

Fact Check: Newsom uses immigration stats to discredit Trump's border 'emergency'

Hannah Wiley

February 13, 2019

During his first State of the State speech as California's newly elected governor, Gavin Newsom wanted to make one thing clear: There is no immigration crisis in California.

Newsom pointed to several statistics in an effort to undercut President Donald Trump's claims that the United States is facing a nationwide emergency at the border.

Newsom started his speech by assuring lawmakers and Californians that border crossings are at their lowest since 1971.

According to data from the [United States Border Patrol](#), border apprehensions were at their lowest in 2017 since 1971. But there's a distinction between apprehensions and total crossings. There is no data available on how many individuals cross the border illegally, so apprehension figures are generally used to determine the overall trend in illegal immigration, [FactCheck.org notes](#). Those numbers do not account for "inadmissibles," or those that Customs and Border Protection say "are seeking lawful admission into the United States but are determined to be inadmissible."

Newsom signed a general order on Monday to [pull approximately 360 California National Guard troops](#) from the border, though 100 personnel will remain in efforts to stem the flow of illegal guns and drugs into the state. He reiterated Tuesday that California's "undocumented population is at its lowest level in more than a decade."

This is true. California's undocumented population shrank in the last 10 years, consistent with a [national downward trend](#). There were [550,000 fewer unauthorized immigrants](#) in California in 2016 than 2007. The Department of Homeland Security recorded [2.8 million](#) undocumented people in California in 2007 and the Pew Research Center estimates that number dropped to [2.2 million](#) by 2016.

Most immigrants in the state are documented residents, according to the [Public Policy Institute of California](#).

Since his campaign, Trump has argued that undocumented immigrants are linked to higher crime rates. He's leveraged the stories of [Mollie Tibbetts](#) and [Kate Steinle](#), two women killed by men living illegally in the United States, as proof of his claim.

Newsom said the exact opposite in his speech on Tuesday.

"Immigrants, both those here legally and those without documentation, commit crime at a lower rate than native-born citizens," he said.

Newsom is correct. According to an often-cited 2018 analysis of 2015 criminal conviction data from the Texas Department of Public Safety out of the Libertarian [Cato Institute](#), "the vast majority of research finds that immigrants do not increase local crime rates and that they are less likely to cause crime and less

likely to be incarcerated than their native-born peers.” The institute also found that immigrants have lower incarceration rates nationwide.

Finally, Newsom said that the families, women and children who are seeking asylum at the border are doing so legally. The issue is more nuanced than he made it seem.

First, anyone can apply for asylum. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services outlines that “you may apply for asylum status regardless of how you arrived in the United States or your current immigration status.”

But you have to be physically present in the U.S. to do so. A 2017 Human Rights Watch report found that the U.S. government was illegally turning people claiming asylum away at the border. Last November, Trump said that anyone wanting to claim asylum had to do so at an official port of entry. But later that month, the nonpartisan Project on Government Oversight found that border agents were turning people away.

A separate issue the Trump administration is still facing backlash over is the “zero-tolerance” policy instituted last year that separated families and children at the border.