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There's no immigrant crime wave

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The Trump administration talks about the heinous crimes of a few undocumented immigrants in an attempt to smear them all.

It's not fair. But crime isn't fair, either.

So let me be clear: I have deep sympathy for crime victims. Their control and their sense of security -- sometimes their lives -- are stolen by scumbag criminals.

That is true whether the criminal is undocumented or U.S.-born. But it is particularly painful when someone is victimized by a criminal who was deported and returned or who was not deported despite a criminal record.

Walls, blame won't fix these problems

That person should not have been here to commit the crime. I get that. It enrages me, too.

But the ease with which criminals return after being deported and the failure to deport dangerous people are both symptoms of an immigration system that has been broken for a long, long time.

Walls won't fix that. Blame won't fix that.

We built fences and barriers to keep people out. But we didn't enforce laws against hiring the undocumented. So millions of workers came and many of them hired scumbag criminal smugglers to help them navigate the new barriers.

We saw thousands of people die in the desert. But those who survived got jobs. So people kept coming.

And the criminal smugglers kept getting rich.

Fixing it isn't just about law enforcement

Now we have an undocumented population estimated at 11 million. We have U.S.-born kids who go to school worried that their undocumented parents might be deported before they get home.

We have a human problem. But we still act like it's all about law-enforcement.

If we had a process to legalize all those people, we could weed out the criminals. But we don't have that process.

Instead, the Trump administration's new office for Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement (VOICE) perpetuates the myth that undocumented immigrants are behind a crime wave.

The real story about violent crime

But it's not true.

A new report from the Sentencing Project – a self-described progressive group – found the increase in the number of undocumented immigrants in this country coincides with a decrease in violent crime.

“In 1990 the reported violent crime rate was 730 offenses per 100,000 residents,” says the report called Immigration and Public Safety.

There were 3.5 million undocumented people living in this country then.

“The violent crime rate began to fall in the mid-1990s and by 2014 it was half of its 1990 level, at 362 offenses per 100,000 residents,” the report says.

By then, there were 11.1 million undocumented people here.

The report says “immigrants — regardless of legal status — do not have higher crime rates than native-born citizens.”

Facts from right and left

Knowing they would be dismissed as a bunch of liberals, the Sentencing Project sent reporters to a report released in March by the libertarian Cato Institute.

Cato's report, "Criminal Immigrants: Their Numbers, Demographics, and Countries of Origin," says:

“All immigrants are less likely to be incarcerated than natives relative to their shares of the population. Even illegal immigrants are less likely to be incarcerated than native-born Americans.”

Tarring undocumented immigrants as violent criminals is a distraction. So is spending billions on a wall.

In March, we had a 17-year low in the number of apprehensions along the U.S.-Mexico border, which border officials say means fewer people are attempting to cross.

Politicians have pandered, punted and dodged their responsibility to fix immigration policies as our undocumented population grew. Demonizing that population now is no answer.

The new administration has to do more than just serve up bigger portions of the same old green baloney.