



Trump Claims Undocumented Immigrants Threaten National Security. Here's Why He's Wrong

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On January 8, President Donald Trump addressed the nation from the Oval Office to discuss his demands for \$5.7 billion in government funding for the border wall and border security, which has been at the center of the ongoing government shutdown. Throughout his approximately 10-minute speech, the president repeatedly enforced the notion that migrants crossing into the United States from Mexico and Central America pose a grave danger to Americans, and should therefore be kept out of the country.

"Over the years, thousands of Americans have been brutally killed by those who illegally entered our country and thousands more lives will be lost if we don't act right now," he stated.

The president's assertions, however, incorrectly align crime with undocumented immigrants. In a study published by *Criminology* in March of 2018, researchers that looked at data spanning from 1990 to 2014 found that an increase in the population of undocumented immigrants within states could generally be tied to a decrease in violent crimes. And while Trump continuously framed killings at the hands of undocumented immigrants as a "crisis," a study conducted by the Cato Institute found that in 2015, the criminal conviction rate for undocumented immigrants in Texas was 50% lower than that of people born in the United States, with a 2.6 per 100,000 homicide conviction rate.

Critics of the president's assertions, such as activist Michael Skolnik, also pointed out that many Americans today worry about the deadliness of mass shootings — and in an analysis of 107 shootings that took place from 1982 to 2018 compiled by *Mother Jones*, a majority of the perpetrators of such attacks were identified as white men, not immigrants.

In fact, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, there were 39,773 gun-violence related deaths in the United States in 2017, 37% of which were homicides. This number constitutes the highest record of gun-related deaths in the last 50 years.

The president also claimed that building a wall will also hinder drug trafficking that fuels the opioid epidemic, stating, "Every week, 300 of our citizens are killed by heroin alone, 90% of which floods across from our southern border. More Americans will die from drugs this year than were killed in the entire Vietnam War."

According to CNN, these overdose statistics do not differentiate between drugs brought in through the southern border and those legally prescribed by doctors — and the Drug

Enforcement Administration reports that most drugs smuggled into the U.S. come through legal ports of entry, and would therefore not be reduced by a physical wall blocking unauthorized entry into the country.

To underline his argument for increased funding to Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), President Trump also highlighted that the dangerous journey to the United States often leaves migrants, especially women and children, vulnerable to sexual assault (which the president himself has been accused of). What he failed to note is that physical and sexual abuse are both issues plaguing those held in immigration detention facilities. Records obtained by *The Intercept* from the Office of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General showed that 1,224 sexual abuse complaints were filed between 2010 and 2017, half of which occurred under ICE custody. In May of 2018, the ACLU also obtained over 30,000 pages of records detailing violent physical, sexual, and verbal abuse against unaccompanied minors by federal officials in U.S. Customs and Border Protection custody.

Throughout his address, the president graphically alluded to several cases of murders and assaults committed by undocumented immigrants, but as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez noted on MSNBC, he failed to acknowledge the deaths of seven-year-old Jackeline Caal and eight-year-old Felipe Gomez Alonzo under U.S. custody on December 8 and December 24, respectively. NBC reports that throughout the first two years of the Trump presidency, 22 immigrants, including Roxsana Hernández, have died under ICE's custody.

"To those who refuse to compromise in the name of border security, I would ask, imagine if it was your child, your husband, or your wife whose life was so cruelly shattered and totally broken," President Trump said on Tuesday night.

But as many Twitter users noted, for many immigrant families — and those whose lives have been impacted by gun violence in the U.S., which most often occurs at the hands of its documented citizens — this pain is already a reality.