In a widely cited (and contentious) New York Times op-ed published in 2006, criminologist Robert Sampson identified what he claims was largely responsible for the crime drop in U.S. cities during the 1990s. He downplayed the "usual suspects" offered up by criminologists, such as changing police practices, increased incarceration, shifting drug markets, gun control efforts, and economic opportunity and argued instead that, in attempting to understand why crime rates declined, "we have been overlooking something obvious—something that our implicit biases caused us not to notice" (March 11, 2006, p. A-27). His "unusual suspect" was foreigners. Drawing from his research in Chicago neighborhoods, Sampson claimed that evidence points to increased immigration as a major factor associated with decreased crime rates of the 1990s. Sampson (2008) further developed his argument in a piece he wrote for Contexts titled "Rethinking Crime and Immigration."

In the years following publication of Sampson's op-ed, research on the immigration-crime link has proliferated. The majority of studies examine whether immigration to neighborhoods, cities, or metropolitan areas affects crime rates in those areas (for a recent review of much of this literature, see Ousey and Kubrin [2009]). Several researchers also have attempted to explicitly test Sampson's argument about the crime drop by employing longitudinal research designs (Stowell et al. 2009; Wadsworth 2010).

Of course, research on immigration and crime is nothing new. More than 70 years ago, Taft (1933, p. 69) commented that "we clearly need to know through unprejudiced study the effect of migration on crime; the relative effects of different nationalities, and of different elements within a nationality. We also need to know the indirect effect through the behavior of the children of immigrants. And if possible we must distinguish between
immediate and long-time effects, which may be different or even opposite.” Yet attention devoted to the issue has been intermittent. Investigations of immigration and crime have varied along with immigration itself. When immigration flows have been high, scholarship has flourished; when flows have been low, scholarship has waned (Stowell 2007).

Regardless, in both earlier and more recent scholarship, and contrary to public opinion, studies generally report consistent findings: immigration to an area is negatively associated with crime rates or not associated with crime at all. For example, in their study of U.S. metropolitan areas, Reid et al. (2005) find little support for the idea that immigration and crime go hand in hand: “Across our analyses of four different types of crime, there is no evident crime-condusive effect of immigration. The effects of a variety of measures of immigration on homicide, robbery, burglary, and theft are consistent. Even controlling for demographic and economic characteristics associated with higher crime rates, immigration either does not affect crime, or exerts a negative effect” (p. 775). This finding holds across studies that employ neighborhoods and cities as their units of analysis (again, for a review, see Ousey and Kubrin [2009]).

Despite general consistency in research findings, we argue that it is premature to draw firm conclusions about this relationship for two reasons. First, a recent publication suggests that when scholars dig deeper, the immigration–crime relationship may be more complex than previously envisioned. Kubrin and Ishizawa (2012) illustrate this when they examine the possibility that city-level context conditions the immigration–crime relationship. In particular, they determine whether neighborhoods with high levels of immigrant concentration that are situated within broader immigrant communities are especially likely to enjoy reduced crime rates, compared to those that are more spatially isolated. Studying neighborhoods in Chicago and Los Angeles—two cities with significant and diverse immigrant populations—they find diverging results: immigrant neighborhoods embedded within broader immigrant communities have lower than average violent crime levels in Chicago, consistent with the literature, but higher than average levels in Los Angeles. In essence, they find that some immigrant neighborhoods are safer than others. Context clearly matters.

A second reason why it is premature to draw firm conclusions about the relationship between immigration and crime is that there are key omissions in the literature that may impact the findings scholars have uncovered to date. In particular, research has largely ignored the role of local institutions in the community, neglecting to analyze how the organizational and institutional capacity of a neighborhood may affect the immigration–crime link. More specifically, in none of the studies just mentioned do researchers incorporate measures reflecting the policies and practices of local institutions such as the police, schools and school programs, labor centers, or other community organizations. Moreover, this research has disregarded the larger policy or political context within which such local institutions operate. To be fair, this shortcoming is relatively common in neighborhood crime studies (but see Peterson, Krivo, and Harris 2000; Triplett, Gainey, and Sun 2003; Gardner and Brooks-Gun 2009). Yet, as we argue later, this omission may be particularly detrimental for those studies that explicitly seek to examine immigration and crime.
The goal of this essay is to begin to address these omissions. Herein, we discuss them in some detail and describe how addressing these omissions would provide further (and necessary) insight into the immigration-crime relationship. To that end, for illustrative purposes, we consider the potential importance of two types of local institutions and their associated exclusionary or integrative practices. We describe how these practices, shaped to a strong degree by the broader city-level context, affect immigrants and their families, with implications for the immigration-crime nexus.

In line with a focus on these issues, several conclusions can be offered:

- A number of communities in the United States have responded to the current influx of immigrants on an institutional level, establishing particularized interventions that have not been adequately accounted for within the immigration and crime neighborhood literature.
- These interventions include (a) institutional policing policies and practices that involve local peace officers in immigration enforcement activities of one type or another and (b) institutional practices designed to promote the integration of immigrant newcomers into community life.
- Criminological theory, along with anecdotal data, suggests that such local policies and practices, along with emerging state laws that mandate local institutional participation in immigration enforcement activities, are likely to impact both community organizational capacity and criminogenic conditions within localities.
- Further study of these phenomena is likely to provide new insights into the relationship between crime and immigration.

In the remainder of this essay, we first outline a number of local policies directed at immigration and immigrants. We then discuss in some detail two types of local institutional interventions—exclusionary and integrative—and provide a basis in theory and practice to argue that these types of interventions likely influence the immigration-crime nexus at the community level. We also suggest that the extracommunity context likely influences local institutional responses to immigrants, and potentially crime, within communities. In the conclusion, we chart some promising new directions for scholars interested in studying immigration and crime across neighborhoods.

I. BROADENING THE RESEARCH FOCUS

Despite the abundance of data demonstrating that immigration does not lead to higher crime rates, the very aggregate nature of much of this data necessarily hides variations across communities and thus clues as to the causal links in this relationship (Kubrin and Ishizawa 2012). Just as important, variations across communities provide anecdotal grist for politicized claims that immigration is linked with crime (see, e.g., Sobczak 2010). As Brettell and Nibbs (2011) point out, tropes of the "illegal" alien are invoked in
communities across the United States to portray an invasion of lawless immigrants into communities and thus to advocate for policies that institutionally target immigrants. As a consequence, we believe that current research in this area should be supplemented to account for local variations in the relationship between immigration and crime—variations that are more than demographically driven. In particular, additional scholarly attention should be devoted to two facets of the local community context: (1) local community institutions that potentially impact the immigration–crime nexus and (2) the broader extracommunity context in which local institutions enact policy decisions, including the influence of this context on the procedures implemented.

Many communities, not surprisingly, have developed particularized institutional responses to immigration, responses that may well affect overall crime rates within those communities, as well as perceptions of criminality among certain populations. Existing research demonstrates, for example, that communities with ethnic enclaves provide important institutional and social supports for new immigrants and thus help to promote prosocial activity within these communities (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). A contrasting example can be found in communities that have enacted—or are subject to—directives that require identification of the undocumented during the normal course of police duties (Wilson, Singer, and BeRenzis 2010). Some police chiefs argue that such policies negatively impact police-community relations to the detriment of public safety (see Provine et al. 2012), a topic discussed in greater depth in section II. Examples of this type strongly suggest that local policies, the institutions that implement those policies, and the procedures that flow from these implementations, all likely impact crime rates in communities that experience immigration. Such institutional factors, in other words, may help explain some of the local variations in the immigration–crime nexus and thus lead to better explanatory frameworks.

To date, scholars have not adequately explored these institutional factors. By “institutional factors” we refer here to those organizations, committees, and businesses—both public and private—that implement policy decisions within neighborhoods. Local police and sheriff practices are a particularly visible type of institutional intervention in community life, but other institutions are salient. Area schools and school programs, local labor centers, libraries, community organizations, and community alliances that implement programs for housing, homelessness, or delinquent youth, as well as policy-making institutions such as city councils and their subcommittees, are all institutions that could potentially affect the crime rate within a community, as well as the immigration–crime nexus in those same communities. This is particularly true if these institutions implement policies directed at immigrants, such as policies that allow localities to enforce aspects of federal immigration law through 287(g) agreements with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency of the U.S. government (“ICE”) or policies that mandate the use of the federal e-verify program by selected governmental or private employers to verify the employment eligibility of prospective employees.

Of equal importance, external institutions and advocacy groups contribute to the political and policy context in which local institutions operate, and these are likely to influence the efficacy with which local policies are enacted, as well as the level of
public and financial support garnered for such policies. This external policy context can include supportive (or resistant) federal governmental agencies such as ICE or the U.S. Attorney’s office, advocacy groups such as the Federation of Americans for Immigration Reform (FAIR) or the Minuteman Project, national support organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) or Habitat for Humanity, and other state and local agencies that have interests in the policies being proposed or implemented at the local level. For example, in the 2005–06 timeframe, the city of Costa Mesa, California debated a possible agreement with ICE to cross-designate and train jail personnel, and perhaps other police officers, as immigration agents. In the months of city council debate, members of LULAC and the Minuteman Project provided resistance or support for the proposed policy, with many speaking members residing outside of the city. Indeed, groups of Minutemen would show up en masse at some meetings to ensure positive public comment on behalf of the policy and its council adherents (Trager 2012). Such groups, in other words, can intensify or alleviate political pressure on city council members to vote in particular ways with regard to policies that may impact immigrants in a given locale. They can also put pressure on council members to ensure that policy is carried out as advertised, or, alternatively, provide civil resistance to the implementation of policy.

To illustrate the relevance of local institutional initiatives and resultant policies to the immigration–crime nexus, in the remainder of the essay we discuss in more detail two types of institutional interventions within communities: the first related to direct efforts to control crime within communities, in particular through community peace officer activities; the second related to efforts to produce integration in communities through public efforts, public–private partnerships, or simply private initiatives. This discussion will include both specific examples of the types of institutions implementing such policies, as well as the theoretical basis for assuming a pragmatic impact on immigrants and, potentially, the immigration–crime nexus.

II. Institutions with Exclusionary Practices: Policing the Community

Perhaps the most salient local institution that impacts neighborhood crime is law enforcement. By definition, the local police are empowered by the state to enforce the law, protect property, and limit civil disorder, so it comes as no surprise that their practices and policies help shape, to a strong degree, crime rates within communities. An important component of this equation is the flexibility officers have in dealing with situations they encounter in their communities, resulting in discretionary decision making that may occur from initial contact to arrest. Of course, police officers do not have unfettered discretion; rather, they are bounded by professional, community, legal, and moral norms. Still, the widespread discretion they enjoy has led some scholars to suggest that
official data—overwhelmingly used in neighborhood crime studies—typically reflect law enforcement practices as much as they do criminal behavior itself (Mears 2002, p. 286).

Ironically, studies on the impact of policing practices and policies in neighborhood crime research are noticeably scarce. Even scarcer, however, are neighborhood studies on the immigration–crime nexus that incorporate measures related to local law enforcement policies and practices. In fact, we are unaware of even one published study that empirically accounts for police practices in a neighborhood analysis of immigration and crime. Yet it is axiomatic that policing practices, and the broader policies that inform them, have the potential to significantly impact the immigration–crime relationship. This is especially true, we argue, in the context of policing today. Policing practices have become increasingly authoritarian and, in turn, exclusionary toward immigrants. This has consequences for crime rates in communities across the United States, as well as for the immigration–crime relationship in those same communities.

Of course, the police need not be exclusionary in their practices with respect to immigrants but, in fact, this has been the trend for the past two decades (Provine et al. 2012). Fueling this trend are increasing demands that local police become more involved in enforcing immigration laws in their communities, something to which they are not accustomed. Historically, enforcement was left to the federal government, and a long-standing policy of the federal Department of Justice prohibited local enforcement of civil immigration violations except in very limited circumstances. As such, state and local police were not empowered to arrest and detain violators, something viewed as the special responsibility of the (then) Immigration and Naturalization Service. But, starting in the 1990s, things began to change as legislation was introduced to create closer ties between local police departments and federal officials charged with immigration enforcement. And then, in 2002, the Bush administration’s Office of Legal Counsel issued a memorandum claiming that local law enforcement officials have “inherent” authority to make arrests for civil immigration violations. This memo, released under a Freedom of Information Act request by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), overturned earlier interpretations of federal law that had denied local police such authority (Kobach 2005). Local law enforcement officials became empowered, and were strongly encouraged, to police immigration in their communities.

These trends have resulted in what scholars refer to as the “devolution of immigration enforcement” (Provine et al. 2012; see also Koulish 2010). In general terms, devolution consists of the statutory granting of powers from the central government of a sovereign state to government at a subnational level, such as a regional, local, or state level. In the context of immigration enforcement, devolution encourages a push toward formal partnerships between federal immigration authorities and local police. These relationships rely on the more intimate contact of local police with residents to, among other things, assist in the detection and removal of unauthorized immigrants. Advocates describe these partnerships as a “force multiplier” to enhance interior enforcement by federal officials (Provine et al. 2012). Under devolution, local law enforcement officials in communities throughout the United States have been encouraged to be more proactive...
when it comes to policing immigration, and the federal government has worked hard to encourage compliance.

Strategies for compliance have followed two tracks. As just noted, the first is a series of measures giving local police officers the authority to identify and begin the process of deporting unauthorized migrants (Skogan 2009). The principal vehicle for this is the 287(g) clause of the federal Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act. Under this legislation, state and municipal law enforcement agencies can sign agreements with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that allow local officers to perform immigration law enforcement functions, including using federal databases to check the immigration status of individuals, and to begin processing them for a deportation hearing. Although state and local officers have inherent legal authority to make immigration arrests, 287(g) provides additional enforcement authority to these selected officers, such as the ability to charge illegal aliens with immigration violations and begin the process of removal. Under the program, a law enforcement agency agrees to a number of its officers receiving intensive immigration enforcement training, to supervision of 287(g) officers by federal agents for immigration enforcement duties, and is assured of federal immigration cooperation and coordination in certain immigration-related enforcement activities. In line with this strategic track, yearly allocated federal funding for the 287(g) program has steadily increased from about $5 million in 2006 to more than $50 in 2009 (Vaughan and Edwards 2009).

The second strategic track involves offering incentives to local police agencies (and even individual police officers) to encourage them to become more proactive in enforcing immigration statutes (Skogan 2009). One incentive to participate is threatening to withhold federal funds from jurisdictions that do not comply. For example, states receive necessary federal funding to help pay for prisons, and Congress has threatened to withhold this money unless state legislatures take action to force their cities into line.

Devolution, for many law enforcement officials, is less than desirable (Skogan 2009; Provine et al. 2012). Increasing involvement in policing immigration, officers maintain, runs at cross-purposes with community policing and other strategies to engage more closely with the community. The police need the trust and cooperation of residents, including immigrants, to do their job effectively. Police rely on the willingness of victims and bystanders, for example, to cooperate with their investigations. To gain this cooperation, police must remain in close and trusted contact with community members.

Developing trust and cooperation had been a hallmark of policing for years prior to devolution, as community policing—a more integrative policing model—was adopted in communities throughout the United States. Community policing is a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, disorder, and fear of crime. For decades, community policing helped make the police more responsive to the particular issues facing local communities, including immigrant communities, through the regular channels they created for civic engagement and via special arrangements for reaching out to immigrant groups (see Skogan [2009] as an example of this in Chicago).
Many worry that devolution is eroding the decades of progress police officers worked hard to achieve under community policing (Khashu 2009). As officers increasingly occupy the role of immigration enforcers, a breakdown in trust, or what some characterize as a "chilling effect" in the local immigrant community, is likely to occur (Khashu 2009). Immigrants' greatest fear is that contact with local authorities might somehow threaten their status in the United States. Residents may question, "Who is the police?" "Who is la migra?" And, of course, if local police visibly join the ranks of immigration enforcement officials, residents of immigrant communities may simply stop talking to them altogether. Consider the following statement a Costa Mesa, California resident made at a city council meeting in January 2006, discussing a proposal to train city police officers to enforce immigration laws:

Why would an undocumented worker or person like to report a crime in front of a police who... can enforce immigration law? What is taking place here in Costa Mesa is called emotional abuse, at the community level. It is the same thing that happens when a father verbally abuses his child; the child will do as he's told, not out of respect, but out of fear for his punishment. This ICE proposal is fostering fear in the community. And a community that lives in fear cannot integrate, and cannot be safer. (Trager 2012)

In essence, shifting responsibility for enforcing immigration laws to local police puts at risk the two-decade investment they have made in community policing and trust building.

But more is at risk with devolution. A related collateral consequence of authoritative or exclusionary policing practices in the context of policies such as 287(g) is the underreporting of victimization among immigrants (Khashu 2009). It has long been documented that immigrants, compared to the native-born, are less likely to contact the police for assistance and to report victimization to local law enforcement officers, even when the victimization is serious (Davis and Hendricks 2007). Findings from a National Institute of Justice-sponsored survey and from selected site visits in immigrant communities across the United States indicate that, compared to other crime victims, immigrants face unique pressures in deciding to cooperate with local law enforcement authorities following victimization (Davis and Erez 1998). According to the report, reasons behind underreporting include possible embarrassment to their families, language difficulties, cultural differences in conceptions of justice, and a lack of knowledge of the criminal justice system (pp. 3–4). Not surprisingly, though, fear of becoming involved with authorities tops the list of reasons why victimized immigrants are reluctant to turn to the police for help. With immigrants already hesitant to seek help following victimization, underreporting is likely to become especially problematic in communities where local law enforcement officials actively police immigration. In this sense, police intervention may serve to increase violence and exacerbate victims' vulnerability and alienation. And communities may experience a sharp rise in unsolved crime and an even greater underreporting of crime by immigrant populations.
As mentioned at the outset of this essay, the practice of local institutions, exclusionary or otherwise, does not exist in a vacuum; rather, it reflects a broader policy and political context. This broader context has been a recent topic of interest among immigration scholars. Some argue that the framework within which communities used to think about security—street crime, lack of respect for community values, avoiding external dangers—has now become intertwined with concerns about legal status and fears of foreign people (Provine et al. 2012). After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the federal government instituted law enforcement measures that targeted people of particular nationalities in the name of national security. In particular, several new laws have been passed that combine (some might say inflate) antiterrorism concerns with renewed attempts to control (undocumented) immigration (Ewing 2008, p. 7). Along these lines, Provine and her colleagues (2012) highlight the fact that federal immigration enforcement now sits within the DHS, established 1 month after the September 11, 2001 deadly attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center. This is especially significant, they argue, in light of the agency’s mission of “protecting the American people and their homeland.” This theme is echoed by Welch (2012), who further claims that the result of this enhanced set of concerns is a sense of insecurity that justifies more exacting governmental controls. What is ironic about all of this, Welch argues, is that it occurs in spite of the fact that empirical evidence consistently finds that immigration, including unauthorized immigration, does not increase crime.

Despite a strong push by the federal government and the support of groups such as State Legislators for Legal Immigration (SSLI), there has not been a blind acceptance of devolution. After initial growth, in the last few years, fewer law enforcement agencies have been joining the program (i.e., the rate of increase is declining), thus creating variation in program compliance not only across cities but within them as well. To get a better sense of how local police executives have responded to the push to become involved in enforcement of federal immigration laws, Provine and her colleagues (2012) distributed questionnaires to police chiefs in large- and medium-sized U.S. cities. Findings from their study reveal a high degree of variation in local responses to federal devolution of immigration-enforcement responsibilities; although the vast majority (nearly 75 percent) answered that they have no informal agreement with the agency but do contact ICE when holding suspected unauthorized immigrants for criminal violations, very few (less than 5 percent) had a Memorandum of Understanding with ICE (a 287(g) agreement) to help manage incarcerated inmates and to work with ICE on investigations and arrests for (civil) immigration violations. Thirteen percent responded that they “do not participate or assist in ICE immigration enforcement activities” in any way. In short, they describe a multilayered, multijurisdictional patchwork of enforcement across the United States. What emerges from this snapshot of perceptions of chiefs is that municipalities have not, in general, acted forcefully to direct their police departments toward greater engagement with immigration enforcement. Nor have departments seized the opportunity to engage in policy making in this area. Provine and her colleagues argue that a strong commitment to community policing, as well as the heated politics of unauthorized immigration, help to explain this reluctance.
Such reluctance is perhaps less surprising in light of the growing number of so-called sanctuary cities. Sanctuary cities are cities and towns where local officials have pushed back against the enforcement priorities of the federal government, and even the demands of their state legislatures, and have continued to emphasize the role of the police in serving all residents (Skogan 2009). In such locations, local policies and practices run against the demands of the federal government, resulting in policing that is more integrative than exclusionary. In Skogan's words:

When it comes to policing, what supposed sanctuary cities have in common is that their police have been instructed to make enforcement of immigration laws a very low priority. They do not participate in the 287(g) program. They may not ask apparent immigrants about their status or even place of birth, perhaps even when they arrest them. They frequently prohibit officers from inquiring about citizenship when they apprehend them for minor traffic offenses or misdemeanors. They do not immediately turn people with suspect documentation over to federal immigration authorities. They do not make arrests based on immigration holds placed in the national “wanted persons” database. They certainly do not make inquiries about the status of crime victims or people they interview during investigations. (2009, p. 108)

Although continually evolving, the list of sanctuary cities includes such well-known places as New York, San Francisco, Houston, Austin, Los Angeles, Portland, Baltimore, Minneapolis, and San Diego. An up-to-date and comprehensive list can be accessed at http://ojjpac.org/sanctuary.asp.

So, what does all this mean? What are the implications of this discussion for the broader arguments advanced in this essay? Accounting for local institutions such as the police and their practices—be they exclusionary or otherwise—is absolutely fundamental to understanding crime within communities. Even more fundamental, perhaps, is the need to account for the role of local law enforcement when analyzing the immigration–crime nexus. It is clear from the previous discussion that, should researchers choose to incorporate local law officials’ practices into their analyses, they can expect to find variation across communities in the tolerance or acceptance of devolution and the (exclusionary) practices that go along with it. They will also be in a better position to determine whether differences in the immigration–crime nexus across localities is an artifact of defined local policies and practices, reflects a more amorphous relationship between community contexts and the characteristics of the immigrant population in that locality, or results from some combination of the two.

A final point is worth repeating: the police need not be authoritative or exclusionary in their practices. More integrative policing practices in immigrant communities include incorporating community leaders into citizen advisory boards for police and prosecution agencies, sponsoring in-service training in the cultures of various ethnic groups, and encouraging police officers to attend and speak at meetings of ethnic organizations in their communities, among other things. Although the focus in the next section is on the practices of other (more integrative) local institutions, such as labor
centers and churches, examples of partnerships that include local law enforcement, where the police are less exclusionary, are mentioned in passing.

III. INSTITUTIONS WITH INTEGRATIVE PRACTICES: BRINGING IMMIGRANTS INTO THE COMMUNITY

As just outlined, local institutions do much more than implement—or not—policies that invoke federal law to attach and remove certain persons from the body politic. Local institutions, governmental and otherwise, also serve more integrative functions within the community. With respect to governmental institutions, Mitnik and Halpern-Finnerty (2010) have outlined a number of policies employed by local governments that shield the undocumented from the restrictions and punishments of federal policy. But many more mundane examples of governmental policies aimed to assist in the integration of new arrivals exist across the nation, policies which are implemented by a variety of public and private institutions. The city of Monterey Park, California, for example, has funded language classes for recent immigrants run by various institutions, including the local senior center, and the police department has conducted outreach and held classes to teach basic traffic safety to its residents, many of whom are recent immigrants (Trager 2012). The city of Plano, Texas, has implemented similar policies directed at integrating newcomers (Brettell 2008). Both of these cities, as well as many others throughout the nation, celebrate ethnically oriented holidays and festivals, such as Chinese New Year and Cinco de Mayo, festivals that seemingly validate the presence of persons from specific places as being full "Americans." Such festivals tend to be organized through public–private partnerships. Local governments also provide school and after-school programs for immigrant children, as well as open space for all members of the community to bond, at least theoretically. Such spaces include community centers, libraries, parks, and playgrounds and are generally administered by parks and recreation or other city departments. Finally, local governments often assist businesses in the area, including providing support for chambers of commerce and, occasionally, for job centers as well—both institutions that, again, are animated by a public–private partnership.

Private organizations can be instrumental in the integration of immigrants as well. In Mount Kisco, New York, for example, Neighbors Link has established a number of services for recent immigrants with the express goal of "strengthen[ing] the whole community by actively enhancing the healthy integration of recent immigrants" (http://www.neighborslink.org). Such services include preschool, after-school programs, adult education, skills development, leadership training, family support, and a worker center. Moreover, this organization has accomplished its goals, in part, by forming strong alliances with local government and police. A new branch of this organization has recently been established in Stamford, Connecticut. Other organizations focus more
on the economic integration of newcomers, such as the Spanish-American Merchants Association in New Haven, Connecticut. This particular Merchant's Association provides educational opportunities for entrepreneurial immigrants to learn computers, gain business licenses, and locate (last resort) financing opportunities (Olvera and Rae 2011). Less localized private organizations also provide assistance to immigrants. For example, LULAC, which does not explicitly aim to help immigrants adjust to life in the United States, still provides a number of services that help to foster integration. However, as national organizations, entities such as LULAC tend to work with and through more local organizations that provide similar services.

Places of worship are another set of local institutions that play a significant role in the integration of immigrants into the community. In a study of immigrant incorporation in the city of New Haven, for example, Olvera and Rae (2011) found that the Catholic Church, in particular, offered services tailored to recent Mexican immigrants, including Spanish-language services, and also encouraged both documented and undocumented alike to become politically active in the community. Moreover, church services directed specifically at immigrants often exist within a framework of other social services offered by religious institutions and their secular partners. For instance, the Catholic Charities CYO of San Francisco, San Mateo, and Marin provide not only low-cost legal services for immigrants, but programs for youth, the elderly, the homeless, and for families as well (see http://community.cccyo.org/page.aspx?pid=190).

Despite suggestions as early as the 1990s that research on the relationship between local policies like these and community crime rates might prove fruitful in the realm of immigration studies (see, for example, Sampson and Wilson [1995]), little research of this kind has actually been conducted. Nevertheless, research and theory both within immigrant studies and within criminology more broadly suggest that the types of efforts just described are likely to enhance community relations and may therefore inhibit crime within the community as well. We shall briefly discuss three different areas of study that validate additional research on community institutional interventions.

Initially, research on the acculturation patterns of recent immigrants suggests that communities that successfully incorporate new immigrants into the socioeconomic fabric of community life are likely to see more prosocial choices made not only by immigrants themselves but also by their children. Drawing on longitudinal data about the children of immigrants in the cities of Miami and San Diego, Portes and Rumbaut (2006) distinguish three types of acculturation paths that immigrants to the United States follow. The first path is restricted to immigrants who bring substantial human capital with them and often results in children becoming professionals and entrepreneurs. The second path relates to working-class immigrants who settle in areas with strong co-ethnic community structures and results in acculturation through educational achievement and eventual integration into mainstream culture (by the third generation). These two paths to acculturation and integration find support in the work of such scholars as Jensen (2008), who has shown that new immigrants from both India and El Salvador, as well as their children, believe that civic participation—first cultural, but also political—is important to their sense of belonging in the United States. Such
participation is initially focused on co-ethnic ties (Stepick, Stepick, and Labissiere 2008) and includes a sense of civic belonging and pride.

Portes and Rumbaut’s final acculturation path is typified by working-class parents who settle in areas with weak co-ethnic ties. Unlike the former two, this final path is typified by children who experience sociocultural dissonance, and who often stagnate socially and economically, or even assimilate into deviant lifestyles or reactive ethnicity (Portes and Rumbaut 2006; see also Portes and Rumbaut 2001). According to Portes and Rumbaut, it is only the final path to acculturation, one in which children of immigrants feel alienated, that leads to deviant behavior. Indeed, they point to the difficulties faced by Mexican-American youth who face widespread discrimination because of their potential undocumented status, as well as a lack of socioeconomic resources in the relevant co-ethnic community. As a result, such children are more likely to turn to antisocial activity. Nor are feelings of alienation limited to immigrants from any single country of origin. For example, Wray-Lake and her colleagues have found that immigrant youth of Arab origin who were exposed to constant portrayals of Arabs as “the enemy” were more likely to feel alienated from their new country (Wray-Lake, Syvertsen, and Flanagan 2008).

Portes and Rumbaut’s claims are buttressed by a number of long-standing criminological theories. First, social disorganization theory focuses on the lack of community cohesion, and thus supervision within local communities, as core precursors of crime. In other words, it is a lack of community cohesion that leads to inadequate supervision of delinquent youth and, thus, to an increase in delinquent and criminal activity (Shaw and McKay 1942/1969). Similarly, opportunity theories suggest that crime occurs in places in which a motivated offender has an opportunity to engage in criminal activity (Clark and Felson 2004). Localities marked by high levels of cohesion, no doubt, would minimize such opportunities; by contrast, communities without such cohesion would seemingly present greater opportunities for criminal behaviors. Third, strain theory would suggest that youth experiencing sociocultural dissonance—along with blocked or limited legitimate opportunities—would be more prone to criminal activity to meet their (socially manufactured) desires (Agnew 1992, 2006). Finally, labeling theory would argue that immigrant youth in noninclusive communities might tend to be labeled as different, and perhaps even illegal, and that such labeling has both cognitive and real-world consequences, driving such youth to gradually conform to such behaviors (Sampson and Laub 1997; Lemert 2011).

Another line of criminological research suggests that community institutions that promote not only incorporation but also education and a youth-centric focus might promote more prosocial, stable communities and thus experience less overall crime. In particular, scholars who have stressed the need to educate youth in impulse control and deferred gratification (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Gottfredson 2006) have laid the groundwork for programs that clearly demonstrate that youth intervention can reduce later aggressive behaviors, delinquency, and perhaps even criminal activity. Examples of such programs include the Midwest Prevention Project, which targets drug abuse through a multidimensional strategy that begins intervention in early adolescence; the
Nurse–Family Partnership, which assists low-income women in learning to parent their first child; and the Incredible Years Series, which arranges parent and teacher education for youth ages 2–10 who exhibit unusual amounts of aggression and also contains a youth intervention aspect. These programs and others have been evaluated by the Colorado Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence Blueprints Program (http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints), and the evidence-based cost-effectiveness of programs of this type has been evaluated by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/default.asp). Since the birth rate of new immigrants tends to be higher than it is for multigenerational families (see, e.g., Passel and Taylor 2010), and since scholars like Portes and Rumbaut (2001) have emphasized the ill effects of dissonant acculturation, community programs that focus on the emotional and psychological well-being of children, immigrants included, would appear to increase the likelihood of prosocial activity among community youth.

One final line of research that is relevant to an evaluation of efforts taken by localities to integrate new immigrants includes studies about communities undergoing rapid demographic change. Since at least the 1980s, scholars have argued that changing demographics within communities—and in particular rural communities—can lead to a cultural clash with differing understandings about the role of law and, thus, criminality. David Engel (1984), for instance, in a study of a small Midwestern community, found that long-time residents saw tort-type injury risks as being assumed by the person injured and, thus, as outside the law. Newcomers, by contrast—many of whom worked in wage labor—were more likely to turn to the legal system to deal with the unexpected costs of an injury. Yet the participants in that system were rarely willing to provide the requested compensation. In other words, the legality of the activity at issue turned on community values that were, at the time, directed by those who had lived in the community for many years.

Recent research findings are consistent with this claim. In an investigation of a small Texas town, for instance, Brettell and Nibbs (2011) argue that rapid demographic change—ethnic- and class-based—caused a great deal of unease among long-time residents of the town. This unease tended to be worded in terms of illegality, in which the persons arriving in town were assumed to be undocumented and, thus, rejecting of the “rule of law.” Brettell and Nibbs suggested there was a strong class element to this unease and that it led to the passage of anti-immigrant ordinances and practices targeting immigrants. This contrasts with Brettell’s (2008) own study of the nearby city of Plano, which has enacted a number of inclusionary policies to address its own rapid demographic changes. These policies include an International Festival, efforts by the Chief of Police to recruit minority officers, a Citizen’s Academy that teaches newcomers about the workings of government, a multicultural roundtable within which to discuss city policy, and a number of programs run by the local library for both adults and youth (Brettell 2008). These two examples suggest that efforts taken by city leaders to minimize (or highlight) the sociocultural distance between newcomers and old-timers in a community can enhance (or exacerbate) community relations and, thus, the social cohesion of the community.
Taken together, these three lines of research suggest that the implementation of policy at the local level can impact both the behavior of new immigrants and long-time residents’ perception of them in positive ways, minimizing both sociocultural conflict and cultural dissonance. Conversely, opponents of such efforts argue that institutions that assist new immigrants are likely to attract large numbers of less desirable residents, particularly if the programs involved are equally available to the undocumented. As one resident of the city of Costa Mesa, California put it during city council meetings in 2007 and 2008, concentrating city services for the poor in an area of a city tends to depress property values, attract persons looking for a handout, and turn the area into a ghetto, with all the attendant crime problems (Trager 2012). In either case, we believe that local institutions, the policies they implement, and the procedures that flow from this implementation constitute a fruitful area for new research on the relationship between immigration and crime.

IV. Conclusion

Historically, immigrants have disproportionately taken the blame for many of society’s problems, including high or increasing rates of crime and violence. The media has played a central role in shaping public opinion in this respect. For one, the constant juxtaposition of the words “immigration” and “crime” in news story after news story helps forge the perception of a causal link between the two. Yet scholars have been quick to challenge these claims, providing empirical evidence that immigration and crime do not go hand in hand. As we stated at the outset of this essay, at least with respect to the relationship between immigration and crime across neighborhoods, cities, and metropolitan areas, the overwhelming finding to emerge from the social science literature is that areas with greater concentrations of immigrants, or that have witnessed increases in immigration, report less crime and violence compared to their counterparts. Although these studies do not report identical results, it is quite remarkable just how consistent these findings have been in the literature.

Yet, as we have also argued throughout this essay, it would be premature to abandon research on immigration and crime at this point. Central to our argument is the fact that, to date, studies have not fully accounted for all of the (potential) forces that can impact neighborhood crime rates generally and the immigration-crime relationship specifically. Important missing elements, we maintain, are local institutions within the community, along with their concomitant practices and policies. Our discussion centered on the practices and policies of local law enforcement officials, which we claim have become more authoritarian—and exclusionary—in the current context of devolution of federal immigration enforcement. Our discussion also highlighted several examples of more integrative institutions, such as private organizations and churches that have resulted in the greater incorporation of immigrants into the community fabric. These local institutions—and our discussion of their potential exclusionary or
integrative practices—are meant to be illustrative. Certainly, additional local institutions could be incorporated into a neighborhood analysis, given their likely influence on the immigration-crime nexus.

We should also note that community institutions likely influence the immigration-crime nexus in more than their policy-making and policy-enforcing roles. Because most policy is, in the final analysis, implemented at the community level, local institutions have become focal points in the wider political debates over immigration. As a number of scholars point out, local institutions often serve as guinea pigs in the debate over immigration policy (see, e.g., Rosenblum and Gorman 2010; Waslin 2010), and occasionally are tasked with serving as enforcement proxies for the federal government. Even when localities themselves are not actively pursuing policies that impact immigrants, local institutions that perform vital local functions can be swept into the glare of a national or statewide policy enforcement scheme, often to the detriment of the stated goals of the institution impacted. Given this, we conclude our essay by providing a few examples of the ways in which extralocal laws, policies, and concerns have inserted themselves into local institutional practices in ways that hinder the prosocial mission of those institutions.

Local schools provide a perfect example of this inadvertent role. Localities are responsible for the education of residents under the age of 18, and federal and state mandates (such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) direct school districts to focus efforts on low-performing schools and students in an effort to help them achieve basic academic competence (PL. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425 [2001]). Some school districts have attempted to accomplish these goals through integrative strategies. Yet some newly implemented state laws, in line with trends in devolution described earlier, place an immigration-enforcement burden on schools, requiring school officials to determine and report the immigration status of enrolling children and their parents. Although such laws do not prohibit the education of unauthorized children (see, e.g., Human Rights Watch 2011, p. 45), and although the courts typically block the implementation of school provisions of this type (see, e.g., U.S. vs. Alabama, No. 11-12532), they can have significant negative impacts on the educational mission of affected schools and, thus, on the future path of success or delinquency of many students.

A good example of this can be seen in the recent Hammon-Beason Alabama Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act ("H.B. 56"), which was signed into law in June, 2011. As noted by Human Rights Watch (2011), H.B. 56 has contributed to a climate of fear at the community level and a distrust of the educational system. Section 28 of the H.B. 56 bill requires school authorities to determine the immigration status of every child enrolled. Prior to the court action that enjoined the implementation of section 28, school authorities stated that more than 5,000 Hispanic children were being held out of school, when normal absences would be about 1,000 children. The total population of Hispanic children in Alabama schools at this time was 31,000, including U.S. citizens. Many children were temporarily held out of school by their parents—and returned when section 28 was enjoined—but many others were formally withdrawn by parents fearful of the consequences of school policing of immigration status. These children not only lost time at
school, but also lost their places in vital educational programs in which they were previously enrolled. For instance, children who were withdrawn from the preschool program Head Start lost their places in the program. Other children never returned to school because their parents were afraid to drive them there for fear of being stopped by local authorities. Indeed, Human Rights Watch noted that police are often a visible presence in the areas around schools (Human Rights Watch 2011). And even students who did return to school often had parents who became distrustful of the schools, thus depriving their children of the critical connections between teachers and parents that promote enhanced learning.

Just as important, this shift of focus from education to fear of actual or potential consequences has undermined the ability of children to learn in these intellectually formative years. Human Rights Watch has found, for example, that many children who never stopped attending school have been traumatized by the sudden disappearance of so many of their friends and classmates. Other students have asked their teachers if they would adopt them if their parents were ever deported. And still other families drag their children to school hours before classes begin in an effort to avoid being pulled over by the police. Although school officials and teachers often make an effort to reassure the children of their safety, this does not eliminate the anxiety felt by such students—an anxiety grounded in the efforts by state and local authorities to make the unauthorized excluded and unwelcome. And the consequences do not stop with school hours. Many families with one or more unauthorized members no longer engage in activities that take them into public visibility. Families live in a climate of fear, even those who own homes or businesses in Alabama. This means that many school-aged children no longer participate in activities such as soccer, cheerleading, or scouts (Human Rights Watch 2011). Moreover, some teachers have suggested that the law has diminished the drive to learn among some students, since they no longer feel they will be able to attend college (AFL-CIO 2011). The theories reviewed earlier in this essay in varied ways all suggest that these developments will have the unintended consequence of increasing vulnerability to delinquency and crime.

Although state laws that impact schools and education constitute an especially visible intrusion into community life, other regional and statewide developments have drawn other local institutions into the wider political debates over immigration. Indeed, regulated businesses and institutions that operate at the local level have been especially vulnerable to such intrusion, including public utilities, courts, jails, county election offices, probation offices, and even local branches of the state bar. The fear and uncertainty created by this intrusion can be palpable. In a recent investigatory effort in Alabama following the implementation of H.B. 16, the AFL-CIO discovered many situations in which regulated local businesses refused services to alleged unauthorized persons. Examples include:

- A local bar association advised its lawyers that they would be required to report information about their unauthorized clients if requested.
- Local water authorities posted signs that Latino customers would have to provide proof of immigration status immediately.
• Probate offices published notice that they will not provide services without proof of immigration status, thus denying many immigrants of birth or death certificates.
• A Latino man in jail was denied use of the telephone to call his attorney because it constitutes a business transaction.

To make matters even more complicated for many residents, H.R. 56 specifically states that a driver’s license from another state is not adequate proof of the right to live in the United States, thus making new residents of the state particularly vulnerable to these developments (AFL-CIO 2011). Developments of this type—which are far from universal—suggest there may be increasing ambiguities in the evaluation of the immigration–crime nexus at the local level because developments like these suggest increased scrutiny for the “criminal” behaviors of the unauthorized and also make ordinary lifestyles more difficult for the unauthorized to maintain.

Finally, extralocal organizations involved in the national debates over immigration can also directly impact institutional policies and practices at the community level. One particularly visible example of this is the Minuteman Project and its role in influencing community institutions, particularly at the level of police enforcement. Because the Minuteman Project as an organization advocates supplementing federal border security through private action (http://www.minutemanproject.com), the organization impacts the immigration–crime nexus in two fairly direct ways. First, it encourages local institutions to take actions that either criminalize the civil acts of unauthorized immigrants and those who assist them or to enforce federal or state laws that provide for such criminalization (Doty 2009). Second, the Minuteman Project also encourages individuals to take private action either to apprehend unauthorized immigrants or to provide information to the local authorities that will enable them to take steps to apprehend unauthorized immigrants (http://www.minutemanproject.com/borderwatch.php). Both types of action lead to increased probabilities that persons will be apprehended under laws that criminalize the undocumented and, thus, directly impact both the operation of peace services within the community as well as the immigration–crime nexus itself. This would even be the case if such apprehensions were improper, in which criminal charges could be filed against the private individuals involved.

In closing, we hope that our discussion has underscored the importance of bringing local institutions to the forefront of neighborhood research on immigration and crime. Clearly, there are many directions researchers could choose to explore. At a minimum though, we hope the arguments made in this essay spur researchers to continue examining the (likely) not-so-straightforward immigration–crime nexus.

Notes
1. Agreements under 8 U.S.C. § 1357(g).
2. The e-verify system is operated by the DHS in cooperation with the Social Security Administration (see http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis).
3. Although we do not explore such policies here, local institutions can also attack the rights of immigrants to live or work in communities (see Varsanyi 2010).

4. Significantly, however, the demographic shift in Plano did not include rapid class change, since many of the new immigrants brought substantial human capital with them (Brettell and Nibbs 2011).

REFERENCES


