



7 Immigration Facts: What You Need To Know

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There's little doubt that immigration will be on the agenda at President Trump's State of the Union address on Tuesday night. After shutting down the government for more than a month, Mr. Trump remains without his campaign's hallmark promise: a Mexican-funded southern border wall. D.C. politicians have until February 15 before temporary funding runs out and the government shuts down for the second time this year.

Regardless of what the president says Tuesday night, here are seven facts that describe the state of immigration in 2019.

How Do Most Unauthorized Immigrants Enter The United States?

Fact: Two-thirds of the recent unauthorized immigrant population entered the U.S. on valid visas, then stayed in the country after that visa expired.

Source: [Center for Migration Studies](#)

Only about one-third of the recently unauthorized immigration population got to the U.S. by sneaking across the southern border, according to Randy Capps, director of research for U.S. Programs at the Migration Policy Institute. That means a wall would not have prevented two-thirds of the country's recently undocumented immigrants from illegally entering the U.S.

How Many Unauthorized Immigrants Live In The United States?

Fact: Between 10.7 and 11.3 million unauthorized immigrants were living in the U.S. as of 2016, the most recent year for which data is available.

Source: [Pew Research Center](#) and the Migration Policy Institute

According to Pew, the number of unauthorized immigrants living in the United States hit a 12-year low in 2016, a decline that researchers attribute to stepped-up enforcement at the country's southern border and shifting economic trends. The Migration Policy Institute estimates there were 11.3 million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. in 2016.

How Many People Are Caught Attempting To Illegally Cross The Southern Border Every Year?

Fact: 396,579 people were caught illegally crossing the border in the year ending September 30, 2018.

Source: [U.S. Customs and Border Patrol](#)

Illegal border crossings began to fall significantly in the mid-2000s after hitting record-highs through the 1980s and 1990s. [In 2005](#), U.S. Customs and Border Patrol agents apprehended just over 1.17 million migrants. Since then, arrests for illegal border crossings have fallen nearly every year.

Is Asylum A Form Of Illegal Immigration?

Fact: No. “If you are eligible for asylum you may be permitted to remain in the United States.”

Source: [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services \(USCIS\)](#)

Asylum is a special type immigration process reserved for people who have “suffered persecution or fear that they will suffer persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion,” according to USCIS.

Being granted asylum is not an easy feat. It’s a multi-year process that involves likely detainment, multiple interviews, extensive documentation of an immigrant’s prior suffering, and less than stellar odds.

How Many Immigrants Claimed Asylum Last Year?

Fact: Approximately 100,000 immigrants begun asylum proceedings last year, a record high.

Source: [The White House](#)

Last year, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services processed about 100,000 “credible fear” claims, the first step in an immigrant’s asylum proceedings. Judges decided about 42,000 asylum cases during the same time period, more than any other year since 2001, according to [Syracuse University’s Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse](#).

But [asylum denials also hit a record high](#) last year. Immigration judges rejected 65 percent of the asylum claims they ruled on in 2018, according to TRAC.

How Many Immigrants Show Up For Their Court Dates?

Fact: Asylum seekers showed up to their court dates 89 percent of the time in the fiscal year ending September 30, 2017, the most recent year for which data is available.

Source: [The Department of Justice Executive Office for Immigration Review](#)

The Trump Administration has based a handful of its new immigration policies, like the recently implemented “Remain in Mexico” policy, based on the assertion that immigrants don’t show up to their court hearings, an idea the White House views as a “loophole.” Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen said during a Congressional testimony late last year that asylum seekers “[more than not](#)” fail to appear for their hearings. And in January, President Trump said only [two percent](#) of asylum seekers make their court dates.

How Do Illegal Drugs Enter The Country?

Fact: The vast majority of illegal drugs — like heroin, cocaine and fentanyl — entered the country through legal entry points, known officially as ports of entry.

Source: [The U.S. Department of Justice Drug Enforcement Administration](#)

Only a “small percentage” of the heroin seized by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol agents was found “along the land border between Ports of Entry,” according to the 2018 National Drug Threat Assessment report, published by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in October.

As for cocaine, the DEA said it was “uncommon to see very large shipments of cocaine headed toward to U.S.-Mexico border,” and that instead the drug is transported on boats and “amongst legitimate cargo of commercial trucks or within secret compartments build within passenger vehicles.” The DEA added that “traffickers are also increasingly targeting seaports along the East Coast.”

Fentanyl enters the country from China via mail and by way of the southern border, according to the DEA. Though it noted that “most [Customs and Border Patrol] fentanyl seizures occur at [ports of entry] in Southern California.”

U.S Customs and Border Protection officials announced the agency’s biggest fentanyl bust ever late last month. On a tractor trailer legally crossing the border in Arizona, the agency captured 254 pounds of the synthetic opioid, [according to the Associated Press](#).

Do Illegal Immigrants Commit More Violent Crimes Than Legal Residents?

Fact: Studies say that undocumented immigrants are less likely to commit violent crimes than American-born citizens.

Source: [The Cato Institute](#) and [The University of Wisconsin](#)

According to a June 2018 research report from the Cato Institute, “illegal immigrants are 47 percent less likely to be incarcerated by natives” and “legal immigrants are 78 percent less likely to be incarcerated than natives.”

Undocumented immigrants are also less likely to commit serious criminal offenses, according to research conducted by Cato. Using government-supplied data from the [Texas Department of Safety](#), the libertarian think tank concluded that in Texas the murder arrest rate for native-born Americans was “about 46 percent higher than the illegal immigrant homicide rate,” according to a [June 2018 research note](#). Another study, performed by researchers at the University of Wisconsin, found that “increased concentrations of undocumented immigrants are associated with statistically significant decreases in violent crime.”

Are Undocumented Immigrants Eligible For Government-Sponsored Welfare Programs?

Fact: Undocumented immigrants are ineligible for government welfare benefits and legal immigrants only qualify for federal benefits once they’ve resided in the U.S. for five years.

Source: [National Immigration Law Center](#)

Undocumented immigrants are barred from most public benefits, like food stamps, regular Medicaid and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), according to the National Immigration Law Center. However, some exceptions are granted in order to “protect life or guarantee safety in dire situations,” the National Immigration Forum wrote in August 2018.

Legal immigrants — including green card holders, people granted asylum and refugees — qualify for federal benefits, but only after they have resided in the U.S. as a legal resident for five years, according to the NILC.