



Rubin: Refugees up, crime down in Southfield, elsewhere

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Southfield has embraced 4,478 refugees across a 10-year span, and in that same period, its rates of violent crime and property crime have plummeted.

No one is claiming a cause and effect. Across the same decade, from 2006-15, Southfield most likely embraced more cellphones and Netflix memberships, too.

What's interesting is that of the 10 cities that received the most refugees relative to their size, nine saw a drop in crime. So while you can't claim that more refugees equals fewer assaults and purse snatchings, the Partnership for a New American Economy will tell you they don't lead to more.

The partnership, known to its friends as NAE, is a group of more than 500 mayors and business leaders from across the political panorama. Fox News owner Rupert Murdoch is a co-chair, as are New York's Michael Bloomberg and San Antonio's Julian Castro.

The NAE, which is fond of both numbers and immigration, assembled data from the state department and the FBI and released its study Tuesday.

"Given the current political debate," said spokeswoman Sarah Doolin Roy in an email, the NAE's research department felt its findings on refugees and crime "might be relevant to the discussion."

Or they might be dismissed, the way facts increasingly are. The libertarian Cato Institute, for instance, has calculated that based on the last 41 years, the per-annum chance of an American being murdered by a refugee in a terrorist attack is 1 in 3.64 billion.

At this point, if you read governmental edicts and the comments sections on websites, we're against and afraid of them anyway. But south of Eight Mile, Steve Tobocman of Global Detroit says the more, the wealthier — and Southfield Mayor Kenson Siver is practically offering free hugs.

Nigerian kids excelling

In case anyone asks, the refugee-friendly city where crime increased is West Springfield, Massachusetts, where the populace discovered opioids.

The city with the sharpest drop-offs — minus 77 percent in violent crime and 46 percent in property crime — is the one Siver has called home for 50 years.

“We've always been loaded with immigrants,” he said.

One of only three Iraqi consulates in the U.S. sits on 12 Mile Road. Southfield also has two Muslim community centers, a magnet elementary school whose students' households speak 29 assorted languages, and a growing population of Nigerians.

“These Nigerian kids are superstars in school,” said Siver, 71, a former teacher and administrator. It's the all-American story: grateful newcomers pushing their children to succeed.

The Iraqi newcomers tend to be Christians, he said. With the Nigerians, he doesn't know; it never occurred to him to ask.

He credits the falling crime rate to a good police department and, appropriately, a sense of community.

“People get along here,” he said, wherever they may have been before.

What the numbers say

Tobocman once hailed from Oakland County, but he moved to southwest Detroit before serving three terms in the Michigan House.

As executive director of Global Detroit, he's trying to leverage the skills and enthusiasm of immigrants to rebuild and repopulate the region.

It's incorrect, he said, to assume that immigrants cost jobs. Rather, “More people in a community grows the pie.”

The population growth Gov. Rick Snyder cheered in his state of the state address last month, Tobocman pointed out, was provided by former foreigners. In a depopulated area, “it's not that too many people are competing for a fixed number of jobs. It's that you've shrunk the amount of economic activity.”

Like the NAE, he does not buy the notion that “they're coming here to somehow get over on us, to commit crimes, to take advantage of public assistance.”

Rather, he cited a study that astonished even the Police Foundation, which conducted it: Immigrants, legal and otherwise, had an incarceration rate one-fifth as high as natives.

That's the opposite of what we tend to believe, but the numbers are on the page, and they're not lying. They're just being ignored.