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Salle 210

Séminaire recherche

Border Apprehensions, Salience of Hispanic Identity and Sentences in the US Federal Criminal Justice System

(avec Morgane Laouenan et Jérôme Valette)

RÉSUMÉ

This paper provides econometric evidence that Hispanic citizens receive significantly harsher sentences in the US Federal Criminal Justice System when there is an increase in the number of illegal aliens that are apprehended along the US-Mexico border. Conversely, sentences for Hispanic immigrants remain unaffected. We interpret that this effect is due to the induced increase in the salience of Hispanic ethnic identity, in response to an increase in media attention and public interest towards immigration, which is often associated with negative stereotypes such as a propensity to commit crimes. This blurs the distinction between Hispanic citizens and immigrants, thus eroding the differential in sentences between the two groups that is typically observed in the data. The proposed interpretation is corroborated by the analysis of the heterogeneity of the results along several dimensions. Notably, the estimated effect is at play when judges have fewer elements to base their decisions and the increase in sentence length is such that it remains within the US Sentencing Commission guideline prescribed range.



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