

Business Standard

Trump cherry-picks examples of violent illegal immigrants to stir up his base, but the statistics tell a different story

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President Donald Trump has repeatedly portrayed undocumented immigrants as dangerous, violent criminals who must be kept out of the US at all costs, but crime data tells a different story.

He began his presidential campaign by referring to undocumented Mexican immigrants as "rapists" who bring drugs and crime into the country. His campaign continued to seize on anti-immigrant sentiments, as he riled supporters up with a promise to build a wall along the US-Mexico border and the assertion that Mexico would pay for it.

Since entering the White House, Trump has only escalated this trend.

In August, for example, Trump used the killing of Mollie Tibbetts, a 20-year-old University of Iowa student, to renew calls for funding for his border wall. The suspect in the killing is a Mexican national who was reportedly living in the US illegally.

Responding to the news of Tibbetts' death, Trump said, "A person came in from Mexico, illegally, and killed her. We need the wall, we need our immigration laws changed, we need our border laws changed."

More recently, ahead of the 2018 midterm elections, Trump released an ad falsely linking Democrats to an undocumented immigrant who killed two police officers in California.

Beyond the fact that experts say a border wall would do little to stop undocumented immigration, Trump's rhetoric on this issue has completely ignored statistics that show native-born Americans commit crimes at a higher rate than undocumented immigrants.

Read more: Trump invited 'permanently separated' families to speak about loved ones allegedly killed by unauthorized immigrants — and he autographed posters of the victims' faces

As David Mosher of Business Insider reported in August:

- Multiple studies using federal and state data have found no suggestion that rising immigration rates leads to more violent crime.

- The charts below come from a December 2016 study published in the Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice. They show that US saw a 118% increase in its immigrant population (documented and undocumented) from 1980 through 2016.
- Yet during this same period, the rate of violent crime — homicides, rapes, robberies, and assaults, according to the FBI — fell by 36% to about 386 incidents per 100,000 residents.

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- A more recent peer-reviewed study, published in March 2017 by The Sociological Quarterly, compared all forms of immigration and violence in rural versus urban communities from 1990 through 2010. The number of foreign-born residents — accounting for many other factors — appeared to reduce violent crime rates in rural areas, though not at statistically significant levels. But in cities, immigration was significantly associated with reduced rates of violent crimes.
- There's also a study published in February by the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, which further rejects the idea that illegal immigration is tied to increases in rates of violent crime.
- The study looked at conviction data in Texas — the state with the second-largest population of foreign-born residents — for native-born, unauthorized immigrant, and legal immigrant residents.
- The research found that native-born residents were most likely to commit and be convicted of crimes, while unauthorized immigrants saw a conviction rate that was about 50% lower. Legal immigrants appeared to be the most law-abiding, with 86% fewer convictions than native-born Texans.

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- There's also a Criminology journal study from March that examined states' reported rates of violent crime and illegal immigration. From 1990 through 2014, that data found a negative correlation — meaning that the more a population was made up of unauthorized immigrants, the lower the violent crime rates seemed to be.

In short, there's a broad set of data showing Trump's cherry-picked examples of violent undocumented immigrants don't paint an accurate picture of crime in the US, or of undocumented immigrants in general.