

Deseret News

US vetting process functions exceptionally well

May 1, 2018

In an age of sleeper cells and random terror attacks, it has become conventional wisdom to believe the United States is lax in the way it vets people wishing to immigrate here. The data, however, show the opposite is true.

In coming days, the U.S. Supreme Court will consider whether the president's ban on travel from certain countries, most of which are predominantly Muslim, should be allowed to stand.

Also, a caravan of migrants from Central America is waiting at the Mexican border with the United States, hoping for entry despite opposition from the Trump administration.

That's why a new [report from the Cato Institute](#), a Libertarian think-tank, is so important. The report examined court records, federal documents and a list of convictions related to terrorism dating to the 9/11 attacks in 2001, and beyond.

The conclusion? The U.S. already has an extreme vetting process in place for issuing visas.

Written by David J. Bier, an immigration policy analyst for Cato, the report says, "The evidence indicates that the U.S. vetting system is already 'extreme' enough to handle the challenge of foreign terrorist infiltration."

The breakdown of the data tells a persuasive story. In compiling it, Bier defined a vetting failure as the legal admission of anyone into the United States who subsequently was charged with a terrorism-related offense within the next 10 years, regardless of whether that person had been "radicalized" before gaining entry.

Despite this generous definition, researchers found only 13 people who had been convicted of a terrorist crime or killed while committing an offense since September of 2001. That was only 2 percent of the 531 people who committed such crimes during that time.

Between 2002 and 2016, only one radicalized terrorist made it through the vetting process for every 29 million people who had visas or statuses approved. Only one of those 13 vetting failures resulted in a fatal attack within the United States. That's a rate of only one in 379 million visa approvals that went terribly wrong.

When examined against data for the 15 years preceding 9/11, this rate represented an 84 percent reduction in vetting failures.

Many Americans likely are ignorant of the process foreigners must navigate in order to obtain entry to the United States. It isn't easy. They first must submit documents that include any names

by which they have been known, the addresses at which they have lived, their means of financial support and other information. These must be accompanied by evidence.

The nation they are seeking to leave must provide criminal and prison records, marriage licenses, birth certificates and military records. Those seeking to work or study abroad must provide proof of sponsorship in this country.

Consular officers with the State Department review this information and, if all is in order, refer applicants to face-to-face interviews at an embassy or consulate. All applicants between 14 and 79 years of age must undergo fingerprint and facial scans, which are checked against a database of terrorists and criminals.

At any point, the interviewer or consular officer may end the process if he or she is suspicious.

The process is more extensive with refugees, who must undergo multiple interrogations and scrupulous fact checking.

The system works well, as the data confirm. It's difficult to imagine how it could work any better, even if the nation cut off all visas from certain countries, as has been proposed.

This is a nation of immigrants, populated by many who either came here searching for a chance to contribute and succeed, or who have ancestors who did so. Too many people worldwide are suffering under the yoke of tyranny and desire to come here for freedom. The beacon of liberty is part of the American heritage.

The nation must secure its borders, but it would be unwise to keep narrowing the flow of immigrants without the data to substantiate such a thing. As the Cato report makes clear, data show the U.S. has done exceptionally well in vetting immigrants for many years now and does not need to reform the process.