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Comments and suggestions welcomed.

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Immigrant Crime in Japan

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Abstract: Many Japanese believe that foreign immigrants bring crime. Do they? Using municipality-level data from 2013 to 2023 and fixed effects regressions at the municipality level we study the relation between immigrants and crime. During the first few years, too few prefectures disclosed municipality-level crime data to let us reach a conclusion. During the last half of the period, the results are unambiguous: immigrants are associated with a small but statistically significant increase in crime -- an elasticity of 0.2. Immigrants may or may not raise crimes in the West -- Japan has unusually little crime -- but in Japan they are indeed associated with higher crime rates.

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At the end of 2025, the number of foreign residents in Japan hit a record 4 million and the number of foreign visitors hit 42 million (Japan Times 2026). Meanwhile, having peaked in 2010 at 128 million, the native population had fallen to 123 million. The resulting non-native fraction of 3 percent was nothing compared to France (13.8 percent), the U.S. (14.5 percent), the U.K. (15.4 percent), or Germany (18.2 percent), but for Japan it was the highest ever (Korekawa 2025, 17).

Many Europeans believe that their immigrants bring criminal chaos. Americans, too, complain of immigrant crime. And Japanese routinely assert that immigrants raise crime rates. But do they?

About Europe and the U.S., scholars have yet to converge on a consensus. Perhaps the most careful study to date (Spenkuch 2014, 215) finds "empirical evidence of a systematic and economically meaningful impact of immigration on crime" in the United States. "A 10% increase in the share of immigrants is estimated to lead to an increase in the property crime rate of circa 1.2%" (Spenkuch 2014, 215). Other studies, however, sometimes reach insignificant conclusions or even find that immigrants reduce the crime rate. Immigrants do usually settle first in higher-crime urban areas. Plausibly, they could raise the average level of crime across the country while still lowering the rates in the neighborhoods in which they settle.

By a similar logic, groups that cause no effect on crime in the West could increase crime in Japan. Crime rates in the U.S. and much of western Europe massively exceed those in Japan. As a result, a given ethnic group could commit crimes at rates below the U.S. average but still substantially above rates in Japan. That merging in the group would reduce U.S. crime rates would imply nothing about whether it would raise the rates in Japan. Indeed, we might even find that moving an average group of Americans, with their high crime rate, to Japan, with its low crime rate, would increase the crime rate in Japan.

In this article, we take comprehensive municipality-level data from Japan (roughly 1,900 municipalities) over the course of 2013-2023 and use fixed-effects regressions to study the relation between changes in foreign population and crime. During the first half of the period, too few prefectures (analogous to U.S. states) disclose municipality-level crime data to permit a conclusion. During the last half, the results are unambiguous: immigrants are associated with higher levels of crime. If, following Spenkuch (2014), a 10% increase in immigrants leads to a 1.2 percent increase in property crime in the U.S., it leads to 2 percent in Japan.

We begin by reviewing the empirical literature on the relation between immigration and crime (Section I). We describe recent immigration patterns in Japan, and summarize some of the police and journalistic accounts about the crime among this population (Section II). We then turn to our data (Section III. A, B), and our empirical results (III. C).

I. Literature Review

A. Introduction:

Whether in western Europe, the United States, or Japan, immigrants tend to be young. They tend to be single and unattached. They tend to have less education than the median native. And they tend to come from countries with higher crime rates than their new homes. By standard economic theory, those factors would suggest that they might be

more likely to engage in criminal activities (especially theft) than local residents. This is so on average even if some immigrants are middle-aged doctors and entrepreneurs.

Studies of immigration in the West, however, generate conflicting results. Some of the most careful studies (e.g., Spenkuch, 2014, discussed below) do find that immigrants commit property crimes more often local residents. Yet other scholars reach opposing or insignificant results.

B. Studies of Immigrant Crime in Other Countries:

1. Generalizability. -- Studies of immigrant crime hark back to the 19th century. Writing in the American Journal of Sociology in 1896, Hastings Hart (1896) reported that immigrants to the U.S. committed crimes at lower rates than natives, but that immigrant children committed crimes at higher rates than native children.

We have no reason to expect Hart's 1896 results to be true of immigrants to the U.S. in 2026, and no reason to expect them to be true of immigrants to other countries. Whether immigrants increase crime rates turns on time and place. Economic and sociological theory suggest reasons to expect various effects from factors like poverty, age, skill levels, education, the cohesiveness of the local immigrant community, and so forth. But their aggregate effect in a given jurisdiction at a given time are hard to predict *ex ante*.

Whether immigrants commit more crimes than locals will turn on the specifics of both the source community and the target community. Societies differ in crime. We would not expect immigrants from a low crime society to exhibit crime rates in their receiving society as high as immigrants from a high crime society -- unless there is selection in who immigrates. And even if emigrants from a given society do not raise crime rates in a high-crime receiving society (like the U.S.), they still might raise rates in a low-crime society (like Japan).

2. Method. -- As always, the research strategy employed will affect the outcome observed. Consider four ways in which one might examine the effect of immigration on crime. First (and most obvious), one could ask what fraction of people arrested or convicted are immigrants, and compare that fraction to their proportion in the general population. Obviously, the result will not reflect the status of the people who commit the unsolved crimes, and could readily turn on any bias among arresting officers, prosecutors, or judges. But as a preliminary cut on the problem, we offer this information in Table 1. In Japan, the total arrest rate in 2020 (total non-traffic arrests per 100,000 population) was 200.4. The arrest rate for foreign citizens was 1002.8.

[Insert Table 1 about here.]

Second, one could ask whether crime in the country increased as the number of foreigners increased. We do not see that correlation in Japan. Given the extremely low fraction of foreigners (the record high was 3 percent in 2025), we would not expect anything else. The statistical power of this approach is too low.

Third, one could ask whether regions of a country with more foreigners have more crime. See Table 1. Of the 10 prefectures with the greatest number of foreigners, seven showed 2020 arrest rates above the national mean. Roughly a fifth of all foreigners live in Tokyo, and the general rate of criminal arrest in Tokyo is 21 percent higher than the national

mean. The correlation is potentially relevant, but immigrants do tend to settle in large cities -- and large cities tend to have high crime rates regardless of immigration.

Fourth, one could perform a time-series cross-section analysis (typically using a fixed-effects model with jurisdiction and year variables) and ask whether an increase in foreigners in a region results in an increase in crime. This differs from both the second and the third approach, and is the approach taken in the most sophisticated studies. It is the approach we take here.

The fixed-effects approach has three problems. First, the classical 5% confidence level in statistics can easily mislead the scholar, and even more easily mislead the policymaker. The typical study of immigrant crime will ask (a) whether foreigners commit more crimes, and (b) how many more? If the regression does not show foreigners committing more crimes with at least a 5% confidence interval, the careful scholar will write (1) we cannot reject the hypothesis that foreigners commit no more crimes than citizens. Unfortunately, most scholars do not write this. Instead, they write (2) we have found that foreigners commit no more crimes than citizens. The problem here is one of statistical "power." If a study is poorly done or if the data is insufficiently clean, then even if foreigners do increase crime, the scholar will not detect it at the 5% level.

Second, the problem of statistical power explains the distressingly common claims in the literature that distinguish among different categories of crime. For example, the scholar might present his results and explain that immigration raises violent crime but not total crime. The distinction does not make sense. What happened was that the scholar found a statistically significant relationship between immigration and violent crime, but the data for other crimes were sufficiently noisy that they swamped the results on total crime.

Third, the fixed-effect strategy does not ask -- does not even purport to ask -- whether an increase in immigrants to a given country is associated with an increase in the rate of crime in that country. Rather, it asks whether an increase in the fraction of foreigners in a given component sub-unit of the country (e.g., a county in the U.S., or municipality in Japan) is associated with an increase in the rate of crime in that component sub-unit. Given that immigrants disproportionately settle in high-crime areas, this distinction poses a problem.

Fundamentally, if immigrants disproportionately move to relatively high-crime sub-units, they could simultaneously (a) lower the crime rate in those particular sub-units, even as they (b) raise the crime rate in the country as a whole. Potentially, the fixed-effects coefficient may calculate a negative (or insignificant) coefficient on the fraction of immigrants even if the immigrants raise the national crime rate. Take this numerical example. A given country has 8 sub-units. Seven are rural, with a population of 1 million each and a crime rate of 100 (per 100,000 capita). The eighth unit is urban, with a population of 3 million, and a crime rate of 500. Over the country as a whole, the crime rate is 220. Now suppose 100,000 immigrants settle in the eighth sub-unit. The immigrants bring a crime rate of 400. Given that the fixed-effect model asks whether the immigrants lower crime rates in the places where they settle, the regressions will yield a negative coefficient on immigrants. After all, the immigrants (with a crime rate of 400) lower the crime rates in the sub-unit in which they settle (the eighth sub-unit, with an initial crime rate of 500). Given that the immigrants do not settle in the other sub-units, the crime rates there remain unchanged.

In fact, however, the immigrants have raised the national rate of crime. With the 100,000 immigrants bringing a crime rate of 400, the national rate has risen from 220 to 221.8. The immigrants do indeed lower the crime rate in the area where they settle, and the fixed-effect regression may calculate a negative coefficient on the fraction of immigrants. Nevertheless, those immigrants simultaneously raise the crime rate over the country as a whole.

3. National and cross-national studies. -- (a) U.S. On the connection between immigration and crime, Joerg Spenkuch (2014) presents one of the most methodologically careful studies extant. During the last four decades of the 20th century, the proportion of immigrants doubled in the U.S., while the amount of violent crime quadrupled. To explore this phenomenon, Spenkuch couples county-level data on immigrant share with the FBI compilation of crime statistics from 1980 to 2000.

Analyzing crime by county and year with fixed effects and log regressions for both, Spenkuch finds that the elasticity of property crime with respect to immigrants is 0.12. The estimate for violent crime, however, does not differ from zero at a statistically significant level. Inter alia, Spenkuch notes that the results are strongest for immigrants with the worst predicted labor market outcomes and for immigrants from Mexico.

Spenkuch conditions his regressions on other variables such as building permits and unemployment (though not race, a crucial variable in the U.S.) and finds no great difference whether those are included on top of county fixed effects. He also tries using first differences (changes rather than levels) and instrumental variables with past immigrant population as an instrument. He finds his results robust to both of these complexities. To restate his (Spenkuch 2014, 215) conclusion: "A 10% increase in the share of immigrants is estimated to lead to an increase in the property crime rate of circa 1.2%."

(b) Countries other than the U.S. and Japan. Scholars have compiled a number of studies on the relation between immigration and crime in other countries. Typically, the results vary by country. For example, Kubrin & Ousey (2025) and Marie & Pinotti (2024) survey articles about crime and immigration across a number of different nations. They conclude that most studies do not find that immigration increases crime. Handled correctly, Kubrin & Ousey (2025) write, immigration could even reduce crime. If governments allowed immigrants to work in the legal job market, for example, they might well lower actual crime rates.

As samples of the individual studies available, consider the following. Ajzenman, Dominguez & Undurraga (2023) study Chile, where the foreign-born population tripled in less than ten years. They find no effect of immigration on actual crime, but positive and significant effects on concern about crime and on precautions such as investments in home security.

Ciorba & Neagoş (2025) examine Sweden. They write that foreign-born residents are 2.5 times more frequently identified as official suspects of a crime than citizens with native-born parents. What is more, from 2010 to 2025, first-generation immigrants constituted 53% of individuals serving long-term imprisonment. Adamson (2020) reaches similar conclusions about Sweden.

Bell, Fasani & Machin (2013) look at immigration to the United Kingdom. They undertake a time-series cross-section analysis at the "local authority" level (n.b.: a county

typically consists of four local authorities). They find that in the late 1990s, asylum seekers led to a small increase in crime. After 2004, they find "a small negative effect."

Bianchi, Buonanno & Pinotti (2012) explore Italy. They take province-level data from 1990 to 2003. They find that the number of immigrants correlates positively with the incidence of property crimes and with the overall crime rate. With an instrumental variables approach, they find that the effect disappears.

One of the most impressive studies is the 2019 book by Fasani, Mastrobuoni, Owens & Pinotti about immigration and crime across the world. In Italy, Belgium, Estonia, Austria, and Norway, imprisonment rates for immigrants are at least double the rates for domestic citizens (Fig. 1.7). In Ireland, the U.S., and New Zealand, however, they find no such result. After studying the U.K. and U.S. in more detail, they conclude that immigrants commit no more crimes than natives. They note that in Japan the crime rate by foreigners is many times higher than that of natives.

C. Studies of Immigrant Crime in Japan:

Given the dramatically different crime rates in Japan and the U.S., any given immigrant group will more likely raise crime rates in Japan than in the United States. In 2024, 16,935 people were murdered in the 334-million population U.S. In the 124 million population Japan, 221 were murdered. If a random group of Americans immigrated to Japan, they would, these numbers imply, raise the murder rate. Indeed, even a random Swede who immigrated to Japan would raise the murder rate.

Japan specialists in the West assiduously avoid this logic. Japanese citizens themselves do not avoid it, but when they complain about crime, Japan specialists in the West routinely dismiss their concerns as xenophobic. Australian historian of Japan Tessa Morris-Suzuki (2002, 175) attributes Japanese concern about crime to "largely a statistical artifact." The police agency focuses on the statistics, she says, "to raise its public profile and win popular support for the maintenance of its budget." When in 2000 the Tokyo governor publicly worried about immigrant crime, Harvard professor of Japanese history Andrew Gordon (2003, 330) dismissed his worries as "prejudice." In a 2025 Cornell University Press book specifically about women and immigrants in Japan, Hilary Holbrow (2025, 142) flatly asserts that "crime rates among noncitizens are no higher than those for Japanese" Apichai Shipper (2005, 326) writes that "nationalistic political elites use unsubstantiated official figures, taken out of their social and demographic contexts, to portray illegal foreigners as criminals and dangerous." He (2005, 300) concludes that "[r]acial prejudices in Japan appear to be largely devoid of links to real events or social reality" Sara Park (2017, 64) claims that even to attribute these concerns to "xenophobia trivialises the issue" Instead, she (2017, 68) explains, at "the root of 'xenophobia' in Japan, there is racism and hatred towards people from the country's former colonies." Ultimately, she writes (Park 2017, 65; see also Hall 2025), "racism is one of Japan's gravest social problems." Holbrow (2025, 142-43) seems to agree: racism "is not uncommon among the police," and "the Japanese internet is a hotbed of racist diatribe against Chinese and Koreans"

Aside from these data-free attacks, four empirical studies of the association between immigrants and crime in Japan stand out. Three use data at the level of the 47 prefectures, and the fourth uses data from 49 subunits of Tokyo's prefecture.

Horiuchi (2012) takes data from 2000, 2005, and 2010, and employs fixed-effect regressions with prefecture and year variables. He adds a variety of demographic and economic controls. He separately estimates the effect of immigrants on logged rates of total crime, violent crime, and property crime. He finds that the fraction of population that is foreign is significantly and positively associated with the rate of property crimes. He finds no significant effect on the rates of either total crime or violent crime.

Kobayashi (2010) similarly uses fixed effects regressions on prefecture-level data, but for the 12 years from 1995 to 2006. Like Horiuchi he uses both prefecture and year variables and adds a variety of demographic and economic controls. Unlike Horiuchi, he uses the number of arrests rather than reported crimes. He appears not to have had access to the immigrant arrest data we present in Table 1. Through his regressions, he estimates the effect of the fraction of the population that is foreign on (logged) rates of total crime, violent crime, and property crime. He finds a significant positive association between immigrants and violent crime, but no significant effects on either total or property crime.

Green, et al. (2025) regress crime rates on the fraction of population that is foreign, but they do not estimate a fixed-effects model. Instead, they pool prefecture-level statistics (with a variety of demographic and economic controls) over the five years from 2017 to 2021. Contrary to Horiuchi (2012) and Kobayashi (2010), they find a negative relationship between immigrants and non-violent crime, though not with violent crime. The Green, et al. (2025) study is troubling, however, on several grounds. The authors use Poisson pseudo-maximum likelihood as an estimation technique. The technique was designed for situations in which the number of crimes or foreigners is often zero in an observation, and like any maximum likelihood technique, it relies on large numbers of observations to achieve unbiasedness. In explaining their use of the technique, they write: "The PPML is more often used in econometrics, where it is considered superior to other forms of regression in that it avoids problems of autocorrelation, multicollinearity, and heteroskedasticity." Not so. The Poisson technique is standard and useful when many observations have a zero value, but it does not deal with autocorrelation, multicollinearity, and heteroskedasticity any better than ordinary least squares does.

Finally, a (2024) explores the connection between immigration and crime in the 49 sub-units of Tokyo over 2007 to 2019. He uses a fixed-effect model, but employs a two-stage least-squares approach to address the possibility that "immigrants tend to settle in areas with higher concentrations of earlier immigrants of the same nationality" (Tomohara 2024, 7). The relation between crime and immigrant population, he concludes, is nonlinear: crime rises as immigrant population increases from a low level, but then falls as immigration increases further. It falls, he explains (Tomohara 2024, 1), because the "favorable ethnic network externalities on crime emerge after the immigrant share reaches a certain level in the community."

II. Immigrants and Crime in Japan

A. The Immigrants:

1. History. -- In the 1990s, the Japanese government began looking for immigrants who would do the low-paid manual labor that young Japanese (who were about to start falling in number) shunned. Initially, the government focused on foreigners with Japanese

ancestry, most commonly from Brazil or Peru.¹ This focus on race was not a success. The Japanese-Brazilian and Japanese-Peruvian immigrants had ancestors who left Japan in the mid-20th century, but they were now Brazilian and Peruvian. They did not speak or read Japanese, and they had largely swapped out their grandparents' culture for that of Brazil and Peru.

When these immigrants found themselves laid off after the 2008 financial crisis, many opted to return to South America. Given that they still did not speak Japanese, they found it hard to find new jobs within Japan. Rather than support them on welfare and risk a spike in crime, the government subsidized their return trip (Idei 2019b; Tomohara 2020, 5).

With so many of the Brazilians and Peruvians gone, immigration changed character. Foreigners who come to Japan in 2026 are highly diverse. Some are controversial; others, less so. The debate within the Japanese public has not been about talented foreigners from the First World. Japanese do not fear the Columbia University Fulbright student studying 10th century court poetry at Waseda University. They do not fear the Berkeley engineer helping Toyota develop a self-driving car. They do not fear the Swedish wife of a Tokyo law-firm partner. They do not even fear the great-granddaughter of the Korean worker who immigrated to Japan in 1927 to work in a steel factory.

Instead, the Japanese complaints that Morris-Suzuki (2002), Gordon (2004), Shipper (2005), Hall (2025), Holbrow (2025), and Park (2017) dismiss as xenophobic concern "exchange students" and "trainees" from the Third World, along with overstaying "tourists" from Asian countries: Kurdish asylum seekers, Vietnamese students, and Filipino trainees-- not foreigners generally. Kurdish asylum seekers are not political leaders fleeing persecution; they are ordinary people seeking a better life. Many Vietnamese exchange students are not in Japan to study and Filipino trainees are not there to train; they are in Japan to do low-end -- but to them, lucrative -- manual labor and to send money home as fast as they can. They have neither the aptitude, the time, nor the interest to learn Japanese, or to learn anything else. The question is how many resort to crime as a source of income.

Given that Japan has an aging population and its young people do not wish to do manual labor at low wages, the government welcomes the foreigners. But a distressing number apparently earn money through crime. That is the subject of this article. Japan is a soft target, and we should expect some foreigners to be tempted. "How many" is the question at the heart of this article.

2. Exchange students. -- In 2024, Japanese schools enrolled 336,708 students from abroad. China sent 23,485, 64,816 came from Nepal, and 40,323 from Vietnam (Monbu 2025). By 2025, the total would climb to 464,784 (Japan Times 2026). In issuing student visas, the Japanese government deliberately sought to limit them to those who would study rather than work. It realized that young foreigners intent on working in Japan might register as students but spend their time in paying jobs. To prevent this, it required applicants or their parents to show income or wealth high enough that the applicants would not feel driven to work for money (Sawada 2020, 219-23).

Unfortunately, the government did not always succeed in filtering out false students. The resulting problem primarily concerned students from Vietnam and Nepal, not China.

¹ See Kim (2016, 31); Idei (2019b); Tomoharu (2020, 5).

Chinese students tend to come from wealthy families, and attend Japan's internationally known schools (Sawada 2020, 221). The problem is students from poorer countries.

In 2019, the university with the highest number of foreign students (5,412 students) was the internationally prominent Waseda University. Founded in 1882, Waseda was sending its faculty to the U.S. and Europe by 1900. Einstein lectured there in 1922. The third-ranked school was the preeminent University of Tokyo (3,853 students) (Gaikokujin 2019). The school opened in 1877, and scholars associated with the university have earned 20 Nobel prizes and a Fields medal. Neither Waseda nor Tokyo enrolled many false students.

The school with the second-highest number of foreign students in 2019 (5,133 students) was not like Waseda or Tokyo (Idei 2019c; Gaikokujin 2019). Founded in 2000, the Tokyo Social Welfare (Fukushi) University celebrated as its motto: "Take students who can't, and make them students who can." With almost entirely open admissions, the school attacked the first half of its motto with zeal. Unfortunately, its president has been otherwise preoccupied. In 2008, the police arrested TSWU founder Tsuneo Nakajima for indecent assault. It followed with a series of other sexual charges, including attempted rape. Nakajima formally resigned most of his posts but stayed involved in the college and faced charges of taking kickbacks in 2023.

The Tokyo Social Welfare University embodies the public distress over the country's immigration policies. Of the school's 3,955 undergraduates in 2025, 2,050 were foreign.² Of its 679 graduate students, 599 were foreign. In 2019 it could not locate 1,610 of its approximately 5,000 foreign students (Idei 2019c). But the school charged first-year tuition and fees of over 1 million yen to foreign students (school web site, 2025; see also Kim 2016, 44; at the close of 2024, \$1.00 traded for 157 yen).

Among the institutions catering to young men and women hoping for low-end Japanese jobs, the Tokyo Social Welfare University was just the most brazen. Over 700 language schools say they will teach Japanese to exchange students (Idei 2019a). One observer estimates that 80 percent of the schools are fake (Idei 2019a). But they are genuine as a way to get a visa.

If a student graduates from one of these language schools, he can transfer to a related technical school and stay on his visa. He need not take an independently administered language test. The technical school will charge its own tuition. And in exchange for the tuition-paying student, the technical school will (claims one observer) pay the language school a kickback, and the language school will in turn pay a kickback to the foreign broker who arranged the student's trip.³

At the low-end jobs available to them, these exchange students can hope to make about 100,000 yen per month (Kim 2016, 44). To get this job, they will need to pay several sources. Typically, they will pay the broker in their home country 300,000 to 500,000 yen (Idei 2019b, 2019c). As noted earlier, they will pay annual tuition of perhaps 1 million yen. And they will need to find room and board.

² School website: https://www.tokyo-fukushi.ac.jp/introduction/research/images/bulletin/bulletin14_0102.pdf.

³ Idei (2019a). Japanese firms involved in the process may not formally charge the trainee fees. See Gaikokujin (2016), sec. 28.

Exchange students may legally work 28 hours per week. Many students apparently avoid the restriction by working multiple jobs, each under 28 hours. The original broker often provides the first job as part of the package (Idei 2019b). Recall that the Japanese government requires an applicant to show family income or wealth sufficient to enable him to focus on study rather than work. The original broker will also manufacture the necessary fake paper work for this statement (Idei 2019a).

3. Trainees. -- The trainee program is no truer to its ostensible purpose than the exchange-student program. The trainee program purports to give young men and women from undeveloped countries a chance to apprentice themselves to Japanese firms and learn the work skills necessary for the modern economy. In practice, they work at very low wages -- in exchange, again, for large fees to home-country brokers.

As of June 2025, 198,000 trainees came from Vietnam. Another 111,000 were from Indonesia. The Philippines sent 40,000, Myanmar 36,000, and the remaining countries 64,000 (Min. Justice 2025, 6).

Trainees come for 5-year terms.⁴ During the first year they combine skills and classroom education. At the end of the year they take a skills and written exam. Those who fail return home -- but over 90 percent pass (OTIT 2024). Those who succeed proceed to the second level for two years. At the end of the third year, they take a second skills exam. If successful, they advance to the third level for two more years.

First-year trainees earn an average of 191,000 yen per month. More senior trainees earn higher amounts. The trainees pay an average of 19,000 per month for room and board, and 27,000 for tax and social insurance (OTIT 2024).

Like the student programs, the trainee programs involve intermediaries (Kosei 2023). Typically, a brokering organization in the sending country recruits potential trainees. In Vietnam alone, 483 organizations sent trainees to Japan (Nagasaka 2025, 68). That brokering organization then contracts with a receiving organization in Japan.

Importantly, the receiving organization arranges placements with Japanese firms, and supervises the internships at those firms. The firms -- spread among hundreds of municipalities -- then contract directly with the trainees. Note that the trainees do not choose the municipality to which they go. Given this recruiter-firm-driven process by which trainees are assigned, in the research below we treat immigrant location as largely (obviously, not entirely) exogenous to the local crime rate.

Nominally, a trainee comes, learns the trade, and goes home. By the explicit terms of the program, neither the sending nor the receiving organization may charge a trainee for its service. Third-world governments, however, are routinely corrupt, and many officials do charge trainees for positions in Japan.

Observers write that in Vietnam, senior Communist Party members often participate (directly or indirectly) in recruiting (Idei 2021, 2023). Vietnamese trainees pay their brokers an average of 690,000 yen, but some pay over 1 million. Manufacturing jobs are popular, and command higher bribes. Construction jobs can be had for less (Idei 2023).

⁴ Arai (2024); Kosei (2023); Gino (N.D.). See generally *Gaikokujin no gino jisshu no tekisei na jisshi oyobi gino jisshu sei no hogo ni kansuru horitsu* [Law Relating to the Appropriate Realization of Technical Training for Foreigners and to the Protection of Technical Intern Trainees], Law No. 89 of 2016.

Trainees come from poor families and do not have the money to pay these bribes. To raise the funds, they borrow.

By far the largest fraction of trainees live in one of the hundreds of municipalities (spread over seven prefectures) in the greater Tokyo metropolitan area. Many others live in the municipalities encircling Nagoya and Osaka. Of all trainees in 2019, 20.8 percent worked in construction. Another 18.8 percent worked in food products firms, 16.1 percent worked in machine or metal industries, 8.9 percent in agriculture, and 6.6 percent in textiles (OTIT 2020; see OTIT 2024).

None of the participants in the third-world student and trainee programs care about the programs' putative purposes. They do not participate to obtain education or training. They want jobs.

In turn, the schools and employers do not care about training or education either. They want people willing to work in the jobs Japanese workers do not want at the wages offered. With a shrinking population, Japanese workers can be choosy about what jobs they accept, and at what wage. Thus the demand for foreign labor. With neither the sellers (young men and women) nor the buyers (schools and employers) interested in the nominal purposes behind the programs, it should not surprise anyone that those purposes get lost. After all, the driving force is the aging of the Japanese workforce and the reluctance of Japanese employers to pay the wages that would attract the smaller number of young workers.

4. The illegals. -- Exchange students and trainees sometimes disappear. Recall that the Tokyo Social Welfare University famously “lost” 1,610 of its exchange students in 2019 (Idei 2019c). Trainees disappear too. Rather than stay with their assigned firm, they simply leave. They look for better jobs.

In 2022, 9,006 trainees absconded. Of these, 6,016 were from Vietnam. In 2023, 9,753 trainees absconded, 5,481 from Vietnam. And in 2024, 6,510 trainees disappeared, 3,865 from Vietnam (Min. Justice 2024a, 1; Betonamu 2025a). The jobs trainees were most likely to leave were in construction. The location they were most likely to leave was Tokyo, probably because they most often started there (Min. Justice 2024, 4, 6).

The illegals tend to stay in the same areas as the trainees: greater Tokyo, Aichi (Nagoya), and Osaka. As of 2024, in the greater Tokyo metropolitan area, the prefectures with the most illegals were Ibaragi (about 3,500), Chiba (2,300), Gunma (1,800), Saitama (1,400), Tokyo (900), Tochigi (600), and Kanagawa (600). In Aichi there were 1,200; in Osaka, 500 (Min. Justice 2024b).

Farmers sometimes hire illegals. They must keep trainees on the payroll year-round and need to follow a variety of labor rules concerning maximum hours, etc. By contrast, they can hire illegals when they have work and lay them off when they do not. They can keep illegals as busy as they like. Worried as the illegals are about deportation, they care very little about working hours. The farmers just need to pay them well, and pay them in cash. Wages in agriculture vary over the farming season, but generally an illegal can make about 250,000 yen a month. Some make 300,000 to 400,000 (Murohashi 2023a).

Foreigners on 90-day tourist visas disappear too. In 2020, most of the 13,000 illegals from South Korea were people who overstayed a short-term visa, as were most of the 9,000 illegals from Thailand. About half of the 11,000 illegals from China and 6,000 from Philippines similarly overstayed 90-day visas (Shutsunyu koku 2024).

Combining all the illegals, as of January 1, 2026 the government estimated the number to be 68,000 -- 1.7 percent of all foreign residents (Japan Times 2026), a trivial proportion compared to the United States.

5. The Kawaguchi Kurds. -- An interesting but unusual case concerns the asylum-seeking Kurds in the city of Kawaguchi (Saitama prefecture) near Tokyo. Local residents complain that Kurdish men frequently harass women. They work on demolition crews, and local residents complain that they underprice their services by flouting asbestos disposal and safety rules. The Kurds leave large bills unpaid. They litter. They make loud noises at night. They make no effort to learn Japanese, they leave unpaid bills, they fight each other, they cause hit-and-run traffic accidents, and they ignore garbage disposal rules (Ishii 2024, 38, 42-44, 62, 80-88, 108; Miyoshi 2025, 39, 44-45; Ishigami 2025, 28-29). According to some observers, Japanese are moving out of the area. Ishii calls it the Tokyo analogue to "white flight" (Ishii 2024, 36-37).

By some accounts, 1,400 Kurds live in Kawaguchi (Miyoshi 2025, 29); by other estimates, 3,000-4,000 (Ishii 2024, 115). No one knows, since many live there illegally. Once they arrive, they apply for asylum. The government takes 2 to 3 years to process an application. It turns down virtually all Kurds who claim asylum, but it lets the applicants stay during the interim. Once denied, the Kurds immediately file a second application, and start the 2 to 3-year process all over (Ishii 2024, 106-09; Ishigami 2025, 16).

B. The Crimes:

1. Introduction. -- As discussed below (Sec. III.B.2.), we focus on violations of the Criminal Code. This excludes traffic and immigration-related crimes. Indeed, a full two-thirds of the crimes are theft, and criminally inclined foreigners in Japan work in "theft rings," typically composed of men and women from a common country (Sato 2025; Gaikokujin 2025). According to accounts in the press, they break into homes, steal cars and agricultural produce, and shoplift. The usual nationality has changed over the years, but Vietnamese currently dominate. As of 2023, 28 percent of the foreign arrests for Criminal Code violations were from Vietnam, with 21.5 percent from China. Of the arrests for breaking and entering, 73.1 percent were from Vietnam, and of the arrests for shoplifting, 55.3 percent (Sato 2025).

Before turning to our empirical exercise (Sec. III), consider some of the many journalistic accounts.

2. Breaking and entering. -- In 2025, police reported a Vietnamese theft ring of 12. Some were exchange students and some were trainees, but all were recruited over the internet. This one theft ring had broken into 209 homes and offices in the Tokyo area. Police reported total losses at 170 million yen (Kokuseki 2025).

A major earthquake hit the Noto peninsula in early 2024. Shortly thereafter, police arrested 5 Vietnamese for breaking into damaged homes. All told, they had stolen from 170 houses. Police reported losses of 25 million yen (Hisaichi 2025).

So closely do the police watch the Vietnamese that some Uzbekistanis see an opportunity. They reason that they can safely come on a 90-day short-term visa, steal large amounts, and return home. With the police so focused on the Vietnamese, they calculate Uzbekistanis will evade detection (Himeda 2024).

Foreigners have been breaking into offices and homes for at least two decades. In 2003, the police reported a team of 30 Chinese who had carried out 579 safe-cracking operations. They also reported a Brazilian theft ring of 60 responsible for 600 cases of theft (Keisatsu 2003, ch. 1). The thieves often coordinate their attacks over the internet. Sometimes, they never actually meet their coordinator. Sometimes, the coordinator is not even in Japan (Dokumento 2024; Gaikokujin 2025).

3. Shoplifting. -- Other Vietnamese specialize in shoplifting. They coordinate these theft rings too over the internet. In some cases, the coordinator operates directly from Vietnam, and tells the Vietnamese in Japan what to steal (Betonamu 2024). One coordinator specialized in thefts from middle-brow Uniqlo stores. He sent his recruits in Japan instructions not just about which products to steal, but about the preferred sizes and colors (Yunikuro 2024). Many rings focus on drug-store cosmetics. Typically they reduce the risk of arrest by targeting middle-tier products. Japanese middle-brow cosmetics are popular in southeast Asia, and that popularity enables the Vietnam-based coordinators to market the products through established retail networks (Betonamu 2024, 2025b).

In yet another example, police issued an international arrest warrant in 2025 for a man and woman in Hanoi. The two had recruited thieves in Japan over the internet. They had sent their agents instructions about what to steal and how. Police tied them to 150 cases of theft, with damages totalling 16 million yen (Betonamu 2025b).

4. Car theft. -- For several decades now, foreigners have played a pivotal role in the car theft industry. From 34,000 in 1990, car thefts climbed to 64,000 in 2003. They then plummeted to 5,200 by 2021 (Seikatsu 2025).

The Russian mob played a major part in the initial spike. Sometimes mob leaders sent their own members to Japan to steal. At other times, they specified their preferred models to the Japanese mob and took possession at small Hokkaido harbors (Keisatsu 2003). This was not crime by immigrants, but by foreigners.

By the 2020s, the police, and increasingly savvy car owners, had sharply cut the number of thefts. In the thefts that remained, Vietnamese played a major part (Tochigi 2022). Of the 6,000 car thefts in Japan in 2025, the security industry wrote that they were "overwhelmingly by Vietnamese" (Tsui 2025, see also Seikatsu 2025), and:

Most of the cars stolen in Japan are secretly transported overseas. Typically, they first go to places like junk yards [often shielded from public view by high walls], where they are disassembled and the parts are packed into shipping containers for export as used auto parts.

Foreign involvement follows from Japanese policing practice. As a centralized rather than federal state, the national government of Japan, not the prefectures, handles motor vehicle registrations. It issues license plates nationally, and attaches them to a car with a seal. The plates remain on the car for the life of the car. The government maintains computer records of all cars, together with license plate numbers and VINs. Regularly, owners must pass safety and emissions tests, which also are recorded on the national computer network. Given this system, thieves do not find it impossible to market a stolen car domestically, but they do find it harder than in the U.S.

Contemporary thieves focus on Toyotas. Some steal relatively plebian but internationally popular models like the Prius. Others focus on the more upscale SUVs sold in the U.S. under the Lexus brand (e.g., Land Cruiser, Lexus LX) (Seikatsu 2025).

According to the Saitama prefectural police, over the course of the first eight months of 2024, one eight-member Vietnamese theft ring stole 495 cars (Chukosha 2025). In September 2025, police arrested a four-member theft ring led by a Chinese student that targeted luxury SUVs (Gifu 2025). In October, they arrested another car theft ring focusing on luxury SUVs, this one involving Brazilians (Kokyu 2025).

5. Hit and runs. -- Not all crimes are for material gain. Trainees tend to be young. They do not know Japan or read Japanese. Many do not have a driver's license. Some drive anyway, and when they do, they hit cars and people. All too often, they panic and disappear as fast as they can.

Accidents are tragically common. One author collected accounts of hit-and-run accidents involving unlicensed Vietnamese drivers in 2020 (Yasuda 2023b, 46-47). These accidents -- all hit and run -- are the kind of incident that create public opinion:

March 26, Mie prefecture: 30 year-old male driver.

May 30, Gifu prefecture: 36 year-old male driver.

June 14, Shizuoka prefecture: 24 year-old male driver.

August 24, Aichi prefecture: 35 year-old male driver.

October 22, Shizuoka prefecture: 56 year-old intoxicated male.

December 19, Ibaragi prefecture: fatal hit-and-run accident involving 30 year-old female.

December 24, Aichi prefecture: 25 year-old male.

Just a few examples-- but this is the kind of thing once can expect to happen.

6. Odd crimes. -- The food markets in Japan famously celebrate high-end vegetables and fruit, raised with excruciating levels of care and fetching extraordinarily high prices. Increasingly, thefts of hyper-premium fruit by foreigners (particularly Vietnamese) have become a major problem. Recent accounts detail thefts of grapes, of massive numbers of peaches in Yamanashi, and of melons in Ibaragi (Yurusu 2022; Murohashi 2023b).

Japanese utilities have invested heavily in solar power generating facilities. To the solar panels, they run wires, and the best wires come with copper cores. Copper is expensive. In Ibaragi prefecture, 2023 saw over 1,600 cases of solar panel wire theft. Of the thieves caught, the majority were from southeast Asia (Taiyo 2024). In Gunma, the damages from solar panel wire theft reached 254 million yen (Dokyumento 2024).

In addition, trainees grow pot. In 2022, police arrested two Thai trainees for cultivating marijuana in Ibaragi (Ibaragi 2022). In 2023, they arrested 16 Vietnamese in Gunma. The Gunma trainees had been growing over 1,000 marijuana plants. "Even in the summer, they kept their shutters closed and ran three air conditioners constantly," remarked an elderly neighbor. "It seemed odd" (Dokyumento 2024).

7. Infanticide. -- The most macabre and heart-rending stories describe a near-epidemic of infanticides among Vietnamese trainees. The news accounts rarely describe it as infanticide, and prosecutors rarely treat it as such. Instead, the prosecutors typically

treat it as stillbirth and prosecute the mothers for the crime of improperly disposing of the corpse. But the facts are strikingly uniform. The woman was alone in her or her boyfriend's room. She gave birth. Sometimes her child (or fetus) was born so premature that it could not have been born alive, and sometimes she had attempted an amateur abortion. Other times the facts are less clear. The trainee wrapped the child in a plastic bag and placed it on a shelf,⁵ or dumped it in the trash.⁶ One trainee abandoned her baby outdoors,⁷ while another buried him in a field.⁸ At least two late-term trainees took abortifacients and flushed their fetuses down the toilet.⁹

If she had given birth, she would have had to return to Vietnam, the trainee invariably told the police. To be sure, pregnancy is not actually a permissible ground for dismissing a trainee (Iwashita 2025), and abortions performed by an obstetrician are generally legal, but the women worried nonetheless. Desperate to avoid deportation, they disposed of the baby as best they could.

III. Empirical Estimates

A. The Empirical Puzzle:

Consider what data one might need to explore the question: do foreign immigrants increase crime? A large fraction of crimes go unsolved anywhere. This complicates any attempt to estimate the relative rates of crime among native and immigrant populations.

Many countries, Japan among them, publish native and immigrant arrest rates. As Table 1 tells us, police arrest 200.4 per 100,000 Japanese for criminal violations, but 1,002.8 per 100,000 among immigrant populations.(the table gives violations of the Criminal Code, and thus excludes immigration-related crimes). Never mind scholars like political scientist Hilary Holbrow (2025, 151) who write of "the (fairly rare) cases in which foreign residents or visitors are actually arrested." In fact, police arrest foreigners at five times the rate they arrest native Japanese.

But arrest rates are not crime rates, and do not reflect the citizenship of the people committing unsolved crimes-- and of course not all arrests are correct or result in convictions. Moreover, police could plausibly find it either harder or easier to identify foreign criminals. On the one hand, police may know the native criminal network better-- - "the usual suspects". They may maintain a sophisticated team of informants for natives, particularly the yakuza gangsters. If so, then foreign arrest rates might understate the relative rate of foreign crime. On the other hand, foreigners might find themselves locked out of the more established and sophisticated criminal networks. They might find it harder to recruit accomplices, harder to fence stolen goods. Their very foreign appearance might

⁵ One Vietnamese trainee in Kumamoto gave birth to twins in 2020, when 8 or 9 months pregnant. Her conviction for corpse abandonment was reversed on appeal to the Supreme Court (Mochizuki 2021; Koku v. [Unnamed] (Sup. Ct. Mar. 24, 2023)).

⁶ Fukuoka trainee in 2024 (Shitai iki 2025; Shitai iki zai 2024; Shitai iki zai 2025).

⁷ Yokohama trainee in 2019 (Kikoku 2020).

⁸ Hiroshima trainee in 2022 (Akachan 2022; Yasuda 2023a).

⁹ Hyogo trainee in 2022, after taking abortifacient when 5 months pregnant (Yasuda 2023a; Shisan 2023a; Shisan 2023b). An Okayama trainee did this in 2020, after taking an abortifacient when 4-5 months pregnant (Shitai iki 2020; Kikoku 2020).

prevent them from blending into a crowd. If so, then foreign arrest rates will over-state the relative rate of crime by foreigners.

Rather than rely on arrest rates, we, like the scholars discussed in Section I.B., focus on changes in the level of crime itself, both solved and unsolved. We monitor changes in the number of foreigners and ask whether the incidence of crime increases or decreases when they move into an area. This exercise does not rely on arrest rates. It does require information at relatively finely partitioned levels, and we use the rates in the roughly 1,900 municipalities in Japan.

B. Data:

1. Introduction. -- We gather crime and demographic data over the course of a decade at the level of the approximately 1,900 municipalities. Using fixed-effect regressions, we control for both years and municipalities. The year variables allow us to hold constant those changes that are common across municipal lines but specific to a given year. The municipality variables allow us to hold constant those changes that remain unchanged over time but vary from community to community. Note that this (along with the fact that the trainees do not choose the municipalities in which they work) goes far towards helping with the endogeneity problem that immigrants might happen to immigrate to municipalities that have high crime.

Municipality-level regressions test whether immigrants increase crime in the specific communities in which they locate. Immigrants to Japan settle in, and the trainees are usually assigned to employers in, the large urban areas. As shown in Table 1, they settle primarily in the greater Tokyo metropolis (covering hundreds of municipalities in the prefectures of Tokyo, Kanagawa, Saitama, Chiba, Ibaragi, Tochigi, and Gunma), the greater Osaka area (the prefectures of Osaka, Hyogo, Kyoto), and the greater Nagoya city (the prefectures of Aichi, Mie, Shiga, Gifu). Crime rates in these areas are higher than in the rest of Japan. Of the 13 prefectures with the most foreigners, 10 have crime rates above the national mean (see Table 1). If despite this settlement pattern, fixed-effect regressions still show a positive correlation between immigrants and crime, then we suggest that immigrants do indeed raise crime levels in Japan.

2. Crime data. -- By crimes, we mean violations of the Criminal Code. The numbers include both violent and non-violent crime. The national police compiles the numbers, and although it distinguishes between the two in its prefecture-level data base, it includes only the total at the municipality level. The figures exclude most traffic offenses and immigration-related offenses. Through 2008, the government published this municipal-level crime data (as item K4201) on its national statistical website, e-stat.go.jp.

Although the government discloses information about the type of crime involved at the prefectural level, it never has done so at the municipality level. In fact, two-thirds of crimes are theft. In 2024, the Ministry of Justice reported 738,000 cases of Criminal Code violations. Of these, 501,000 (67.9 percent) involved theft (Homu 2025, 2).

After 2008, the national government continued to provide prefectural-level crime data, but delegated to prefectural governments (47 in all) the decision about whether and how to publish municipality-level crime data. Some prefectures chose to disclose that municipality-level data already by 2011. Most disclosed it by 2021. For this project on

2013-2023 crime rates, we could turn only to the various prefectural governments for the municipality-level data, so the sample size increases over time.

In Table 2 we provide information on the availability of this municipality-level data for the 18 prefectures with the most immigrants for three different years. Recall that the national government delegated disclosure to the prefectures in 2009, and that immigrants tend to settle in urban areas.

[Insert Table 2 about here.]

As of 2011, only 9 of the 26 prefectures with the most foreigners disclosed municipality-level crime data. Five years later, that number had climbed to 18. As of 2021, all 26 with the most foreigners disclosed the data. Of the 7 Tokyo-area prefectures, 4 disclosed the data in 2011; 6 disclosed it in 2016. Of the 7 Osaka- or Nagoya-area prefectures, only 1 disclosed the data in 2011, and only 2 in 2016.

In Table 3, we provide more detailed information on the availability of municipality crime data for the years 2013-2023. By 2013, this crime data was available for 38.7 percent (732 of 1892) of the municipalities. Disproportionately, these were the more urban areas with higher crime rates. Those 38.7 percent of the municipalities included 52.6 percent of the population and 57.1 percent of the crime. More pointedly, they included the areas in which many foreigners settled. That 38.7 percent of the municipalities covered 64.7 percent of the foreigners.

[Include Table 3 about here.]

Over time, more and more prefectures disclosed the crime data. By 2016, 53.0 percent of the municipalities disclosed the information, and by 2018 62.1 percent did. Those 53.0 percent of the 2016 municipalities included 67.9 percent of the foreigners. The 62.1 percent of the 2018 municipalities included 71.3 percent of the foreigners. By 2021, the disclosure relevant here was largely complete: 90.1 percent of the municipalities covering 93.6 percent of the crimes and 94.1 percent of the foreigners.

We provide selected summary statistics in Table 4.

[Include Table 4 about here.]

3. Demographic data. -- Our data on foreigners include all foreign residents. Unless otherwise noted, they do not include those who arrive on 90-day visas (colloquially known as the "tourist visa"). These foreigners on 90-day visas often travel throughout Japan and hence do not appear on municipal residence records. Note that they comprise a large group: 42 million foreigners visited Japan in 2025 (Japan Times 2026).

Our data also exclude foreigners who illegally overstay their visas. This is a small group. As of January 1, 2026, the government estimated the number of illegals at about 68,000 (Japan Times 2026).

Many discussions of crime in Japan distinguish between the permanent-resident foreigners (zainichi) and those on term-limited visas (rainichi). For reasons of data availability, we do not. Note that the descendants of war-time Koreans who have not

adopted Japanese citizenship are part of the zainichi category. Given that they tend to be elderly, they do not commit crimes at high rates.

The Japanese government conducts its population census every five years. In this census it counts the general population (item A1101), the number of foreigners (A1700), and the numbers required to calculate the fraction of young males. The data are available from the statistical website for the national government, e-stat.go.jp.

For the years beginning 2012 (and for foreigners, 2013), the government has also disclosed the number of residents (A2301) registered with the local municipal office on an annual basis. Known as the Jumin kihon daicho, the registry forms the basis for determining both the right to vote and the eligibility for a variety of social services. The registry records the number of foreigners as well (A2201). These are the data that we use for our Table 5 regressions.

4. Other controls. -- As a measure of economic welfare, we use annual taxable income per capita (in 1,000 yen). We take the figures for taxable income from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication. It is available on the estat.go.jp as item C120110.

Given the strong correlation between the population of young males and crime, we would like to include a variable that captures the fraction of young (e.g., ages 15-35) males in a municipality. The census does include the information necessary to calculate the fraction of males aged 15 to 39 (items A110101, A130101, A141501), but that appears only every five years. Thus, as a correlate to the fraction of young people, we include the number of high school students. Although mandatory education in Japan extends only to 9th grade, as of 2020, 98.8 percent of Japanese students proceeded to high school.¹⁰ Note, however, that some small rural municipalities do not have their own high school; their high-school students attend school in one of the neighboring municipalities. The data are provided by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science & Technology, and appear as item E4501 on the etat.go.jp database.

As an alternative demographic control, we offer the fraction of the population represented by males aged 15-39, as calculated by the most recent census. For our 2016, 2017, and 2018 and 2019 data, for example, we use the figure calculated according to the 2015 census. For the year 2015, the correlation across municipalities between the number of high school students and the fraction of males aged 15-39 was .288. For 2020, the correlation was .309.

C. Results:

1. Basic results. -- We report the results of our fixed-effects regressions on Table 5. To facilitate comparison, we structure our research as much as possible in line with those of Spenkuch -- probably the best study extant. Following his example, we place the logged number of crimes on the left, and use the logged population figures as controls. Note that in 2018, 71.3 percent of the foreigners lived in municipalities that disclosed crime data (Table 3). Because regressions in logs both reduce the effect of outliers and provide the elasticity involved, we focus on the results in Panel A. They suggest an elasticity of crime

¹⁰ chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20211207-mxt_koukou02-000019354_01.pdf.

with respect to immigration of (depending on the specification) .1 to .3. Recall that Spenkuch (2014, 192 Tab. 3) calculates an elasticity in the U.S. of .123 to .147. Crime in Japan, apparently, is as least as elastic with respect to foreigners as in the U.S. It may actually be as much as twice as high.

[Insert Table 5 about here.]

With no controls (Column (1)), the coefficient on the logged number of foreigners is strongly significant, but only at .106. With controls for income and the number of high school students, the coefficient on logged foreigners rises to .192 (Column (3)). In 2016, the crime data covered only municipalities with 66.2 percent of the foreigners. If we run the regressions on 2016-2023 (Column (4)), the coefficient on the logged number of foreigners falls to insignificance. By 2020, however, the municipalities with crime data covered 87.4 percent of the foreigners. If we limit the regression to the years 2020-2023 (Column (5)), the coefficient on logged foreigners now climbs to .282.

In Panel C, we run the same regressions with an alternative variable for capturing the demographic distribution within the various municipalities. More specifically, we replace the number of high school students with the fraction of males aged 15 to 39 according to the most recent census. The coefficient on logged foreigners remains strongly significant at .148. The adjusted R^2 is .91 -- roughly the same value as for the analogous regression in Panel A.

Note that the coefficients on the various controls in the logged regressions (Table 5, Panels A and C) mostly point in the predicted direction. Crime generally rises with an increase in population (with one exception). It generally falls with income (again, with one exception). And it consistently increases with the share of young males.

2. Years before 2018. -- Regressions on the years 2013-2017, in contrast, show only a negative or insignificant association between foreigners and crime. Potentially, that phenomenon could result either (a) because foreigners did not raise crime rates during that period, or (b) because only a much smaller (and non-random) fraction of prefectures disclosed crime rates, reducing the power of the regressions. To explore this question further, we run the same regressions on the period before the national government delegated the disclosure of municipality-level crime data to the prefectures: 1980-2005.

In Table 6 we report our findings: the results of fixed-effect regressions of logged crime on logged foreigners, logged population, and controls for income and demographics for the years 1980 to 2005. Given that the national government still disclosed municipality-level crime data during this period, we take the information on crime directly from the estat.go.jp data base. Because the government did not disclose Jumin kihon daicho data before 2012, we take our foreigner and population figures from the national census instead, which unfortunately limits our regressions to data from every five years.

[Insert Table 6 about here.]

Again, for the prefecture-level data from 1980 to 2005, the results point to a significant positive association between crime and foreign residents. The logged regressions suggest an elasticity of crime with respect to foreigners of .135 to .179 --

virtually the same as the elasticity calculated from 2018-2023 data. Given the nearly identical results from 1980-2005 and 2018-2023, we conclude that the different results from 2013-2017 reflect the smaller number of non-randomly selected municipalities in the database.

3. Effects of nationality and visa category. -- In Table 7 we explore (in logs) the extent to which the relation between crime and foreign population varies by nationality. We take the number of locally registered foreigners (which excludes illegals and visitors on tourist visas) from the general national database, etat.go.jp. We examine the seven countries with the greatest number of citizens in Japan, and add the number of U.S. citizens for reader interest. Note that we hold constant the total number of foreigners. The basic coefficient on the logged number of foreigners now rises to nearly .5. The rate of crime rises further still with the number of Chinese and Indonesians, but falls by .102 with the number of Vietnamese and by .03 with the number of Brazilians.,

[Insert Table 7 about here.]

In Table 8, we repeat the exercise by visa category. To the basic logged regressions, we now add the controversial categories of exchange students and technical trainees. Trainee Category 1 refers to those in their first year. Category 2 refers to those in years 2 and 3, and Category 3 to those in years 4 and 5. The basic coefficient on the logged number of foreigners is now .2. The results for the number of exchange students does not differ significantly from this, but trainees in their first three years (but not the last two) are significantly associated with higher crime rates.

[Insert Table 8 about here.]

IV. Epilogue

In his book on the Kawaguchi Kurds, Takaaki Ishii (2024, 14-16) quotes the account of a young woman:

I moved to Kawaguchi when I was a junior in high school Soon after that, I took a part-time job in [a convenience store] in order to earn some money. This was three years ago [2020]. ...

It was Sunday evening, my first day of work. I saw some middle-eastern men hanging around in the parking lot. Several of them were ogling me, and it made me uneasy. ...

Two of them came into the store to buy some liquor. "How old are you?" they asked as I worked the register. "Where do you live?" They seemed drunk and didn't speak Japanese well. ...

After work, I set out on my bicycle, but a white car stopped next to me and a man got out. ... Another man was in the car. It looked like the man in the store, so they must have followed me. With one man in front of me, a car on the right side, and a field on the other, I couldn't move.

It was autumn, so the sun had already set. It was dark, and I was scared. "Someone help!" I shouted. A Japanese man stopped his car, and stuck his head out

the window. "What's going on?" he asked. "It's nothing," the two men said. They got in their car and drove off. ...

I didn't want to talk about this much, but when I mentioned it to some high school girlfriends a few months later, they started talking about having the same experience. "I was chased around by a middle-eastern man who looked like a Kurd too," they said. "It was really scary."

I worry that this could be happening a lot. There could be lots of sex crimes by foreigners in Saitama prefecture, but the women can't report it. ... The media, the government, and the police could be telling us about the harassment. If they had, I could have taken precautions (Ishii 2024, 15-16).

Nothing happened to the high school student Ishii interviewed, but she was scared. Should she have been scared? At least one prefectural legislator reports that for political reasons the police no longer disclose the ethnic or foreign character of a crime suspect. "We are a society that cherishes diversity," the police apparently explained (Tayosei 2026). Ishii (2024, 1) makes the obvious connection to Douglas Murray's The Strange Death of Europe. The parallel to the British grooming gangs is too obvious to miss.

By one account (Miyoshi 2025, 29), 1,400 Turkish men and women (mostly Kurds) live in the Kawaguchi area; by another, 3,000-4,000 (Ishii 2024, 115). In 2015, police arrested two Turkish young men for raping and robbing a woman in her 30s in a public toilet.¹¹ In 2021, they arrested an unemployed Turkish man for murdering his Japanese wife. In the same year, they arrested a 19 year-old Turkish man for killing a pedestrian in a Kawaguchi hit and run (they caught him as he was trying to escape the country). In 2024, they arrested another Kawaguchi Turkish man for a fatal hit-and-run (Miyoshi 2025, 27-29). Kawaguchi is a city in Saitama prefecture. All told, in 2024 the Saitama police arrested immigrants in 4 murders or attempted murders, 10 armed robberies, 8 rapes, and over 900 thefts (Saitama 2024, 27). For Japan, this is not routine.

And 2024 takes us back to Ishii's account of the scared high school student. In January of that year, the police arrested a 20-year-old Kurd for raping a middle-school student in a Kawaguchi convenience store parking lot (Miyoshi 2025, 28; Ishigami 2025, 28). In September, they arrested the same Kurd again, this time for sexual violence against a 12-year-old, but again in a Kawaguchi convenience store parking lot (Ishigami 2025, 28). Ishii's high school student and her friends had reason to be scared. They were not imagining things.

In this article, we assemble municipality-level data over the course of a decade to trace the association between immigrants and crime in Japan. Are immigrants associated with an increase in crime in Japan? Economic theory suggests a positive connection between young uneducated immigrants and property crime. Some careful work on that connection in the U.S. is consistent with that logic. Other work on the immigrant-crime tie reaches ambiguous conclusions.

Using fixed-effects regressions with municipality and year variables and several controls, we confirm the logic from theory, as far as Japan goes: increases in the number of immigrants in a community are associated with modest but significant increases in the rate of crime. The leading study of the phenomenon in the U.S. suggests an elasticity with

¹¹ Acquitted over uncertainty related to the defendant's bodily fluid on the woman. Miyoshi (2025, 27).

respect to immigrants of .12 to .15. We calculate an elasticity in Japan of .11 to .28, a 10 percent increase in the number of immigrants in a municipality is associated with a 1.1 to 2.8 percent increase in crime.

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Table 1: Crime and Arrest Rates in 2020 in the Prefectures with the Most Foreigners

Pref.	Number of Foreigners	Crime Rate	Total Arrest Rt	Foreign Arrest Rt
1 Tokyo	483,372	589.2	242.5	1199.1
2 Aichi	231,369	529.0	233.4	1185.1
3 Osaka	208,681	773.4	239.6	1155.4
4 Kanagawa	195,535	381.5	174.3	754.3
5 Saitama	161,439	605.7	206.2	1204.8
6 Chiba	142,177	551.9	174.0	877.8
7 Hyogo	87,280	626.6	266.8	1278.6
8 Shizuoka	86,046	423.0	202.2	705.4
9 Fukuoka	66,699	538.0	250.2	745.1
10 Ibaragi	57,819	568.6	164.7	1221.1
11 Gunma	53,432	513.9	211.7	1510.3
12 Kyoto	52,442	459.7	200.4	657.9
13 Gifu	48,979	528.0	198.1	669.7
14 Hiroshima	47,733	418.8	217.2	833.8
15 Mie	44,721	483.5	133.4	816.2
16 Tochigi	37,408	468.6	153.7	1176.2
17 Hokkaido	34,321	353.5	192.0	457.4
18 Nagano	31,491	339.1	129.7	771.6
19 Shiga	28,704	427.2	169.6	745.5
20 Okayama	25,116	414.7	198.0	712.7
21 Miyagi	19,453	442.8	169.7	611.7
22 Okinawa	18,157	408.7	218.7	1107.0
23 Toyama	16,326	438.6	234.7	569.6
24 Niigata	15,028	388.9	175.8	1191.1
25 Kumamoto	14,591	292.3	165.6	452.3
26 Yamaguchi	14,378	308.3	169.4	966.8
27 Yamanashi	13,993	386.2	163.5	528.8
28 Fukui	13,796	360.4	199.9	1080.0
29 Ishikawa	13,685	317.4	161.1	957.3
30 Fukushima	12,868	417.6	149.0	792.7
All Japan	2,402,460	486.9	200.4	1002.8

Notes: Crime rates are sum of the number of Criminal Code violations, "special" crimes, drug crimes, and sex crimes, divided by population given in 2020 census, times 100,000. Total Arrest rates are total arrests (all non-traffic crimes) per 100,000 capita (2020 census). Foreign Arrest rates are total arrests (all non-traffic crimes) per 100,000 capita (2020 census).

**Table 2: Availability of Post-2008
Municipality-Level Crime Data in Prefectures
with the Most Foreigners in 2016**

	Prefecture	Foreigners	2011	2016	2021
1	Tokyo	486,346	x	x	x
2	Aichi	217,218			x
3	Osaka	215,057		x	x
4	Kanagawa	185,859	x	x	x
5	Saitama	149,225	x	x	x
6	Chiba	130,725		x	x
7	Hyogo	100,080			x
8	Shizuoka	76,599			x
9	Fukuoka	64,213	x	x	x
10	Ibaragi	56,843	x	x	x
11	Kyoto	54,405			x
12	Gunma	48,521		x	x
13	Gifu	46,775	x	x	x
14	Hiroshima	45,384		x	x
15	Mie	43,445			x
16	Tochigi	35,721			x
17	Nagano	31,307			x
18	Hokkaido	28,189		x	x
19	Shiga	25,043	x	x	x
20	Okayama	23,853	x	x	x
21	Miyagi	18,966		x	x
22	Toyama	14,774	x	x	x
23	Yamaguchi	14,546		x	x
24	Yamanashi	14,455		x	x
25	Niigata	14,441			x
26	Okinawa	13,863		x	x

Notes: x means the data is available. Tokyo: 23 metropolitan wards only; Hyogo: Kobe and 12 other cities only; Hiroshima: Hiroshima city only for 2016; Okinawa: cities only for 2016. Number of foreigners in prefecture are 2016 numbers (item A2201).

**Table 3: Availability of Municipality-Level Crime Data,
2013-2023**

[illegible]

Table 4: Selected Summary Statistics

	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Maximum</i>
Crime	0	133	618	63,719
(per capita)	0	.004	.005	.100
Foreign	0	275	1693	169,392
(per capita)	0	.010	.015	.338
High School				
Students	0	593	2,038	84,502
(per capita)	0	.019	.020	.221
Fraction Male				
Aged 15-39	0	.253	.254	.521
Taxable Income per				
capita (1/1000)	352	1,184	1,230	8,217
Population	156	29,775	80,554	3,759,939

Notes: For sources, see text.

Table 5: Foreign Population and Crime, Fixed-Effect Regression**A. In logs:**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>Dep. var.:</i>		<i>LnCrimes</i>		<i>LnCrimes</i>	
	.	(2018-23)	.	(2016-23)	(2020-23)
LnForeigners	.106 (5.04)	.145 (6.82)	.192 (7.64)	-.006 (0.28)	.282 (9.17)
LnPopulation	1.902 (12.84)	1.306 (6.82)	.790 (3.64)	.864 (5.44)	-.249 (0.75)
LnIncome PC		-.580 (6.03)	-.428 (4.48)	-1.160 (14.81)	.390 (3.33)
LnHigh School			.316 (8.07)	.268 (8.23)	.171 (3.10)
Constant	-15.574	-5.515	-3.684	2.392	1.726
Adj. R ²	.92	.91	.92	.86	.72
No. Obs.	8,979	8,072	6,018	7,386	4,386

B. In Count Numbers:

<i>Dep. var.:</i>		<i>Crimes</i>		<i>Crimes</i>	
	.	(2018-23)	.	(2016-23)	(2020-23)
Foreigners	.026 (5.75)	.040 (8.63)	.103 (23.06)	-.037 (7.39)	.121 (39.73)
Population	-.002 (1.58)	-.003 (2.14)	-.024 (19.95)	-.028 (24.63)	-.010 (7.79)
Income PC		-.272 (15.88)	-.144 (9.17)	-.181 (9.99)	-.008 (0.72)
High School			.558 (40.08)	.709 (45.55)	-.007 (0.47)
Constant	463.2	762.1	1018.0	1311.7	697.7
Adj. R ²	.46	.61	.53	.61	.64
No. obs.	9,085	8,178	8,178	9,956	5,963

(Continued to next page.)

Table 5 (Continued)**C. Alternative Demographic Controls:**

<i>Dep. var.</i>	<i>LnCrimes</i> <u>(2018-23)</u>		<i>Crimes</i> <u>(2018-23)</u>
LnForeigners	.148 (6.50)	Foreigners	.041 (8.74)
LnPopulation	.571 (2.87)	Population	-.003 (2.74)
LnIncome PC	-.468 (4.91)	Income PC	-.255 (14.46)
LnYoung Males	1.457 (12.06)	Young Males	760.851 (4.25)
Constant	3.171		600.8
Adj. R2	.91		.68
No. obs.	8,069		8,175

Notes: Absolute value of t-statistic in parentheses. The number of foreigners and total population are as given in the municipal registry. The income is taxable income. High school gives the number of enrolled students.

Young Males gives the fraction of the population that is male, aged 15 to 39, according to the most recent annual census (2015 or 2020).

All regressions include municipality and year fixed effects.

For sources, see text.

Table 6: Association between Foreign Population and Crime, 1980-2005**A. In logs:**

<i>Dep. var.:</i>	<i>LnCrimes</i>		
LnForeigners	.179 (31.88)	.174 (22.23)	.135 (15.68)
LnPopulation	1.254 (29.22)	1.259 (21.95)	1.729 (28.45)
LnIncome PC		-.024 (0.88)	-.125 (4.50)
LnHigh School			-.277 (13.14)
Constant	-8.217	-8.048	-10.219
Adj. R2	.91	.91	.90
No. Obs.	8,068	6,176	4,865

B. In Count Numbers:

<i>Dep. var.:</i>	<i>Crimes</i>		
Foreigners	.299 (28.13)	.394 (30.26)	.240 (18.11)
Population	.021 (34.07)	.024 (23.95)	.030 (30.60)
Income PC		-.013 (0.62)	-.077 (3.77)
High School			-.176 (27.32)
Constant	-563.00	-757.22	-593.28
Adj. R2	.84	.91	.89
No. Obs.	8,370	6,392	6,314

Notes: Absolute value of t-statistic in parentheses. The number of foreigners and total population are as given in the national census every five years. The income is taxable income. High school gives the number of enrolled students.

All regressions include municipality and year fixed effects.

For sources, see text.

Table 7: Association between Foreign Population and Crime, by Nationality, 2018-2023

A. <u>Foreign Population by Nationality</u> <u>2023</u>			B. <u>Fixed Effects Regression</u>	
			<u>Dep. var.:</u>	<u>LnCrimes</u>
			LnForeigners	.493 (11.79)
			LnPopulation	.536 (1.71)
			LnIncome PC	-.363 (3.71)
			LnHigh School	.214 (3.66)
1.	PRC	844,187	LnPRC	.068 (3.02)
2.	Vietnam	600,348	LnVietnam	-.102 (5.84)
3.	S Korea	411,043	LnSKorea	.025 (0.83)
4.	Philippines	332,293	LnPhilippines	-.017 (0.82)
5.	Brazil	212,325	LnBrazil	-.030 (2.30)
6.	Nepal	206,898	LnNepal	-.008 (1.03)
7.	Indonesia	173,813	LnIndonesia	.055 (6.00)
	USA	64,842	LnUSA	.003 (0.22)
			Constant	-2.642
			Adj. R2	0.90
			No. Obs.	3,281

Source: Absolute value of t-statistic in parentheses.
Population by nationality (left column) is given in Shutsunyu koku zairyu kanri sho [Immigration Services Agency], available at:
https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/publications/press/13_00047.html.
Source for right column data is given in the text.

**Table 8: Association between Foreign Population
and Crime, by Visa Category, 2018-2023**

A. <u>Foreign Population</u> <u>by Visa Category</u> <u>2023</u>		B. <u>Fixed Effects Regression</u>	
		<u>Dep. var.:</u>	<u>LnCrimes</u>
		LnForeigners	.200 (4.33)
		LnPopulation	.125 (0.42)
		LnIncome PC	.174 (1.83)
		LnHigh School	.314 (4.98)
Exchange Students	340,883	LnExchange Students	.008 (1.06)
Trainee Cat 1	167,734	LnTrainee Cat 1	.071 (13.70)
Trainee Cat 2	163,274	LnTrainee Cat 2	.066 (6.66)
Trainee Cat 3	66,780	LnTrainee Cat 3	-.048 (6.00)
		Constant	-1.147
		Adj. R2	0.87
		No. Obs.	3,048

Notes: Absolute value of t-statistic in parentheses.
Population by visa category (left column) is given in
Shutsunyu koku zairyu kanri sho [Immigration Services
Agency], available at:
<https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/content/001425981.pdf>. Trainees
(both columns) are subcategory "ro". Source for right
column data is given in the text.