

MINORITY PARADOXES: ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN SELF-REPORTED OFFENDING AND OFFICIAL CRIME STATISTICS

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Immigrants and their native-born children tend to be overrepresented among crime suspects in Europe. Using a representative Dutch survey, we examine whether inhabitants of Turkish and Moroccan origin also self-report more crimes than the native Dutch. In addition, we test various explanations for ethnic differences in crime, partly using variables that are unavailable in administrative data (socio-economic status [SES], perceived discrimination, neighbourhood disadvantage and control, family bonds, religiousness). We discover two 'minority paradoxes'. Firstly, contrary to analyses using administrative data, both minorities have similar to lower self-reported crime rates compared to the majority group when age, sex, urbanization, SES and social desirability are controlled. Secondly, first-generation immigrants report fewer crimes than expected given their social disadvantage, thus indicating a notable 'righteous migrant effect'.

Keywords: ethnic minorities, self-reported crime, law enforcement, immigration, assimilation

Introduction

Immigrants and their native-born children are generally found to be overrepresented among crime suspects and convicted offenders in Europe (De Haen-Marshall 1997; Tonry 1997; Bucerius and Tonry 2014). A recent Dutch study, e.g., reported that the country's four largest ethnic minorities, which originate from Turkey, Morocco, Surinam and the Dutch Antilles, had between 2.2 (first-generation Turkish immigrants) and 8.1 (native-born with two Moroccan-born parents) higher odds of being a crime suspect than the native Dutch (Blom and Jennissen 2014). Variables such as age, sex, socio-economic status (SES), and degree of residential urbanization only partially explained the higher odds. Although there is considerable doubt about whether official crime data indicate ethnic differences in criminal behaviour (Tonry 1997; Van der Leun and Van der Woude 2011), European scholars tend to see the overrepresentation of ethnic minorities in official crime figures as a behavioural consequence of a hampered social integration of migrants and their children in the host society (Tonry 1997; Killias 2009; Koopmans 2010; Engbersen *et al.*, 2014). Interestingly, in the traditional immigration countries outside Europe (United States, Canada and Australia), first- and second-generation immigrants are typically not, or less, overrepresented in crime statistics (Lynch and Simon 1999; Wortley 2009; Bersani 2014; Bucerius and Tonry 2014).

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American researchers actually speculate about a *protective* effect of immigration, which is assumed to dissipate over time. In that connection, [Martinez \(2002\)](#) and [Sampson and Bean \(2006\)](#) introduced the notion of a ‘Latino paradox’ in American criminology, which holds that foreign-born Latinos in particular do better on various social indicators, including violence, than would be expected given their social disadvantage. Here, crime among immigrants and their offspring is actually seen as a—paradoxical—consequence of increased integration into (segments of) US society ([Portes and Zhou 1993](#); [Sampson *et al.* 2005](#); [Rumbaut and Ewing 2007](#); [Sampson 2008](#)).

The available quantitative studies on migration, ethnicity and crime are almost entirely based on criminal justice and other administrative data, and two limitations result from that focus. Firstly, it is unclear to what extent findings regarding the overrepresentation of ethnic minorities among crime suspects in Europe indicate differences in criminal behaviour or mostly point at ethnic differences in the probability of criminal behaviour being detected, reported and prosecuted. Official crime data are likely to be biased against ethnic minorities, especially those with lower SES. A considerable body of research points at the importance of stereotyping and prejudice among officials and the wider public to the disadvantage of individuals of low SES and/or ethnic minority background ([Weenink 2009](#); [Van der Leun and Van der Woude 2011](#)). Additional biases can be expected from [Black’s \(1970\)](#) social distance theory, which argues that the probability of formal law being applied increases with the social distance between offender and victim (also see [Rojek *et al.* 2010](#)). Because of family ties and network homophily, criminal victimization tends to be intra-ethnic, especially for crimes, such as intimate partner violence, that typically occur within the offender’s primary group ([O’Brien 1987](#)). However, individuals from a small group are more likely to meet individuals from a large group than vice versa. Given that ethnic minority populations are smaller than the ethnic majority, offenders with minority status will therefore, for statistical reasons, be relatively likely to victimize somebody outside their ethnic group—thus putting themselves at a higher risk of formal sanctioning.

Such biases may be less influential in the United States and Canada than in Western European countries, which are relatively reluctant to receiving immigrants (cf. [Cornelius *et al.* 2004](#); [Esipova *et al.* 2015](#)) and generally have lower percentages of foreign-born. By implication, transatlantic differences in the association between migration and crime may be smaller than official crime figures indicate. Although most Dutch criminologists contend that selective law enforcement only partially explains the overrepresentation of ethnic minorities in officially recorded crime (for a discussion see [Engbersen *et al.* 2014](#)), the extent to which such figures do indicate ethnic differences in criminal behaviour is unclear.

Secondly, quantitative analyses of the causes of ethnic differences in criminal behaviour have largely been limited to variables that researchers could measure with administrative data—using variables such as age, sex, ‘generation’ and, in more advanced analyses, using administrative microdata ([Blom and Jennissen 2014](#); [Bovenkerk and Fokkema 2016](#)), socio-economic position and demographic household characteristics. Other relevant factors—both factors that put ethnic minorities at risk of offending (e.g. perceived ethnic discrimination) and factors that may be protective for them (e.g. family bonds and religiosity)—have rarely been considered in studies of this type.

Thus, to better understand whether and how ethnicity is related to criminal behaviour, we have to strive for methodological triangulation and also examine data that (1)

are not directly influenced by selective law enforcement and (2) include information that is unavailable in administrative data.

This article aims to fill both gaps with data from the *Netherlands Longitudinal Lifecourse Study (NELLS)*. Conducted by a team of sociologists, the NELLS is a large survey ($N = 5,312$) on the living situation and attitudes of the Dutch population in 2010 (De Graaf *et al.* 2010).¹ The survey included several items on offending and is representative for the native Dutch population aged between 15 and 45 years and for ethnic Turks and Moroccans—the country’s two largest ethnic minorities—in that age span. Hereafter, these two groups will be called the ‘Turkish Dutch’ and ‘Moroccan Dutch’ to acknowledge their connection to the Netherlands (most persons in these groups also have Dutch nationality). The ‘native Dutch’ are defined as people with two Netherlands-born parents.

The following research questions guided the analysis:

- (1) Do first- and second-generation Turkish and Moroccan Dutch report more crimes than native Dutch respondents?
- (2) How can ethnic differences in self-reported offending be explained?
- (3) How do the patterns of self-reported offending compare to police data?

Using the NELLS data, we consider five factors that may promote ethnic differences in criminal behaviour: (1) SES, (2) perceived ethnic discrimination, (3) neighbourhood disadvantage and control, (4) family bonds and (5) religiousness. We juxtapose levels of self-reported crime by ethnic group and generation to police data, and compare our multivariate results to similar analyses regarding crime suspects (Blom and Jennissen 2014).

We are aware of four (mostly older) studies that have previously compared rates of self-reported offending among different ethnic groups. These studies have yielded differing results: two found higher rates of self-reported offending among ethnic minorities (but not of the magnitudes that are regularly observed in official data), one found lower rates and one study found no significant differences. Killias (2009) conducted a survey in 2006 among 2,067 native Swiss youth and 772 migrant youths, and, for most crimes, found two to three times higher rates for minority youth from ‘Balkan countries’, and smaller differences for other immigrant youth. Wittebrood (2003) analysed data from a Dutch school survey that included 420 youngsters of Moroccan or Turkish origin and found that they were somewhat more likely to report crimes than native Dutch youth (16% against 12%). In 1993 and 1994, Murad *et al.* (2003) conducted a survey among 363 youth of Turkish origin and 1,098 native Dutch adolescents: 31% of the native Dutch males scored above the 75th percentile on a delinquency scale against 21% of the Turkish Dutch males. Junger and Polder (1992) compared self-reported crime and police data on Moroccan ($N = 182$), Turkish ($N = 196$), Surinamese ($N = 206$) and native Dutch ($N = 204$) youth living in the same neighbourhood, all with comparable SES, and found no significant ethnic differences in self-reported offending. Junger and Polder stressed that their survey results should be distrusted as respondents of immigrant origin allegedly underreported criminal behaviour more than native Dutch youth.

¹The data are deposited at the DANS data archive: https://dans.knaw.nl/en/front-page?set_language=en.

The recent methodological literature indeed gives some credibility to the latter claim (cf. [Kim and Kim 2015](#)). First-generation immigrants in particular—especially those from relatively ‘collectivistic’ societies—typically show higher magnitudes of social desirability bias than the majority group. Among the advantages of the NELLS data compared to the existing studies is that the data include various items from the Marlowe–Crowne Social Desirability Scale, which allowed us to assess and control ethnic and generational differences in social desirability (cf. [Saunders 1991](#)).

The theoretical background of our hypotheses is discussed in the Hypotheses, Risk and Protective Factors section. As we will see, each hypothesis involves two elements: it is argued why a factor explains criminal behaviour *and* why that factor is expected to promote higher or lower crime rates among the Turkish and/or Moroccan Dutch relative to the native Dutch. As the second element requires some knowledge of the characteristics of the ethnic groups included, the next section first gives some concise information about immigration in the Netherlands.

The Netherlands as a Reluctant Country of Immigration

In 2010, when the NELLS was conducted, 10.3% of the Dutch population ($N=16,574,989$) was foreign-born, and 10.0% was native-born with one or two foreign-born parents. With 2.3% and 2.1% respectively, both the Turkish and Moroccan Dutch represented about one-tenth of those of foreign (parental) origin. Other immigrant groups mostly originate from former colonies (e.g. Surinam, the Dutch Antilles), from source countries of asylum migration (e.g. Afghanistan, Somalia) and from European Union member states (e.g. Germany, Poland).

The Netherlands has been characterized as a ‘reluctant country of immigration’ ([Cornelius et al. 2004](#)). To the extent that the Dutch government actively sought to attract migrants, it mainly recruited ‘guest workers’ from Mediterranean countries in the 1960s and early 1970s. Like other Western European countries, it first attracted workers from Southern Europe, before recruiting Turks and Moroccans. The workers were expected to return to their countries of origin, but a significant part of the Turkish and Moroccan workers in particular reunified with their families and settled permanently. Afterwards, a considerable number of youth with Turkish or Moroccan parents married a spouse from their parents’ country of origin ([Leerkes and Kulu-Glasgow 2011](#)). Both Turkey and Morocco—especially the rural areas where most migrants originated from—are relatively poor and ‘traditional’ societies with high levels of communal social control, as indicated by a patriarchal family structure and high rates of religiousness ([Lucassen and Penninx 1997](#); [Pels 2000](#)).

In spite of gradual upwards social mobility ([Heath et al. 2008](#)) and stricter immigration policies ([Leerkes and Kulu-Glasgow 2011](#)), the Turkish and Moroccan Dutch still have a relatively low SES. In 2010, e.g., the percentage of households with a disposable annual income below €10,000 was 10% for the ‘Turks’ and 9.2% for the ‘Moroccans’, against 4.5% for the native Dutch.² Both minorities are also overrepresented in relatively disadvantaged neighbourhoods (cf. [Leerkes and Bernasco 2010](#)).

²Statistics Netherlands, <http://statline.cbs.nl>, visited August 2017.

The Turkish and Moroccan Dutch tend to have relatively tight familial bonds. Both groups—especially the Turkish Dutch—typically marry and procreate at a relatively early age, and they are relatively unlikely to live on their own as a student (Leerkes and Kulu-Glasgow 2011). In 2015, 40% and 50% of the Turkish and Moroccan Dutch reported having daily contacts with their family, against 30% among the native Dutch (Statistics Netherlands 2016). Among the native Dutch in particular, there has been a notable increase in ‘liquid love’ (cf. Bauman 2003): as lifelong relationships became less common, a substantial number of people live in single-person households during periods of their lives. In 2010, 39% of all households among persons in the 15–45 age span were single-person households.³

Almost all Turkish Dutch (94%) and Moroccan Dutch (97%) are Muslims, and a majority (56% and 84%) are practicing Muslims, meaning that they pray daily, follow a halal diet and participate in Ramadan. A part of them also regularly visit mosques (70% among practicing ‘Turks’ and 51% among practicing ‘Moroccans’) (Maliapaard and Gijsbers 2012). Among the general population, 49% self-identifies as religious, making the Netherlands one of the world’s most atheist countries (De Hart and Dekker 2013; Röder 2015).

In 2013, the majority of the Turkish (73%) and Moroccan Dutch (76%) claimed to have experienced some form of discrimination that year (Andriessen *et al.* 2014). Among those experiencing discrimination, 54% felt discriminated because of ethnicity, and 51% (Moroccans) and 39% (Turks) felt discriminated because of religion. Among the native Dutch, less than 1% felt discriminated on ethnic or religious grounds. Field experiments show the existence of actual ethnic discrimination on the labour market (Andriessen *et al.* 2012).

Van der Leun and Van der Woude (2011) hypothesized that the increasingly ‘actuarial’ Dutch criminal justice system—which has led to proactive stop and search powers being expanded—entails a risk of ethnic profiling. Two recent ethnographies indeed highlight widespread practices of ethnic and racial profiling among Dutch police, which, according to the researchers, are partly due to racism among police (Mutsaers 2014; Çankaya 2015). Older studies found little evidence for such racism and argued that eventual ethnic selectivity mostly arose from a desire among police to optimize ‘organizational output’ under conditions of limited resources: at most, police tended to monitor groups that they had come to suspect of crime (see e.g. Junger 1990).

In the latter view—which is still dominant in Dutch criminology—selective law enforcement possibly inflates but does not ultimately cause the overrepresentation of ethnic minorities in official crime figures (for a fuller discussion, see Engbersen *et al.* 2014). It is pointed out that various ‘white’ minorities (Yugoslavs, Russians, Poles) are also prominent in crime statistics, although they are less likely to experience ethnic profiling. Some ‘visible’ minorities, such as the Chinese Dutch, are actually underrepresented among crime suspects.

In 2011, 71% of the Turkish Dutch and 67% of the Moroccan Dutch had ‘sufficient’ trust in the police, against 78% of the native Dutch (Huijnk and Andriessen 2016).

³Statistics Netherlands, <http://statline.cbs.nl>, visited August 2017.

Hypotheses, Risk and Protective Factors

We started with the hypothesis that *first- and second-generation Turks and Moroccans report higher levels of criminal behaviour than respondents of native Dutch origin* (H1). The hypothesis is in line with all Dutch studies using police suspect data (e.g. [Blokland et al. 2010](#); [Blom and Jennissen 2014](#); [Engbersen et al. 2014](#)), the dominant view among Dutch criminologists that selective law enforcement only partially explains ethnic differences in suspect rates and [Wittebrood's \(2003\)](#) findings regarding self-reported delinquency.

In what follows, we discuss five additional hypotheses (H2–H6) that pertain to the second research question. We first discuss factors that are expected to put ethnic minorities such as the Turkish and Moroccan Dutch at risk of criminal offending (*SES, perceived ethnic discrimination, neighbourhood deprivation and control*), followed by a discussion of two factors that may be protective for these groups compared to the native Dutch (*family bonds and religiousness*).

[Ellis and McDonald \(2001\)](#) compared 273 studies into the relation between SES and criminal behaviour and concluded that SES was a significant predictor of criminal behaviour in many, though not all, studies. According to general strain theory, which builds on [Merton's \(1967\)](#) anomie theory, a low SES may put pressure on people to engage in criminal behaviour (cf. [Agnew 2001](#)). Moreover, social bonds are assumed to be relatively weak among the lowest social strata in particular. [Blom and Jennissen \(2014\)](#) indeed found that ethnic differences in SES explain part of the overrepresentation of the Turkish and Moroccan Dutch among crime suspects. For these reasons, we hypothesize (H2): *The effect of being a first- or second-generation Turk or Moroccan on self-reported offending diminishes after controlling SES.*

Immigrants are often labelled with an ethnic 'master status' (cf. [Hughes 1945](#)), i.e. a status overshadowing other traits. Such forms of labelling risk being coupled with ethnic discrimination, both actual and perceived, which promote criminal behaviour for two reasons. Firstly, discrimination is likely to be felt as an additional strain on top of low SES ([Simons et al. 2003](#)). Secondly, it is an indicator of a social environment seeing certain groups as 'deviant', possibly promoting 'secondary deviance' via the labelling mechanism (cf. [Grattet 2011](#)). We therefore hypothesize (H3): *The effect of being a first- or second-generation Turk or Moroccan on self-reported crime diminishes after controlling perceived ethnic discrimination.*

Neighbourhood social control reduces neighbourhood deviance and crime, including crimes committed by residents (cf. [Sampson et al. 1997](#)). Poorer immigrants are likely to start their housing careers in relatively 'disorganized' and socially deprived neighbourhoods. Over time, they obtain the resources to relocate to more prosperous and 'organized' neighbourhoods, or may reinvigorate their neighbourhoods of settlement ([Sampson 2008](#)). Given that the Turkish and Moroccan Dutch are still overrepresented in disadvantaged and ethnically diverse neighbourhoods, we hypothesize (H4): *The effect of being a first- or second-generation Turk or Moroccan on self-reported crime diminishes after controlling differences in neighbourhood disadvantage and control.*

Family bonds tend to reduce criminality as they typically foster informal social control. In his classical formulation of social bond theory, [Hirschi \(1969: 16\)](#) explicitly mentions family relations: 'Elements of social bonding include attachment to families, commitment to social norms and institutions (school, employment), involvement in activities, and the belief that these things are important'. Before we started this study,

it was somewhat unclear whether familial bonds are stronger or weaker among Turkish and/or Moroccan Dutch than among the native Dutch. On the one hand, there was evidence—which was discussed in the previous section—that familial bonds are relatively strong among the minorities, leading us to hypothesize (H5a): *The effect of being a first- or second-generation Turk or Moroccan on self-reported crime increases after controlling family bonds.* Junger and Polder (1992), by contrast, found that ‘Moroccan’ and ‘Turkish’ youth had higher arrest rates than the native Dutch of comparable SES living in the same neighbourhood, which they implicitly attribute to differential family bonds, including lower parental supervision of ethnic minority youth, especially among ‘Moroccans’. Although the NELLS data mostly pertain to young adults (rather than youth), we therefore formulated the following counterhypothesis: *The effect on self-reported crime of being a first- or second-generation Moroccan in particular diminishes after controlling familial bonds* (H5b).

Religiosity is generally found to be negatively associated with crime (Johnson *et al.* 2000). In the European context in particular, first- and (less so) second-generation immigrants are more religious than the majority population, which is especially true for migrants originating from rural areas in ‘Islamic countries’ (Röder 2015). As a rule, religiosity can therefore be expected to protect Dutch Moroccans and Turks from crime relative to the native Dutch, leading us to hypothesize (H6): *The effect of being a first- or second-generation Turk or Moroccan on self-reported crime increases after controlling religiousness.*

Methodological Approach

Data and missing values

The NELLS is a large survey for sociological research on the living situation and opinions of residents of the Netherlands (for a more elaborate methodological discussion, see De Graaf *et al.* 2010). It pertains to the 15–45 years age span and was carried out in the 4 biggest cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht) and 31 randomly selected municipalities. Random samples were taken from three types of inhabitants. Firstly, persons from Turkish origin (born in Turkey or with at least one parent born in Turkey); secondly, persons from Moroccan origin (born in Morocco or at least one Moroccan-born parent) and thirdly, the remainder of the population, mostly native Dutch (two Netherlands-born parents), but also inhabitants with other parental origins (the latter were excluded from the analyses). The ‘Turks’ and ‘Moroccans’ were over-sampled so as to obtain a sample that would also be representative for the two minority groups.

We used the first wave, which was carried out in 2010 ($N = 5,312$). It consisted of two parts, a face-to-face interview and a questionnaire, which included the items measuring criminal behaviour.

Operationalization

Five items were combined to measure *criminal behaviour*. Respondents were asked if, in the last 12 months, they had been involved in the following activities: ‘stolen something from a person or a shop’, ‘damaged or demolished property of others’, ‘carried

a weapon (knife, gun), 'threatened someone', 'kicked or punched someone or participated in a fight'. For each item, respondents could answer on a four-point scale ('never', 'once', 'two–three times' and 'four times or more'). We calculated the *sum* of reported crimes for each respondent with the category 'two–three times' being counted as 2.5, and 'four times or more' as 4. We also created a dichotomous variable measuring whether or not the respondent reported at least one crime.

Two variables measured *SES*: income and educational level. Income is the net monthly income of the respondent and eventual partner. Incomes were classified into low (net monthly income of up to €1,499), middle (€1,500–€2,499) and high (€2,500 or more). Educational attainment was similarly classified in three categories: 'no formal education or primary education', 'secondary education' (high school, lower professional education) and 'tertiary education' (higher professional education, university degrees). When respondents were still in school, the unfinished school level was used. Respondents who obtained a diploma outside of the Netherlands were asked to indicate whether the diploma corresponded to a low, middle or high education level.

Perceived ethnic discrimination was measured by averaging the following items: 'Did you in any of the following situations experience that you were discriminated on the basis of your ethnic background (1) during a job application, (2) at work, (3) at school, (4) on the street, in stores, or in public transport, (5) in associations or sports clubs, (6) during nightlife or discotheques'. Respondents could answer 1: 'no, never'; 2: 'yes, once in a while' or 3: 'yes, quite often'. We used the average value of the scores on these six variables and deducted 1, thereby obtaining a scale from 0 (no perceived discrimination) to 2 (high perceived discrimination). Cronbach's alpha was 0.81. Perceived ethnic discrimination was set at zero for all native Dutch respondents. The NELS did not ask the native Dutch about perceived ethnic discrimination, probably because studies show that they hardly experience it (cf. [Andriessen et al. 2014](#)). As was reported in the previous section, the latter assumption is more or less supported by other survey data.

Three community measures were included. Firstly, *neighbourhood disadvantage*, a neighbourhood-level factor score based on four indicators by Statistics Netherlands: (1) the average real estate value in the neighbourhood (factor loading: -0.53), (2) the percentage of rental housing (0.47), (3) the average income per income recipient (-0.46) and (4) the percentage of residents receiving welfare benefits (0.53). The factor had an eigenvalue of 2.9 and explained 74% of the variation in the four indicators mentioned. In addition, we calculated *neighbourhood collective efficacy* and *neighbourhood contacts*, by aggregating to the neighbourhood level the mean values on selected survey items for all respondents living in the same neighbourhood, regardless of ethnic origin. *Neighbourhood collective efficacy* is the neighbourhood average of six 5-point items, each ranging from 0 to 4, namely people in this neighbourhood: (1) 'greet each other', (2) 'trust each other', (3) 'go along well', (4) 'know each other', (5) 'like to help each other' and (6) 'would say something against youth causing nuisance' (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85). *Neighbourhood contacts* is the neighbourhood average of the seven-point item 'How often do you have personal contact with a person in your neighbourhood', which was recoded from low (0) to high (6).

Three variables measured *family bonds*. Firstly, whether or not the respondent lived with a child and/or partner. Secondly, whether or not the respondent lived with at least

one parent.⁴ Thirdly, parental relationship quality, based on six items measuring contact and level of satisfaction with each parent.⁵ The first four items were as follows: ‘How much contact do you have with (1) your mother face to face, (2) your father face to face, (3) with your mother via calling, email, text or chat and (4) with your father via calling, email, text or chat?’ All items had the same seven answer categories ranging from ‘(almost) every day’ to ‘never’. The fifth and sixth variable ‘How satisfied or unsatisfied are you at the moment with the relation that you have with your mother?’ and ‘How satisfied or unsatisfied are you at the moment with the relation that you have with your father?’ had five-point response options ranging from ‘very satisfied’ to ‘very unsatisfied’. The first four items were recoded into a five-point scale before being combined with the latter two items into one scale measuring parental relationship quality, ranging from ‘very unsatisfied’ (0) to ‘very satisfied’ (4) (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.74). *Personal religiousness* is a five-point item (‘How important is religion for you personally’), ranging from not important at all (0) to very important (4).

Finally, the following control variables were used: age, sex, degree of urbanization of the municipality and social desirability. Urbanization follows the official classification by Statistics Netherlands. The options were ‘small village’, ‘big village’, ‘small city’ and ‘big city’. The NELLS dataset includes 5 three-point items from [Crowne and Marlowe’s \(1960\)](#) Social Desirability Scale: (1) ‘There have been occasions when I have taken advantage of someone’, (2) ‘I’m always willing to admit it when I make a mistake’, (3) ‘I sometimes feel resentful when I don’t get my way’, (4) ‘I am always courteous, even to people who are disagreeable’ and (5) ‘No matter who I’m talking to, I’m always a good listener’. We averaged these items into a scale ranging from 0 to 2. The reliability of the scale was relatively low (alpha = 0.49) and could not be improved by dropping items.

Analytical method

We compared self-reported offending rates from the NELLS to population suspect rates by Statistics Netherlands, both with and without controls for social desirability. Subsequently, all hypotheses were tested in Stata 13 (StataCorp LLC, Texas, USA) using negative binomial regression with robust standard errors allowing for clustering of observations at the neighbourhood level, using the preexisting NELLS population weights. Robust regression was preferred to multilevel regression, because it was impossible to conduct weighted multilevel analyses (the NELLS data only include individual-level weights). Clustering of observations was limited at both the neighbourhood (intraclass correlation [ICC] = 0.077) and the municipality level (ICC = 0.025) and was more of a ‘nuisance’ than a focal point of interest (cf. [Cameron and Miller 2015](#)). Negative binomial regression was used because the dependent variable—the total amount of self-reported crimes committed in the last 12 months—was skewed and overdispersed (cf. [Land et al. 1996](#)): most respondents did not report crimes, a significant minority reported one or a few crimes and a small minority reported many crimes. In all models, we controlled age, sex and degree of urbanization of the municipality,

⁴We also ran models with separate dummies for living with one or two parents. The coefficient of the dummy living with two parents was the most negative of the two, but did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

⁵If information on the father was missing, we used information on the mother and vice versa.

thus excluding basic demographic explanations for ethnic differences in criminal behaviour.

We first estimated a model with four dummies indicating the respondent's ethnic group by generation (being of native Dutch origin was a reference category), and with sex, age and urbanization as controls. We added relevant variables block by block, while examining how their addition affected the coefficients of the dummies indicating ethnic minority membership by generation. Using seemingly unrelated estimation, it was tested whether the changes in coefficients from one model to the next were statistically significant. We estimated all models with and without the social desirability control. For each model, we report coefficients of the dummies indicating ethnic origin with and without the social desirability control; the reported coefficients of all other coefficients were obtained while including the social desirability measure.

Prior to the analysis, all missing values were deleted, so as to keep the number of observations constant between different models. After selecting 'Turkish', 'Moroccan' and 'native Dutch' respondents under 45 who filled in the questionnaire, which included the questions on criminal behaviour, 4,294 respondents remained. The eventual regression analyses pertain to 4,074 respondents (95%), living in 261 different neighbourhoods across 35 municipalities. A small number of cases (~1%) could not be used because the respondent filled in less than two items measuring delinquency. The remaining missing values are mostly due to missing information on parental relationship quality (about 4.5%) and, less so, on perceived ethnic discrimination and personal religiousness variable (less than 1%). The respondents refusing to state their income were classified as missing (about 10%) and kept in the analysis by creating a dummy 'income missing'.

Validity

Self-reported offending is assumed to be a reasonably valid measure of 'less serious' criminal behaviour (cf. Jolliffe *et al.* 2003), and we are fairly confident that the NELLE data measure ethnic differences in relatively minor forms of crime reasonably well and are an important addition to criminal justice data. That position can be explained by discussing two limitations of survey data at some length.

Firstly, criminal behaviour, which is a sensitive subject for most people, is likely to be underreported, possibly leading to social desirability respondent bias (SDRB). Various techniques have been developed to control SDRB, and we followed Saunders' (1991) recommendation to introduce the Marlowe–Crowne scale as a control variable in multiple regression analyses (also see Sutton and Farrall 2005). It was checked whether there were *interaction effects* between ethnic origin and social desirability on self-reported offending, which was not the case, suggesting that the items measuring criminal behaviour were not differentially sensitive for minority respondents with an inclination to social desirability than for such respondents among the native Dutch. It should be mentioned, however, that there is still the possibility that the items measuring criminal behaviour were relatively sensitive for *all* respondents of immigrant origin regardless of their score on the social desirability scale, e.g., because they feared that reporting criminal behaviour would harm the image of the immigrant group.

The Marlow–Crowne scale has been criticized for being confounded with genuine individual differences in religiosity (Watson *et al.* 1986) and prosocial behaviour (Mills and Kroner 2005). Introducing it as a control variable may therefore represent a kind of ‘overcontrol’; it could lead us, e.g., to underestimate the protective effects of ethnic minority status on crime via religiousness and (other) variables that are mediated by prosocial attitudes, such as familial bonds. We therefore estimated separate models with *and* without the social desirability control. The results *without* the social desirability control are likely to represent an *underestimation* of the crime involvement of respondents with minority status relative to ethnic majority respondents. The results *with* the social desirability control are expected to represent an *overestimation* of criminal behaviour among ethnic minorities relative to the majority group, given that the former are expected to score relatively high on religiousness and familial bonds.

SDRB was also reduced in other ways: (1) the questionnaire only included questions about relatively ‘minor’ crimes, (2) respondents were asked to answer a broad gamut of sociological questions, not just the sensitive items on crime and (3) the delinquency items were included in the written questionnaire, so as to prevent interviewer effects.

A second methodological concern is that high-rate offenders are unlikely to participate in surveys (Junger-Tas and Marshall 1999). Such a bias would be especially problematic should there be ethnic differences in the sampling and response rates of such offenders. For example, if those committing crimes with ethnic minority status had elevated chances of being imprisoned, they would have a lower chance to be sampled, potentially leading to an underestimation of criminal behaviour among the ethnic minorities. Fortunately, Dutch imprisonment rates are too low to create a meaningful non-response. Even among ‘Moroccans’, the ethnic group with the highest imprisonment rate, no more than 3 per 1,000 persons were imprisoned on a given day in 2011 (no data for 2010).⁶ Ethnic differences in response rates were limited: the overall response rates among the Turkish and Moroccans Dutch and other respondents (mostly native Dutch) were 46%, 50% and 56% respectively. The influence of undersampling of potential offenders, such as males, was reduced by using the NELLS population weights.

Although all this gives some confidence in the NELLS, it should be stressed that it is possible to remain somewhat agnostic about its ability to measure the ‘true’ rates of relatively minor criminal behaviour in different ethnic groups, while still identifying central risk and protective factors for ethnic minorities and the majority group, which was the second motivation underlying our study. The coefficients of the dummies indicating the effects of ethnicity on crime may be too low, or too high, but the *changes* in these coefficients from model to model still provide important evidence about risk and protective factors. A dummy going down from one model to the next indicates that the added variables tend to put the minority group at risk of criminal behaviour compared to the ethnic majority group; a dummy going up from one model to the next indicates that the added variables are protective for the minorities.

⁶On 1 September 2011, 548 of 10,975 prisoners were Moroccan-born, and about 500 prisoners were second-generation Moroccans (Henneken-Hordijk and Van Gemmert 2012).

Results

Self-reported offending versus police suspect data

Table 1 compares the NELS self-reported offending rates by ethnic group and generation to population suspect rates by Statistics Netherlands for a similar age span. We also report figures on self-reported offending that are adjusted for social desirability (see note for details).⁷

Both minorities turn out to have *much* higher suspect rates than expected given their self-reported offending rates. The official suspect rate among the two minority groups varies between 3.9% (first-generation Turks) and 11.1% (second-generation Moroccans), which is between 2.0 and 5.6 times higher than for the native Dutch (2.0) in this age span. When social desirability is not controlled, the self-reported crime rates are actually *lower* among first-generation immigrants than among native Dutch, and they are only 1.1 (second-generation Moroccans) and 1.5 (second-generation Turks) times higher among the second generation. Adjusting the rates for social desirability leads to higher self-reported offending scores for all groups but changes the rates of first-generation immigrants the most: their rates become comparable to the self-reported rates among the native Dutch. The elevated second-generation self-reported crime rates are associated to their relatively young age within the 15–45 age span (see Model 1, next section).

The two final rows in **Table 1** show the ‘incidence density’, i.e. the *average number of crimes per respondent* specified by ethnic group and generation (the criminal justice equivalent for this figure is unavailable). The self-reported incidence density after adjustment for social desirability shows the highest correlation with the percentage of crime suspects ($r = 0.52$, see the last column in **Table 1**). If we, therefore, assume that the self-reported incidence density under low social desirability represents the best measurement of the true incidence of criminal behaviour, the percentage of crime suspects among the minorities is still between 1.6 (first-generation Moroccans and second-generation Turks), 1.9 (first-generation Turks) and 3.6 (second-generation Moroccans) higher than the NELS data would suggest.⁸

Descriptives

The remainder of the Results section pertains to the NELS data. **Table 2** shows means of the dependent and independent variables by ethnic group and generation. All figures pertain to respondents without missing values. For that reason, the average number of reported crimes by respondent and ethnic group differs somewhat from **Table 1**.

We find that first-generation immigrants were relatively old, with an average age of 33 years, whereas second-generation immigrants were five to seven years younger than the native Dutch. The majority of the ‘Turks’ and ‘Moroccans’ lived in large cities, against one-quarter of the native Dutch. Both minorities have a considerably lower

⁷The group figures under low social desirability were calculated by estimating a model with five IVs: the four dummies indicating ethnic origin by generation and social desirability. We then calculated the percentage for each group based on the constant and the coefficient for the dummy indicating ethnic group and generation.

⁸For example $(11.1/2.0)/(0.32/0.21) = 3.6$.

TABLE 1 Crime suspects (12–45 years) and self-reported criminal behaviour (15–45 years) by ethnic group and generation (in 2010)

	Turkey first generation	Turkey second generation	Morocco first generation	Morocco second generation	Native Dutch	<i>r</i> (correlation with suspect rates)
<i>Population</i>						
Persons	114,648	118,168	99,845	97,035	5,302,320	
% Suspects	3.9	5.8	5.4	11.1	2.0	
<i>NELLS</i>	590	352	607	363	2,340	
% Reported a crime	5.7	12.5	7.1	9.7	8.5	0.35
% Reported a crime (low social desirability)	9.7	18.2	12.8	14.3	11.1	0.46
Average no. of crimes per respondent	0.14	0.23	0.23	0.20	0.15	0.49
Average no. of crimes per respondent (low social desirability)	0.22	0.39	0.36	0.32	0.21	0.52

TABLE 2 *Weighted means of the dependent and independent variables by ethnic group and generation*

	Turkey first generation (N = 539)	Turkey second generation (N = 347)	Morocco first generation (N = 563)	Morocco second generation (N = 348)	Native Dutch (N = 2,277)
<i>Dependent variable</i>					
Self-reported crimes (av.)	0.13	0.23	0.22	0.19	0.15
<i>Independent variables</i>					
Men (%)	50.7	48.2	49.8	46.4	50.5
Age (av.)	33.1	23.8	32.8	22.4	29.3
Large city (%)	65.8	54.8	57.2	50.8	21.1
City (%)	20.5	27.1	30.6	33.6	24.3
Town (%)	13.1	17.1	12.0	15.3	20.0
Rural municipality (%)	0.6	1.0	0.3	0.3	34.6
Income low (%)	39.7	56.0	43.0	65.0	36.4
Income middle (%)	30.1	17.4	32.2	13.2	19.6
Income high (%)	21.0	13.0	14.0	10.8	35.6
Income unknown (%)	9.2	13.6	10.8	11.0	8.4
Primary education (%)	50.6	32.9	52.6	27.7	21.1
Secondary education (%)	27.8	44.2	31.4	50.1	39.1
Tertiary education (%)	21.6	22.9	16.0	22.2	39.8
Living with partner and/or child (%)	72.7	33.9	73.1	21.7	44.1
Living with parent(s) (%)	14.4	49.6	11.9	63.1	28.3
Living without partner, children or parents (%)	12.9	16.5	15.0	15.2	27.6
Parental relationship quality (%)	2.7	3.1	2.7	3.2	2.9
Neighbourhood disadvantage (av.)	1.1	0.8	1.0	0.8	-0.6
Collective efficacy (av.)	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.4
Neighbourhood contacts (av.)	3.8	3.9	3.9	4.0	3.8
Perceived discrimination (av.)	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.0
Religiousness (av.)	3.4	3.3	3.7	3.6	1.6
Social desirability (av.)	1.5	1.3	1.5	1.4	1.2

mean SES than the majority population. The native Dutch are almost twice as likely to live without a partner, child and/or (grand) parent. Parental relationship quality is somewhat higher among the second-generation than the native Dutch, but lower among the first-generation. Ethnic minority status is associated with living in poorer neighbourhoods, with second-generation immigrants being slightly better off than first-generation immigrants. The native Dutch reside in neighbourhoods with somewhat higher average levels of collective efficacy, but there are no clear ethnic differences in neighbourhood contacts. Among 'Turks' and 'Moroccans', the average level of perceived discrimination is about 0.3 (0.4 for second-generation Moroccans). Both minority groups attach more importance to religion than the native Dutch. The mean value for the native Dutch is 1.6 (between 'not important' and 'important/not important'), whereas the minorities score in the 3.3–3.7 range ('important' to 'very important'). First-generation immigrants score considerably higher on social desirability than the native Dutch; second-generation immigrants are halfway between first-generation immigrants and the native Dutch.

Multivariate results

Table 3 presents six negative binomial regression models. Model 1 only includes the four dummies indicating ethnic minority membership by generation, and controls age, sex and urbanization of the municipality and social desirability (thus excluding basic demographic explanations for ethnic differences in criminal behaviour). Between parentheses, we also report the coefficients of the dummies indicating ethnic origin without the social desirability control.

On average, first-generation Moroccans reported more crimes than the native Dutch when age, sex, municipality and social desirability are held constant. The effects of the other dummies indicating ethnic minority status are positive, too, but are not significant. In this model, being a first-generation Moroccan is associated with a 1.97 higher incidence rate ratio (not shown), meaning that the number of crimes per respondent is approximately twice the rate for the ethnic majority when age, sex, municipality and social desirability are held constant. As a result, we only partially accept hypothesis 1 (*First- and second-generation Turks and Moroccans report higher levels of criminal behaviour than respondents of native Dutch origin*).

Model 2 adds income and education, which show the expected negative relationship with crime. Due to their inclusion, the effects of the dummies indicating ethnicity go down significantly, confirming hypothesis 2 (*The effect of being a first- or second-generation Turk or Moroccan on self-reported offending diminishes after controlling SES*). Being a first-generation Moroccan no longer has an independent positive effect on crime, suggesting that the effect in Model 1 is related to the lower SES of this group. Adding SES leads to a significant *negative* effect of being first-generation Turk: Turkish immigrants report fewer crimes than would be expected on the basis of their SES. By contrast, **Blom and Jennissen (2014)**, who conducted logistic regression analyses using police data, found that ethnic minority status, including being a first-generation Turk, was associated with a considerably *higher odds of being a crime suspect* after controlling SES: the ‘residual’ odds ratio of ethnic minority status on being a crime suspect, after controlling age, sex and urbanization of the municipality, household structure and SES, varied between 1.6 (first-generation Turks) and 4.0 (second-generation Moroccans with two foreign-born parents).

Model 3 adds perceived ethnic discrimination, which is associated with a higher number of reported crimes ($b = 0.52$; $p < 0.05$). Like in Model 2, the effects of the dummies indicating ethnic minority status go down significantly, indicated by the coefficients getting closer to zero. In other words, Moroccan and Turkish Dutch experiencing discrimination reported more crimes than Moroccans and Turks (and native Dutch) not experiencing it, thereby confirming hypothesis 5 (*The effect of being a first- or second-generation Turk or Moroccan on self-reported crime diminishes after controlling perceived ethnic discrimination*).

Model 4 adds three neighbourhood measures: neighbourhood disadvantage, collective efficacy and contacts. The coefficients of these measures are in the expected direction, but only neighbourhood contacts reach conventional levels of statistical significance. Their addition does lead to slightly lower negative coefficients for first-generation immigrants in particular, but the changes are not significant, leading us to reject hypothesis 4 (*The effect of being a first or second-generation Moroccan or Turk on self-reported crime diminishes after controlling differences in neighbourhood disadvantage and*

TABLE 3 Determinants of the number of self-reported crimes

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Native Dutch (ref.)						
Turkey first generation	0.00 (-0.22)	-0.54** (-0.81***)	-0.77** (-1.08***)	-0.84** (-1.17***)	-0.70** (-0.96***)	-0.46 (-0.65*)
Turkey second generation	0.39* (0.20)	0.02 (-0.17)	-0.15 (-0.36*)	-0.17 (-0.38)	-0.07 (-0.25)	0.18 (0.07)
Morocco first generation	0.68** (0.42)	0.05 (-0.27)	-0.21 (-0.54*)	-0.29 (-0.64**)	-0.18 (-0.48*)	0.10 (-0.12)
Morocco second generation	0.40 (0.21)	-0.01 (-0.21)	-0.27 (-0.51)	-0.24 (-0.46)	-0.16 (-0.38)	0.11 (-0.03)
Female (ref.)						
Male	1.26***	1.25***	1.20***	1.15***	1.09***	1.05***
Age	-0.34***	-0.29***	-0.23***	-0.23***	-0.24***	-0.25***
Age squared/100	0.52***	0.35***	0.38***	0.37***	0.38***	0.39***
Large city (ref.)						
City	-0.47**	-0.53***	-0.54**	-0.34**	-0.36**	-0.37**
Small town	0.17	-0.01	-0.05	0.17	0.19	0.19
Rural municipality	-0.44*	-0.76***	-0.78***	-0.45	-0.42	-0.42
Income high (ref.)						
Income low		0.87***	0.83***	0.78***	0.64**	0.67**
Income middle		0.55**	0.56**	0.47*	0.45*	0.50**
Income missing		0.78**	0.74**	0.73**	0.71*	0.75**
Tertiary education (ref.)						
Primary education		1.10***	1.11***	1.15***	1.17***	1.16***
Secondary education		1.15***	1.16***	1.21***	1.25***	1.26***
Perceived ethnic discrimination			0.53**	0.57**	0.54**	0.57**
Neighbourhood disadvantage				0.06	0.04	0.04
Collective efficacy				-0.17	-0.10	-0.16
Neighbourhood contacts				-0.36**	-0.31*	-0.28*
Lives without parent, partner, child (ref.)						
Lives with partner and/or child					-0.50***	-0.45**
Lives with parent(s)					-0.18	-0.22
Parental relationship quality					-0.19**	-0.16*
Religiousness						-0.15**
Social desirability	-1.07***	-1.09***	-1.08***	-1.02***	-0.97***	-0.95***
Constant	3.59***	0.55	0.83***	2.45*	2.94**	3.23***

*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.10$.

control). Apparently, these minorities have become relatively established in terms of neighbourhood ties. The negative effect of being a first-generation Moroccan is significant at the $p = 0.05$ level in this model, when the social desirability measure is not included.

We now turn to two factors possibly explaining why first-generation immigrants reported fewer crimes than would be expected on the basis of their social disadvantage. Model 5 adds family bonds. Living with a partner or child ($b = -0.50$; $p < 0.01$) and good parental relationships ($b = -0.19$, $p < 0.05$) indeed have a negative effect on crime. Due to their inclusion, the effects of the dummies indicating ethnic minority status go up significantly, indicating that stronger family bonds among the minorities counterbalance the potentially criminogenic effects of their social disadvantage, leading us to accept hypothesis 4a (*The effect of being a first- or second-generation Turk or Moroccan on self-reported crime increases after controlling family bonds*) and to reject hypothesis 4b.

Finally, Model 6 adds religiosity, which shows the expected negative relationship with self-reported crime ($b = -0.15$, $p < 0.05$), and also significantly increases the coefficients of the dummies indicating ethnic origin, leading us to accept hypothesis 6 (*The effect of being a first- or second-generation Turk or Moroccan on self-reported crime increases after controlling religiousness*). Religiousness, too, tends to counterbalance the criminogenic effects of minority disadvantage.

Conclusion and Discussion

One of the puzzles in the field of migration, ethnicity and crime is that first- and second-generation immigrants are generally overrepresented in criminal justice data in Europe, but not, or not as much, in traditional immigration countries, including the United States. We reasoned that official crime figures are likely to be biased against newcomers and their children, and that such biases may explain part of the transatlantic differences in the relationship between immigration and crime, as indicated by official data. Consequently, we analysed the NELLS data so as to examine whether the two largest ethnic minorities in the Netherlands—the Turkish and Moroccan Dutch—also self-report more criminal offending than the native Dutch. An additional reason for analysing the NELLS data was to examine underresearched mechanisms that are difficult or impossible to consider with administrative data, including perceived ethnic discrimination, family bonds and religiousness. The NELLS also allowed us to assess and control ethnic and generational differences in social desirability.

We find two ‘minority paradoxes’, both of which suggest that transatlantic differences in the relationship between migration and crime may well be smaller than official crime data indicate. The first paradox is that findings regarding ethnic differences in criminal behaviour turn out to be highly sensitive to the data source used. Analyses using police data have found rather large positive effects of being Turkish or Moroccan Dutch on the chances of being a crime suspect, even when sex, age, urbanization and SES are controlled (e.g. Blom and Jennissen 2014). In the NELLS, however, only first-generation Moroccan Dutch reported significantly more crimes than the native Dutch when age, sex and urbanization of the municipality (and social desirability) were controlled. Both minority groups reported similar to *lower* rates than the native Dutch when group differences in SES were controlled. Although first-generation immigrants

in particular scored relatively high on social desirability, ethnic and generational differences in social desirability were found to only partially account for the apparent contradictions between self-reported crime rates and police figures. When the number of crimes is adjusted for group differences in social desirability, the percentage of crime suspects among the minorities is still between 1.6 and 3.6 times higher than expected on the basis of the NELLIS data.

These disparities between survey and official crime data warrant more research along three lines. Firstly, there is the possibility that official data are—seriously—biased against ethnic minorities, warranting more research in the spirit of [Weenink \(2009\)](#) and [Rojek *et al.* \(2010\)](#), especially for the early stages of policing, including *reactive* policing. How does the ethnic and class origin of offenders, victims, bystanders and police—and their complex interactions—structure the selection of cases that end up being formally sanctioned? Secondly, the survey data may still understate criminal behaviour among ethnic minorities relative to the majority group in spite of the techniques that were used to promote construct validity and representativeness. Perhaps high-rate offenders among those with minority status were less likely to cooperate with the survey than majority ‘criminals’ with a similar high crime incidence; perhaps we did not eliminate all ethnic and generational differences in social desirability bias. Given the latter possibility, it is advisable to also use other methods that have been developed to deal with social desirability, such as list experiments (cf. [Kim and Kim 2015](#)). Thirdly, there is the possibility that both administrative and self-report data measure criminal behaviour reasonably well, but measure different *types* of crime. Perhaps ethnic differences in the European context mostly pertain to relatively serious crimes that are registered by the police, whereas surveys, which focus more on minor forms of crime, predominantly show ethnic similarities. Better longitudinal studies are therefore in order that examine whether practices of selective law enforcement lead to an *escalation* of deviance among immigrants and their descendants, especially in contexts that are relatively hostile to migration and ethnic diversity (cf. [Marx 1981](#); [Grattet 2011](#)). In the absence of additional research, we should not take ethnic differences in official crime figures as definitive proof for large ethnic differences in criminal behaviour. We should be especially cautious in assuming that immigrants and their descendants commit more crimes than can be accounted for by general demographic and socio-economic factors.

The second paradox is that first-generation immigrants reported fewer crimes than would be expected given their disadvantage, which resembles findings for the United States based on official crime data (cf. [Sampson and Bean 2006](#), [Bersani 2014](#)). On the basis of the present analysis, we propose to label that protective effect the ‘righteous migrant effect’, which contends that the criminogenic effects of ethnic minorities’ social disadvantage are partially or fully annulled by their stronger family bonds and religiousness under the influence of cultural traditionalism in migrants’ countries of origin. By coining that term, we mean to broaden and ‘decontextualize’ the notion of a Latino or Hispanic paradox ([Martinez 2002](#); [Sampson and Bean 2006](#)). In addition, we intend to create an analogy to the so-called ‘healthy migrant effect’ in medical sociology, which argues that migrants are healthier than would be expected given their SES ([Razum *et al.* 1998](#)). Like the healthy migrant effect, the righteous migrant effect seems to be related to selective migration, albeit in different ways. Although the healthy migrant effect is related to positive selection of (labour) migrants at the individual level, the righteous migrant effect seems to be primarily associated to unintended

group-level selection: most Turkish and Moroccan immigrants, including those who were not recruited as labour migrants, originate from rural societies with relatively high levels of informal social control. The persistence of the righteous migrant effect over the life course may well be driven by (psycho)cultural processes that also explain the relative durability of the healthy migrant effect; Durkheim (1915) already pointed to the similarities in the social causation of health and crime, and highlighted the importance of family bonds and religiousness.

Our findings also suggest a *complex* relationship between immigrant integration and crime. In general sociology, the term ‘integration’ is generally used in a Durkheimian sense: it refers to the different social ties of individuals and groups that enable social order. However, in the sociology of migration—especially in the United States—the term is often used as synonym for assimilation, as the gradual diminishing of the socio-economic and cultural differences between immigrant groups and (segments of) the receiving society (cf. Portes and Zhou 1993; Alba and Nee 1997). So understood, American scholars are certainly right in arguing that a relative lack of assimilation may, in some ways, *protect* migrants’ and their offspring against criminal behaviour. In the present analysis, minorities’ relatively traditional family structure and religiousness are found to be at least partially responsible for that effect. It is nonetheless misleading to suggest that assimilation *only* has the effect of fostering criminal behaviour. Structural assimilation to the mainstream—as indicated by diminishing socio-economic disparities between the ethnic minorities and the ethnic majority and diminished levels of interethnic discrimination—certainly reduces crime among poorer migrants and their descendants. If there is a ‘paradox of assimilation’ (Rumbaut and Ewing 2007), it is not that crime increases with assimilation; rather, different forms of assimilation produce opposite effects.

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