media reports contradict such findings (Kingsbury 2008; McKinley 2009).

While a growing body of community-level empirical research has also examined the relationship between recent immigration and violent crime (Akins, Rumbaut, and Stansfield 2009; Hagan, Levi, and Dinovitzer 2008; Lee, Martinez, and Rosenfeld 2001; Martinez, Stowell, and Cancino 2008; Mears 2001; Nielsen, Lee and Martinez 2005; Sampson 2008), these analyses have largely focused on traditional immigrant gateway cities, such as Los Angeles, Miami, and San Diego. As many of these areas have approached saturation levels in certain employment areas, however, foreign-born workers have relocated to other fast growing areas (Castillo 2004; Light 2006). Given the historical importance of the co-ethnic community in helping to incorporate newcomers, provide networks for employment opportunities, and buffer the potentially disorganizing effects of immigration (Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Telles and Ortiz 2008), it is increasingly critical to examine areas of new immigrant settlement. Indeed evidence from new destinations offers a less fortuitous picture for new Latino immigrants and crime (e.g., Cravey 1997; Kandel and Parrado 2005; Shihadeh and Barranco 2010; Shihadeh and Winters 2010). The first key contribution of this study, therefore, is to examine immigration and crime in the context of communities experiencing extensive new immigrant settlement.

Although studies have begun to examine the effect on violent crime in communities of new immigrant destinations (e.g., Shihadeh and Barranco 2010), the dearth of community-level studies examining recent immigration and serious property crime in these new destinations represents a significant gap in this emerging literature. New Latino arrivals to the United States are predominantly those most determined to overcome the contradiction between their life aspirations and the means to fulfill them in their countries of origin (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). New Latino arrivals are also disproportionately young men from Mexico and Central America with less than a high school education, who come in search of work without papers. Similarly, while a convergence of reasons have been offered to explain the changing geography of new immigrants in the United States in the past decade (e.g., Massey 2008; Massey and Pren 2012), much of the shift to new destinations has also been spurred by economic motivations (Crowley and Lichter 2009; Zuniga and Hernandez-Leon 2005). Cities across the United States experienced economic resurgence during the 1990s, particularly in industries recognized to employ large numbers of Latino migrants (Waters and Jimènez 2005). Despite scholars theorizing that the economic motivations related to recent immigration may yield a greater effect on property crime than violent crime (Hagan and Palloni 1999), only three studies have empirically examined the effect of immigration on property crime rates, and none have examined this relationship at the tract level. Tract-level analyses are important as they enable us to explore the link between recently arrived immigrants and serious property crime rates in the context of emerging immigration, represented by Austin. This avoids the city-level problem of including "saturated" areas of immigration within which significant, established ethnic populations may confound any potential direct relationship between *new* immigration and crime by providing enhanced access to formal institutions and social support, potentially alleviating strain. In methodological terms, variation in the relationship that might otherwise be concealed when considering an aggregate unit of analysis (e.g., cities) can be exposed when considering a smaller unit of analysis (e.g., tracts).¹

The juxtaposition between the economic motive underlying much recent immigration, and the limited economic opportunities and discrimination awaiting recent arrivals in some job markets (Hagan and Palloni 1998; Lee et al. 2001; Waldinger 1993), would create conditions under which elevated property crime would be expected—as it is property crime that targets these same monetary aspirations.

Accordingly, this study will consider the effect of recent immigration on serious property crime in the city of Austin, Texas. Austin was selected for analysis because its foreign-born metropolitan statistical area (MSA) population increased from just over 22,000 in 1980 to more than 154,000 in 2000, an increase of more than 580 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 2007). This total of 154,000 foreign-born in the MSA included 109,006 in the city of Austin specifically, over 60 percent of whom arrived between 1990 and 2000. Because of its changing population dynamics, Austin was one of five cities considered to be a "pre-emerging" immigrant gateway city in the recent Brookings Institution report *The Rise of New Immigrant Gateways* (Singer 2004). This massive and recent growth in its new immigrant population makes Austin an ideal city to examine the effect of recent immigration on property crimes in a new locale.

BACKGROUND

A growing body of empirical research has considered the relationship of recent immigration and crime in contemporary American society. Despite the fact that new immigrants often reside in communities that are characterized by a variety of criminogenic factors, research tends to show that the presence of new Latino immigrants results in either a negligible or negative effect on crime (see, for example, Davies and Fagan 2012; Hagan and Palloni 1999; Kubrin and Ishizawa 2012; Lee et al. 2001; Martinez 2002; Martinez and Lee 1998; Martinez et al. 2008; Mears 2001; Ousey and Kubrin 2009; Reid, Weiss, Adelman, and Jaret 2005; Sampson 2008; Wadsworth 2010). This body of research has focused almost exclusively on violent crime, particularly homicide, to examine the recent immigration–crime relationship.

The same immigration–crime literature is quick to acknowledge that the motivation for immigration to the United States is complicated and nuanced. Patterns of immigrant settlement, for example, have varied historically based on industrial shifts, economic needs, and policies of both sending and receiving areas (Durand and Massey 2004; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Telles and Ortiz 2008). In general, however, the reason most individuals from central and southern America choose to enter the United States, legally or illegally, is because of the gap between life aspirations and the local realities of achieving them, realizing that their country of origin may stay poor for several generations to come (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). Thus for the most ambitious and the most resourceful, economic opportunities and the sustained demand for immigrant labor by U.S. employers make immigration to the United States an attractive way to overcome this contradiction. If monetary goals are the primary motivation behind contemporary immigration, and property crime targets these same goals, then research examining recent immigration and crime requires a closer look at property crimes rather than homicide.

In the traditional sense of strain, referring to the discrepancy between blocked opportunities and aspirations, it is common to expect property crimes to increase in communities with large concentrations of new immigrants. As the post-1965 wave of Latino immigrants have settled in predominantly urban neighborhoods subject to community conditions of poverty and unemployment (Hagan and Palloni 1998; Portes and Rumbaut 2006), immigrants may face economic barriers and blocked opportunities that make it difficult to abide by conventional societal norms. As an example, new arrivals may initially be faced with limited opportunities entering into the labor market due to language barriers, a lack of well-paying jobs within close proximity, and discrimination (Fisher and Tienda 2006; Hagan and Palloni 1998; Lee et al. 2001; Waldinger 1993).

In the face of restricted legitimate opportunities, recently arrived immigrants might be expected to "innovate," and turn to economic acquisition crimes to fulfill their aspirations (Lee et al. 2001; Merton 1938). As Reid et al. (2005) discuss, this focus on opportunity structure may be too restrictive in assuming that immigrants either do or do not engage in crime as a response to their blocked opportunities. More likely, an individual will engage in both legitimate and illegitimate means at the same time as the presence of legitimate opportunities is likely to ebb and flow. But when the opportunity structure is blocked, one way immigrants may adapt is to alter cultural ideals away from middle-class normative means of achieving success, toward an oppositional culture where engaging in crime, including organized property crime, may be used as a way of acquiring wealth and status (Anderson 1999; Bankston 1998; see also Cloward and Ohlin 1960).

Earlier studies examining the link between homicide and immigration have detailed the merits of social disorganization theory for positing an association between immigration and crime (Lee et al. 2001; Nielsen et al. 2005) that's also relevant for property crime. Concurrently with the structure of economic opportunities and cultural forces, social disorganization theory suggests that a large number of recent immigrants are also likely to contribute to neighborhood crime because of the high population turnover and increasing population heterogeneity that accompanies the immigration process (Bankston 1998; Bursik and Grasmick 1993). Renewed attention to Shaw and McKay's (1931) conception of social disorganization has helped to clarify the link between social change and crime rates in disorganized neighborhoods due to a lower sense of "collective efficacy" and a lack of social control through weakened community supervision (Sampson and Raudenbush 1999).

In addition to the opportunity structure of communities, new immigration may also change the structure of the local labor market. Communities within which recently arrived Hispanic immigrants and low-income blacks share the same residential neighborhoods have long been marked with conflict over the ability of Hispanics to obtain jobs, and a perception among blacks that undocumented workers take jobs away from Americans (Bobo, Zubrinksy, Johnson, and Oliver 1995; Johnson and Farrell 1993). And employment trends continue to show the emergence of recently arrived Hispanic immigrants in industry sectors traditionally occupied by low-skill African American employees (Bean and Stevens 2003). With a reputation as hard-working employees, newly arrived immigrants may be more attractive to employers (Waldinger 1997), increasing the level of competition over low-wage jobs. An increase in the commission of property crime by nativeborn minorities displaced from the labor market may be expected (Wilson 1996), given the association between local unemployment, low-quality employment, and property crime (Allan and Steffensmeier 1989; Chiricos 1987).

The above theoretical perspectives suggest why recent immigrants may turn to property crimes to fulfill their monetary aspirations, but theory emerging from the immigration–crime literature provides equally compelling reasons for why immigration may have no effect on property crimes. Specifically, whether there is a positive or negative relationship of recent immigration and crime may depend on the presence of vibrant co-ethnic communities awaiting recent arrivals, local labor market structures, and levels of racial discrimination in the host community (Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Portes and Zhou 1993).

As discussed earlier, the image of the poor, disadvantaged migrant is inaccurate in the current context of immigration. Immigrants are not typical of those in their host countries; they are generally the most motivated and least apt to engage in criminal behavior upon arrival as it may jeopardize their gains and ability to support those in their native country (Davies and Fagan 2012; Tonry 1997; Wadsworth 2010). Many Mexican households, for example, turn to migration for instrumental reasons as an adaptive strategy to compensate for missing or failed economic markets in Mexico, sending those able to the United States—common in a society undergoing transition to a developed market society (Durand and Massey 2004). Many of these recent immigrants will not only reside in better neighborhoods than their low-income counterparts in the United States (Johnson, Farrell, and Guinn 1997), but may also bring significant resources to the area (Sampson 2008). Consistent with this, the number of Hispanic-owned businesses has grown at rates far exceeding the growth rate for all U.S. businesses over the past two decades (Castillo 2010; U.S. Department of Commerce 2010). In areas such as Los Angeles, where Latino-owned businesses make up the largest share of minority-owned enterprises, Hispanic-owned businesses have been the key to bringing jobs and revenue back into the local economy (U.S. Department of Commerce 2010). Kotkin (2000) and Stansfield (2013), among others, have argued that immigrant trades also have positive economic effects, such as job creation, for nonimmigrants in these areas. Under these conditions of economic development and job creation, it is possible that increased immigration to an area may actually lessen the motivation toward property crime (Stansfield 2013).

Even among the less-skilled and less-educated recent arrivals, economic motives may not adequately predict property crime. Research has documented high rates of employment among recent Hispanic immigrants, even if the employment happens to be at a low wage level (Martinez 2002; Martinez and Valenzuela 2006). Jobs that are considered "undesirable" and/or those offering wages that are low by American standards are often acceptable to recently arrived immigrant laborers as they offer much better wages than similar jobs in their country of origin (Martin and Teitelbaum 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2006). In addition to basic economic sustenance, the higher rates of Hispanic labor market involvement are important for an understanding of offending patterns because employment provides stability and regulation of daily behavior by requiring that people follow consistent schedules and spend time engaging in conventional activities (Bourdieu 1984; Hirschi 1969; Wilson 1996).

To advance the immigration and crime scholarship, some studies have assessed the effects of recent immigration on aggregate property crime rates at the city and metropolitan area levels, with mixed results. Using Uniform Crime Report (UCR) data for the year 2000, Reid et al. (2005) examined the relationship of recent immigration and crime across 150 metropolitan areas in the United States. After controlling for relevant demographic and economic influences, they found that the foreign-born population does not increase rates of burglary or larceny (Reid et al. 2005). Similar results were found in a 2008 Public Policy Institute of California study of twenty-nine California cities. Using data from the UCR for the years 2000 and 2005, Butcher and Piehl (2008) found that the city-level total property crime rate fell across the twenty-nine cities between 2000 and 2005, however the higher the percentage of recently arrived immigrants in these cities, the more the property crime rates fell. The results of both of these studies are in contrast to Hagan and Palloni's (1998) findings. The authors construct measures of both legal and illegal immigration within thirty-four Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas in five southwestern states, and find that the size of the immigrant population is positively related to rates of property crime arrests. Yet while Hagan and Palloni (1999) have further suggested that immigration is more likely to be associated with property-based offenses, the limited empirical research discussed above has yet to demonstrate this in traditional locales, and to our knowledge, no effort has been made to explicitly examine the commission of property crime at the neighborhood level, or in new destinations.

NEW DESTINATIONS

While the above studies suggest an inconclusive relationship between recent immigration and property crime, a number of issues remain. Community-level studies examining the direct effect of recent immigration on property crime, especially in new destinations, are rare. Thus the principal goal of this article is to report additional evidence in the absence of a clear relationship between recent immigration and property crime in an emerging immigrant gateway.

Second, a majority of community-level studies have to date focused on cities with a long history of immigration from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. While prior to 1990 the Latino population remained somewhat limited in most cities throughout the United States (Suro and Singer 2002), a sizeable increase in the Latino population began to emerge in cities in new destinations thereafter (Singer 2004; see also Massey and Pren 2012). "New destinations" thus primarily refers to cities that had very small or nonexistent Latino populations up until 1990 compared to traditional destinations. As these traditional immigrant gateway cities, such as Los Angeles, have approached saturation levels in certain employment areas, foreign-born workers have relocated to other fast growing areas much like Austin, Texas (Castillo 2004; Light 2006). While past neighborhood research suggests overwhelmingly that areas with higher concentrations of Latino immigrants tend to have lower rates of crime, the evolving immigrationcrime literature has provided ample theoretical reasons to expect entry into these new destinations to be more problematic for Latinos (e.g., Cravey 1997; Crowley and Lichter 2009; Shihadeh and Barranco 2010).

These new destinations are not likely to have significant established ethnic populations (e.g., networks of Latino families and businesses preexisting the recent wave of immigration) and as such lack "the social control umbrella of traditional destinations" (Shihadeh and Winters 2010:631), depriving new immigrants of a significant source of social capital (Leach and Bean 2008). The importance of co-ethnic community has been discussed for protecting this population not only against outside discrimination but also against engaging in violence (Sampson 2008). At the heart of this debate is the issue of successful integration, and the idea that recently arrived immigrants can be integrated more successfully into a community with existing Latino populations and networks, offering social, cultural, and economic capital (Waters and Jimènez 2005). In the more heterogeneous communities of new destinations, the potential for disadvantage to undermine the benefits of co-ethnic community and intergenerational alliance may be heightened. Given the historical importance of co-ethnic community in helping to incorporate newcomers, provide networks for employment opportunities, and buffer the potentially disorganizing effects of immigration (Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Telles and Ortiz 2008), it is increasingly critical to examine areas of new immigrant settlement that do not have these same ethnic support systems.

In addition, neighborhoods in new destinations tend to differ in important ways for recently arrived Latinos, who tend to be younger, and have lower educational and occupational skills than their native-born counterparts (Vásquez, Seals, and Marquardt 2008). Segregation and housing research has highlighted that Latinos tend to be more segregated in new destinations (Lichter, Parisi, Taquino, and Grice 2010), with neighbors who are more likely to be poor, contributing to the concentration of poverty (Quillian 2012). As such, Latinos in new destinations seem to face a tougher economic and social context for adaption, integration, and assimilation (Massey 2008; Massey and Pren 2012). Given the structural dissimilarities between traditional and new locales, it is important to continue to examine differences between these. This growing ethnic diversity has raised concerns about growing poverty, increased crime, and a declining quality of life, evident in previous qualitative analyses of community conditions (Massey 2008; Zuniga and Hernandez-Leon 2005), despite the fact that research has found surprisingly few negative economic impacts on new destinations of Latinos (Crowley and Lichter 2009).

A number of recent studies have examined the effect of immigration to new destinations. Recent work by Shihadeh and Winters (2010) suggests that Latinos may be able to offset the lack of existing immigrant community by relying more on local religious ecology to keep crime low and community strong. This study also adds weight to previous findings of Shihadeh and Barranco (2010; 2011), however, to suggest that high Latino immigration areas are not the safe havens they are in traditional destinations. Instead Latinos are murdered at an exceedingly high rate. A notable omission from this recent body of work, however, is an examination of property crimes. One of the "violent crimes" often included in several studies of the immigration–violent crime relationship in traditional destinations is robbery (e.g., Ousey and Kubrin 2009; Reid et al. 2005; Stowell, Messner, Mcgeever, and Raffalovich 2009). Robbery clearly has a heavy instrumental motivation, making it similar to property offenses in the sense that it is economically motivated. However, to our knowledge, there have been no prior examinations of burglary, theft, and motor vehicle theft within new or emerging immigrant destinations.

DATA, METHODS, AND ANALYSIS

Across the United States, geographic context can have important implications for crime and its causes so it is important to consider the effect of immigration on community crime patterns using a variety of different cities (Lee et al. 2001; Martinez et al. 2008). Given the changing demographics of Austin, the city provides an interesting setting for analyzing the relationship between recent immigration and crime.

Although Texas is a traditional location for immigrants, and studies of immigration and crime (Martinez et al. 2008), Austin differs substantially from Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, and other cities that have a long history of immigration from Central and South America. It is because Austin has virtually no significant history of immigration that Singer (2004) has called Austin a new urban gateway. As an example, examination of Census Data from 2000 shows that the number of Latino immigrants in Austin who had arrived prior to 1980 was 8,878, compared to 66,413 in Houston and 59,076 in El Paso. In 2000, the city of Austin had a foreign-born population of 109,006 (about 17 percent of its total population). The vast majority of foreign-born in the city of Austin originated from Latin America (66 percent), and more than 60 percent of the total foreign-born population arrived between 1990 and 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2007). Given the proportion of Austin's-born population that has recently arrived, it provides a strategic research site to examine immigration into an area that is less able to provide networks of support, which would attenuate the strain associated with immigration.

Hispanic Americans are not a homogenous population and there are myriad cultural, social, and economic differences within this group (Rumbaut 2007; Tienda and Mitchell 2006; Zhou 2001). The Latin American population of the city of Austin in 2000 was made up predominantly of Mexicans (86 percent) (U.S. Census Bureau 2007). There was, however, substantial variation in the percentage of new immigrants in each neighborhood. Our data reveal that the mean percentage of the population that were new immigrants in 2000 was slightly more than 8.5 percent but ranged from 0 to more than 36 percent across the tracts, highlighting substantial variation across the tracts.

Austin also has an exceptionally high property crime rate (combined with a low violent crime rate). Of American cities with populations greater than 250,000 in 2009, Austin was in the top five in terms of total property crime rate but in the bottom third in violent crime (UCR 2009). This underscores the importance of examining the relationship of immigration with *property* crime as well as the need to consider community context in analyses of structural predictors of crime.

Data

The units of analysis for this study are 181 of a total of 182 census tracts encompassing the city of Austin.² Each tract that was included had no less than 700 residents with an average tract population of 4,574. Consistent with a number of similar studies (Lee et al. 2001; Martinez 1997; 2004), the minimum population requirement is necessary to stabilize crime incident counts, avoiding areas with very few residents where the significance of criminal activity may be statistically inflated.

As noted, earlier studies of the immigration and crime relationship at the tract level are needed as recent immigrants are not evenly spread across cities. Rather research has shown that immigrants tend to settle in more central and disadvantaged areas of cities (Hagan and Palloni 1998) with other-race neighbors who are disproportionately black, or non-Hispanic white, whose poverty rate is significantly above the average (Quillian 2012). In addition, the theoretically relevant predictors linking immigration and property crime (e.g., financial strain and social disorganization) are not evenly distributed across cities either. Census tracts allow a comparison of property crime outcomes across different levels of disadvantage and instability, while considering the spatial distribution of crimes in a city (Krivo and Peterson 1996).

Measures

Data on serious property crimes were obtained from the Austin Police Department records management system for the years 2004–2006.³ The three-year average in crime count totals were employed to reduce the impact of annual fluctuations (Crutchfield 1989). The time frame selected for analysis was deliberate, for multiple reasons. The first addresses immigration enforcement, which saw major changes beginning in 2007. These data predate a massive expansion of the border patrol budget, which almost doubled between 2006 and 2008 (see Massey and Pren 2012), the passage of the Secure Communities Program (an Immigration and Customs Enforcement program to identify and deport criminal noncitizens arrested by state and local authorities), and a more rigorous enforcement of 287g, a section of the Immigration and Nationality Act that requires state and local police to more rigorously enforce immigration and naturalization violations. As a consequence of these factors, it is possible that underreporting of crime by both documented and undocumented immigrants, found by research to be at levels comparable to other minority populations prior to this time, may have increased (Rumbaut 2009). Specifically referring to 287g, this was the finding of a yearlong investigative effort by the Police Foundation on the consequences of federal efforts to collaborate with local police on immigration enforcement (Police Foundation 2009) and reflects the declining trust of immigrant populations in the police after 2007 based on this new local enforcement role (Pew Hispanic Center 2007a).

In addition to the significant changes in immigration enforcement from 2007 onwards, the U.S. housing bubble peaked in 2006 and the corresponding recession began in 2007, which had a particularly devastating effect on new housing construction. These jobs were disproportionately held by immigrants—the Pew Hispanic Center estimates that as much as 60 percent of the new construction jobs created from 2004–2006 were held by immigrants, most of them recent immigrants (Pew Hispanic Center 2007b). The disappearance of these jobs combined with more rigorous immigration enforcement described above resulted in Mexican immigration dropping to "net zero" from 2005–2010—roughly 1.4 million Mexicans immigrated to the United States and 1.4 million Mexican immigrants and their U.S.-born children moved from the United States to Mexico (Passel, Cohn, and Gonzalez-Barrera 2012). We selected data from 2004–2006 for analysis in order to avoid these tumultuous effects, which could have confounded our analysis of recent immigration and property crime.

Despite these efforts, it is important to acknowledge limitations in our measures of property crime. Despite their common use in research on crime, underreporting has always been an issue with UCR index offenses (Gove, Hughes, and Geerken 1985), and particular forms of property crimes tend to be the most affected. Depending on the value of the property and nature of the offense, a victim may not see the utility of reporting such offenses to the police, the property may not be insured, or there may be more general reasons to avoid contact with the police. The highest rates of police notification for property crimes are among victims of motor vehicle theft, upwards of 83 percent of cases, and the lowest among larceny victims (Rand and Catalano 2007). The underreporting of property offenses may therefore lead to an underestimation of the effect of immigration on property crime, particularly among relatively minor larceny cases. There is, however, evidence to suggest that the likelihood of reporting property crime victimization to the police has substantially increased over time (Baumer and Lauritsen 2010) and in the absence of better alternatives these data are commonly employed to analyze race/ethnic differences in the commission of property offenses.

It is also important to recognize that our tract-based analyses make a spatial assumption and that offending patterns are highly localized and occur predominately within the tract of residence. This is justified based on previous research that indicates, by and large, most offenders commit their crimes in fairly close proximity to their place of residence. In part this is a function of routine activities; the paths that offenders regularly travel affect their awareness of criminal opportunity and likelihood of crime commission, and these paths are disproportionately near an offender's place of residence (Cohen and Felson 1979). With respect to property crime specifically, Geographic Information Systems analyses of property crime patterns indicate criminal acts follow a "distance-decay function," meaning that the further away the regular activity space of an offender is, the less likely that the person will engage in a predatory criminal activity. However, the immediate proximity to one's residence is typically avoided for fear that they will be identified by a neighbor (Rossmo and Rombouts 2008; see also Beavon, Brantingham, and Brantingham 1994). The result is most crimes occur within two miles of the offender's residence (Rossmo 2000). Census tracts are typically much larger than this, averaging about twenty city blocks and 4,000 persons (tracts analyzed in the present article averaged just over 4,500 persons), of sufficient size to capture the majority of property crimes committed by tract residents.

Independent Variables

Data for our independent variables were drawn from the 2000 decennial census. Consistent with existing research on immigration and crime (Lee et al. 2001), we employ a measure of recent immigrants as our measure of immigration. *Percent new immigrants* is the percentage of the total tract population that is foreign-born and that arrived in the United States between the years 1990 and 2000. As noted above, over 60 percent of the foreign-born population in Austin arrived between 1990 and 2000. As with existing studies of crime at the neighborhood level (Bursik 1989; Nielsen et al. 2005), a *community stability index* was created. The index was created by summing *z* scores of two variables: the percentage of houses occupied by owners and the percentage of the population that has lived in the same house for five years or more.

Concentrated disadvantage is thought to weaken social control of communities, resulting in increased crime (Sampson and Bean 2006). Consistent with extant ecological research on the effects of neighborhood disadvantage and extreme poverty (Crutchfield 1989; Massey and Denton 1993; McNulty 2001; Nielsen et al. 2005; Sampson, Morenoff, and Raudenbush 2005; Wilson 1987; 1996), we include measures of economic disadvantage shown to be linked with criminal outcomes unemployment, poverty, and family disruption: *the percentage of the population over age 16 that is male and unemployed; the percentage of persons living below the poverty line;* and *the percentage of family households headed by a female, no husband present*. To address the issue of high collinearity among these independent variables, we used principal components factor analysis to generate an *economic disadvantage* factor.⁴ The variables loaded at .79 or higher and generated a factor eigenvalue of 2.11. A Cronbach's alpha test of reliability yielded a score of .72, indicating an acceptable degree of reliability (Carmines and Zeller 1979; Field 2005). After the creation of the composite measures described above, no bivariate independent variable association exceeded .61 (see Appendix), suggesting no problems with multicollinearity (Field 2005). In addition variance inflation factors were run for the models and no Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) in any model for any crime exceeded 2.38, which indicates very low or no concern with multicollinearity (Menard 1995).⁵ Finally, we included two variables commonly employed in ecological research on crime: (1) the percentage of the population that is male between the ages of 15 and 24 and (2) the natural log of the population size.

Estimation Procedures

As noted above we employ crime counts rather than crime rates. Property crime tends to be concentrated on a relatively small group of victims, specifically those whose household and area characteristics make them most vulnerable. Because of this, the use of common statistical estimation techniques such as Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression would be inappropriate. Previous studies have also confirmed that Poisson model assumptions are not satisfied for property crime events because repeat victimizations are more concentrated than a Poisson distribution would indicate (Lauritsen and Davis-Quinet 1995). The Poisson regression model assumes that the mean is equal to the standard deviation, so the measures employed here are all overdispersed for such a distribution (i.e., they have a variance significantly greater than the mean). Negative binomial regression possesses qualities similar to Poisson regression, but with an extra regression coefficient to account for overdispersion, so we employ negative binomial regression to analyze counts of serious property crime (Osgood 2000; Willis, Broidy, Gonzales, and Denman 2011).

Our analyses also control for spatial autocorrelation. The "First Law of Geography" states: "everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things" (Tobler 1970:236). As a consequence crimes are not randomly distributed across communities. Events that occur in one location may be affected by those occurring nearby, so there may be clusters of tracts with high rates of crime (resulting in positive autocorrelation), or clustering of high crime tracts adjacent to low-crime tracts due to policing activities and displacement effects (resulting in negative autocorrelation) (Nielsen et al. 2005). Using geographically based software (GeoDa) it is possible to test a model for the effects of spatial autocorrelation and adjust the model if spatial autocorrelation is present. As with existing research we employ a twostage approach to control for spatial autocorrelation using count-dependent variables (see, for example, Nielsen et al. 2005). We used GeoDa to create a tract-fitted spatial lag term⁶ for the dependent variable, which was exported from GeoDa, imported into Stata 9, and added to the respective models. Consistent with Baller et al., this spatial lag term captures the spatial dependence of property crime in a particular census tract on property crime in the adjacent tracts (Baller, Anselin, Messner, Deane, and Hawkins 2001).

RESULTS

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for all variables that are included in the multivariate analyses (as well as rate-based crime figures, for comparison purposes here). Compared to other U.S. cities with populations greater than 250,000, Austin has a high rate of serious property crime. But there is significant variation across the property crime measures. Austin has a high rate of larceny and burglary and a below average rate of motor vehicle theft. The mean of the percent of Austin's foreign-born population that arrived between 1990 and 2000 was just greater than 8.5, but ranged to as high 36 and exceeded 20 in many tracts. Examining bivariate correlations between our measure of new immigration and property crime rates reveals a moderate association between the burglary rate and the percentage of the foreign-born population who entered between 1990 and 2000 (r = .27). Correlations with the rate of larceny (.06) and motor vehicle theft (.13) are not as strong. The percentage of the population that is young and male average 9.6 but ranged from a low of 2 to a high of almost 45. The tracts with large young male populations were those encompassing or adjacent to the University of Texas. As expected, community instability and disadvantage also varied substantially by tract.

Tables 2, 3, and 4 present the results of the negative binomial regression analyses that consider the effect of recent immigration on burglary, theft, and motor vehicle theft, respectively, controlling for other factors. Model 1 considers the effect of recent immigration and the control variables on the respective property

	М	SD	Min.	Max.
Burglary (counts, 3-year average)	39.72	30.37	0	140
Burglary (rate per 10,000)	97.22	67.26	0	399.61
Larceny (counts, 3-year average)	175.07	172.85	0	1,435.33
Larceny (rate per 10,000)	457.57	590.77	0	6,192.11
Motor vehicle theft (counts, 3-year average)	15.12	17.09	0	139
Motor vehicle theft (rate per 10,000)	38.34	52.69	0	599.65
Percent new immigrants (arrived in U.S. 1990–2000)	8.59	7.33	0	36.40
Population size (Ln)	8.32	.46	6.61	9.74
Percent young and male	9.63	6.34	1.98	44.72
Community stability	0	1.57	-4.35	3.28
-Percent houses owner-occupied	51.75	27.11	.3	97.3
—Percent residents, same house 5 years+	43.47	12.80	11.4	73
Economic disadvantage	0	1	-1.37	4.13
—Percent males over 16 unemployed	3.96	3.34	0	21.85
—Percent persons living in poverty	12.95	11.91	0	69.43
—Percent households, female headed, no husband present	11.19	7.03	2	39
Spatial lag				
Burglary	41.12	23.73	.33	96.93
Larceny	190.13	114.83	5.33	668.99
Motor vehicle theft	16.16	12.66	0	65.33

TABLE 1 Descriptive Statistics

Negative Binomial Regression Results for Burglary					
	Model 1		Model 2		
Intercept	-1.871*	(.929)	-1.343	(.965)	
(Ln) population	.518**	(.111)	.476**	(.112)	
Percent young males (15–24)	003	(.010)	004	(.010)	
Community stability	010*	(.041)	097*	(.041)	
Spatial lag burglary	.026**	(.003)	.022**	(.003)	
Recent immigration (to U.S.)	.002	(.007)	002	(.007)	
Economic disadvantage			.120	(.069)	
Maximum likelihood R^2		.50		.51	
<i>N</i> = 181					

TABLE 2

Standard errors in parentheses p < .05. **p < .01.

	IADLE 3				
Negative Binomial Regression Results for Larceny					
	Model 1		Model 2		
Intercept	1.699	(1.162)	2.224	(1.231)	
(Ln) population	.323*	(.137)	.275	(.142)	
Percent young males (15–24)	.011	(.013)	.008	(.013)	
Community stability	170**	(.051)	178**	(.051)	
Spatial lag larceny	.003**	(.001)	.002**	(.001)	
Recent immigration (to U.S.)	.003	(.009)	001	(.010)	
Economic disadvantage			.121	(.073)	
Maximum likelihood R^2	.28		.28		
<i>N</i> = 181					

TABLE 2

Standard errors in parentheses.

p < .05. p < .01.

crime, while Model 2 examines the effect of these variables on property crime once economic disadvantage is controlled for.

For all three measures of serious property crime and in both models, tracts that are proximate to crime-prone tracts experienced more crime themselves. With respect to burglary, community instability and population size were also significant predictors. Tracts with a higher level of community stability had lower levels of burglary, and larger tract population size correlated with higher burglary rates. Despite the theoretical case made earlier, leading us to expect a positive relationship, recent immigration did not increase burglary in Austin regardless of the control for economic disadvantage. Instead we found that the impact of immigration on burglary was negative or null.

In our analyses of larceny, the spatial lag variable and population size predicted higher rates of larceny. Tracts with higher levels of community stability had lower levels of theft. As with burglary, recent immigration did not increase theft in Austin either with or without the control for economic disadvantage.

Negative Binomial Regression Results for Motor Vehicle Theft					
	Model 1		Model 2		
Intercept	.418	(1.148)	1.341	(1.205)	
(Ln) population	.111	(.137)	.025	(.141)	
Percent young males (15–24)	.031*	(.013)	.027*	(.013)	
Community stability	111*	(.049)	127**	(.049)	
Spatial lag MVT	.049**	(.006)	.041**	(.007)	
Recent immigration (to U.S.)	.002	(.009)	003	(.009)	
Economic disadvantage			.172**	(.078)	
Maximum likelihood R^2	.48		.49		
<i>N</i> = 181					

 TABLE 4

Standard errors in parentheses.

p < .05. p < .01.

Analyses of motor vehicle theft in Austin revealed that the spatial lag variable and the percent of young males in the tract were positively associated with crime. Unlike burglary and larceny, the size of the tract population had no effect on motor vehicle theft in Austin. This may be due to cars being more likely to be stolen in downtown or "target-rich" areas, as opposed to thefts that are more likely to occur closer to the perpetrator's home. Tracts with higher levels of disadvantage did have more motor vehicle theft, however. Geographic proximity to motor vehicle theft hotspots was also a significant predictor of auto theft. Tracts with a higher level of community stability had lower levels of motor vehicle theft. As with burglary and theft, we found that the impact of recent immigration on motor vehicle theft was null.

DISCUSSION

Although it has been theorized that the economic motivations related to recent immigration may yield a greater effect on property crime than violent crime (Hagan and Palloni 1999), only three studies have empirically examined the effect of immigration on property crime rates, and none have examined this relationship at the tract level. Tract-level analyses of this topic are important as they enable an investigation of recent immigration and serious property crime rates in the context of an area of emerging immigration, represented in the present study by the city of Austin. This analytic strategy avoids the city-level problem of including "saturated" areas of immigration and crime via the enhanced institutions and social support provided by existing immigrant networks, and potentially alleviating strain on recent immigrants.

Because many immigrants to the United States, especially Mexicans and Central Americans, are young men who arrive with very low levels of formal education, popular stereotypes tend to associate them with higher rates of crime and incarceration. The fact that many of these immigrants enter the country through unauthorized channels or overstay their visas often is framed as an assault against the "rule of law," thereby reinforcing the impression that immigration and criminality are linked. This research has attempted to provide further evidence to consider in the immigration–crime debate by examining the relationship with serious property crimes in an emerging gateway city.

The vast majority of the research on immigration and crime has focused on crimes of violence. While this research is clearly important, new Latino arrivals to the United States are typically motivated to immigrate by their desire to achieve prosperity, a desire that is often blocked in their country of origin (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). As first-generation immigrants to the United States may initially face limited economic opportunities (Hagan and Palloni 1998; Lee et al. 2001; Waldinger 1993), and the commission of property offenses may be seen as a way to achieve these monetary aspirations (Merton 1938), it is property crime, not violent crime, which should have the greatest association with immigration if one exists in new destinations. Recent immigrants to new destinations are disproportionately young men from Mexico and Central America who come in search of work but typically have little education and often no proof of citizenship. Under such conditions, while evidence has shown that Latinos may be murdered at an exceedingly rate (Shihadeh and Barranco 2010), elevated rates of property crime would also be expected.

Conversely, there are reasons to expect recent immigration may reduce rates of serious property crime. Immigrants are not representative of those from their host countries; they tend to be the most motivated and least likely to offend (Tonry 1997). Many of these recent immigrants will reside in better neighborhoods than their low-income counterparts in the United States (Johnson et al. 1997) and bring significant resources including employment opportunities to the area (Kotkin 2000; Sampson 2008; Stansfield 2013; U.S. Department of Commerce 2010). Even among the less-skilled and less-educated recent arrivals, property crime may not be motivated by economic motives. The high rates of employment amongst recent Hispanic immigrants (Martinez 2002; Martinez and Valenzuela 2006) include employment in positions considered "undesirable" or low paying by domestic workers but which are regarded as acceptable to recently arrived immigrants who compare the opportunities to those in their country of origin (Martin and Teitelbaum 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2006). The high rate of labor market involvement is important for an understanding of offending patterns because employment provides stability and regulation of daily behavior by requiring that people follow consistent schedules and spend time engaging in conventional activities (Bourdieu 1984; Hirschi 1969; Wilson 1996). Under these conditions it is possible that increased immigration to an area may actually lessen the motivation to commit property crime.

Our findings indicate that recent immigration is not a meaningful predictor of burglary, theft, or motor vehicle theft in this emerging urban gateway, once community variables are controlled for, which is consistent with the existing research on violent crime in tradition locations (Alaniz, Cartmill, and Parker 1998; Lee et al. 2001; Martinez 2004; Reid et al. 2005), and contrary to the recent research on violence in new locales (Shihadeh and Barranco 2010). There are a few possible explanations for why we do not see higher rates of property crime in new urban gateway communities. In addition to the reasons mentioned above, immigrants from Latin American countries, especially Mexico and Central America, are more likely to define their economic and social situation from the vantage of a "dual frame of reference" in which present opportunities in the United States are compared with past realities of fear and economic scarcity (Suárez-Orozco 1989). Thus, strain is avoided by implication. With assimilation, however, the dual frame of reference dissipates and the strain associated with deprivation is apt to increase. This is consistent with findings that first-generation (foreign-born) immigrants are least likely to commit violent crimes, followed by the second generation (the children of foreign-born parents), with third generation (the children of native-born parents) the most likely of these groups to commit acts of violence (Harris 1999; Rumbaut 2005; 2008; Sampson et al. 2005).

The lack of a relationship between new immigration and property acquisition crimes in Austin could also be a result of the economic neighborhood revitalization that results from immigration. There is a growing consensus that immigration revitalizes and stabilizes local communities (Lee et al. 2001; Portes and Mooney 2002). Revitalization lessens criminal outcomes, particularly property crimes, not just among the immigrant population, but also amongst all population groups through business development and the increase in jobs made for native-born Americans in serving the needs of the expanding population (Rosenfeld and Tienda 1999). Many of the jobs created that require more responsibility and skill would be likely to be filled by native-born workers (Reid et al. 2005). The net economic benefit of immigration to communities may thus explain why we do not find evidence of the theoretical rise in the commission of property crime by either recent immigrants or displaced native-born workers. Net community growth and development resulting from immigration would certainly not be a new phenomenon. The past decade has witnessed a number of examples of the revitalization of stagnant economies. Queens, New York, has witnessed economic rejuvenation driven largely by the success of black immigrants from the Caribbean. Similar rejuvenation of inner city areas has occurred in Los Angeles, Miami, and other Latino immigrant hotspots (Sampson 2008). Even urban areas that have struggled for decades to revitalize downtown commercial neighborhoods, like Poughkeepsie, New York, have seen regeneration of the downtown area as a result of both top-down investment to meet the needs of the growing population as well as bottom-up growth of Mexican commercial enterprises (Mano and Greenow 2006).

Austin, for its own part, is currently undergoing revitalization across the city, including communities on the east side of Interstate 35, where the majority of residents have been Mexican or African Americans since city planners segregated these communities from downtown areas. The economic development and revitalization Austin is witnessing has also occurred in tandem with the city's changing demographic profile due to immigration (Wilson et al. 2007). Furthermore, Austin has begun competing with other Texas cities for wealthy immigrants from Mexico to bolster economic development. The wealthy and well-educated arrivals are buying and building high-end homes in the northern suburbs, opening restaurants, and investing in high-tech businesses, all helping to create local jobs. As an example, in

2010, information technology firm Evox, based in Monterrey, invested \$2.4 million in an Austin office, hiring eleven local employees (*American Statesman* 2011). And this looks to be a process that is set to continue in Austin. In May of 2011, the Greater Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the City of Austin hosted their first seminar for Mexican investors, where more than forty business owners were able to learn about the legal steps to starting enterprises in Austin.

While Austin is a prima facie example of an emerging destination, it is important to note that the city has had a number of favorable policies toward immigrants in recent years. As one example, the police department in Austin collaborated with local banks to encourage immigrants to open bank accounts in an effort to reduce the risk of robberies (Singer 2004). Such policy stances are certainly more favorable than has been seen in some of the newer emerging areas of Arizona and Alabama, however innovative and positive responses to immigrant workers by labor organizations and politicians are not unique to Austin. Rather, they have become more frequent in many new areas such as the Delmarva Peninsula, as more local actors have become aware of their contributions to the local economy and communities (Dunn, Aragones, and Shivers 2005). To this extent, results based on Austin may be generalizable to other areas that have largely welcomed and relied on economically motivated immigration. Despite the lack of co-ethnic community that has been critical in traditional locales (Sampson 2008), evidence from Austin may suggest that institutional support and welcoming policies help offset the loss of this social control umbrella.

There are some limitations to this study. The data are cross-sectional and thus cannot follow patterns of immigration over time. This leaves open two important questions. First, it remains difficult to examine whether the new immigrants entering the United States are different from their peers who did not emigrate, raising the possibility that their lower involvement in crime predates their arrival in the United States (Hagan et al. 2008). The role of the selection process that leads persons to emigrate and settle in particular neighborhoods remains a challenge (Morenoff and Astor 2006). Second, it remains difficult to adequately study second- and third-generation children of immigrants, in the United States, using community-level demographic information provided by the U.S. Census. Research on the offending patterns of U.S.-born children of immigrants should continue as it is this population that appears to be at an elevated risk of criminal offending, criminal victimization, and a variety of other negative social outcomes (Portes and Rumbaut 2006).

There are also well-known shortcomings of official crime statistics. Although research indicates significant increases in the likelihood of reporting property victimization to the police over time (Baumer and Lauritsen 2010), underreporting remains an issue with UCR index offenses and some property crimes, particularly larceny, tend to be the most affected. Depending on the value of the property and nature of the offense, a victim may not see the utility of reporting such offenses to the police, the property may not be insured, or there may be more general reasons to avoid contact with the police. The underreporting of property offenses may therefore lead to an underestimation of the effect of immigration on property crime. To minimize concerns with underreporting, the data used in this analysis are for the years 2004–2006, as explained above.

In conclusion, this article extends the body of knowledge on new immigration settlement and crime. We examine the relationship of new immigration and serious property crime in the unique quasi-experimental environment provided by Austin's rapid and substantial growth in new immigration, ostensibly the most criminogenic of environments if the anti-immigration rhetoric is to be believed. Our findings based on Austin communities are consistent with the existing literature and further indicate the protective effect of recent immigration on public safety. Given the cumulative weight of the evidence on immigration and crime, the rise in immigration is arguably one of the most important reasons that crime rates in general continue to decrease in the United States—and even more so in cities of immigrant concentration (Rumbaut and Ewing 2007). For immediate policy implications, therefore, it is worth reiterating that the problem of crime and incarceration in the United States is not "caused" or even aggravated by recent immigration. Meanwhile, the communities where immigrants choose to settle are reaping the benefits. But the uncritical assumption that the opposite is true persists among policymakers, the media, and the general public, thereby depriving a genuine understanding of complex phenomena-a situation that undermines the development of evidence-based, reasoned public responses to both crime and immigration.

APPENDIX Correlation Matrix					
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Pop (ln)	1.0000				
2. Young males	0.0213	1.0000			
3. Stability	0.0134	-0.6133	1.0000		
4. Foreign born	-0.0123	0.2100	-0.2849	1.0000	
5. Disadvantage	0.0508	0.3010	-0.2105	0.5185	1.0000

NOTES

- 1. The issue of unit of analysis and obfuscation of effects has not been directly addressed in the context of community-level immigration and crime research, but this issue has been found to be substantively important in related work. This includes research on segregation and disadvantage (Massey and Denton 1993) and research considering the association of race/ethnic population composition and indicators of environmental justice (Anderton 1997; Anderton et al. 1994; Bowen, Salling, Haynes, and Cyran 1995). Massey and Denton note that measuring segregation at the neighborhood (tract) level is necessary because the larger the unit of analysis, the more likely variation in segregation is to be concealed within the aggregate unit; so that which may appear to be an "integrated" city may actually be quite segregated on a neighborhood by neighborhood basis (Massey and Denton 1993). Similarly, Bowen et al. (1995) found a positive association between the percent black and the release of toxins into the environment by Ohio chemical companies when measured at the county level, but when considering the relationship at the census tract level, this association disappeared.
- 2. Tract 16.06 was excluded from the analyses because its population was just 450 residents. However, analyses were run including tract 16.06 and the results were not

substantively different from those presented. We also considered the possible impact of tracts 5.0, 6.3, and 6.4, as these tracts either encompass or are adjacent to the University of Texas and have large student populations. Exploratory analyses were run excluding these and the results similar to those presented in the tables.

- 3. Crime data from 2004–2006 was matched to the closest available decennial census, which was in 2000. The figures of population and housing should not significantly change over the 5-year time lapse, and matching to the most recent decennial census is an accepted method (see Martinez 1997).
- 4. Analyses including the percent of the tract population that is African American were also run. There was no meaningful effect on the coefficients for recent immigration and serious property crime. This variable was omitted given the absence of a compelling theoretical reason for its inclusion outside of its association with concentrated disadvantage, which was included in the models.
- 5. Because negative binomial regression is an overdispersed, discrete response regression model, VIF is not typically used to test for multicollinearity. However, the same model can be run in OLS, and VIF calculated, because the dependent variable is not of concern when calculating VIF (as it is when running analyses on overdispersed count-dependent variables). We did this and no VIF in any model for any crime exceeded 2.38. Although there is no standard, accepted VIF level to indicate excessive multicollinearity, the literature suggests that a VIF value of 10 (a common rule of thumb figure) to as low as 4 may be indicative of a potential collinearity problem (see, for example, Menard 1995). However, it is important to recognize that even VIF values far in excess of 10 do not necessarily discount the results of a regression analysis (O'Brien 2007).
- 6. Specifically, we used GeoDa to create a contiguity-based rook weights matrix, which defines a location's neighbors as those areas with shared borders. Neighbors are defined as 1 and the location and nonneighbors are defined as 0.

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