

# A Progressive Perspective: Immigrants Not Causing Crime or Taking Your Jobs

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James Wegman poignantly wrote in an October 18th essay entitled “His Demagogy” in The New York Times: “A president’s words are among the most powerful, and potentially dangerous, tools. They can rally the American public to work together toward a common cause. They can soothe the jangled nerves of a frightened nation or provide healing balm at time of mourning. They can move global financial markets, start wars – and embolden violent individuals.”

Unfortunately, President Trump throughout his tenure has used his words to divide us not bring us together. He frequently espoused, condoned and often times incited racism and xenophobia and consistently equivocated when asked to disavow white supremacists.

As Carlos Lozada wrote in *What Were We Thinking: A Brief Intellectual History of the Trump Era*, he “has done everything possible to make immigration into a cultural war. Trump campaigned for the border wall in 2016 with violent and dehumanizing rhetoric, even likening immigrants to poisonous snakes.” Very early in his campaign, he accused Mexican immigrants of being “rapists.” Throughout his tenure in office he repeated statements about immigrants and crime to underscore a perception, which some Americans have, that crime is correlated with immigration, especially illegal immigration.

This view was a total misperception without any data or facts to support it.

According to The Center for Immigration Studies, an organization that advocates for stringent immigration laws, first-generation immigrants commit fewer crimes than native-born Americans. Immigration and crime levels have had inverse trajectories since the 1990s: immigration has increased, while crime has decreased.

The Congressional Research Service (CRS) found that the vast majority of immigrants do not fit in the category that fits Trump’s description: aggravated felons, whose crimes include murder, drug trafficking or illegal trafficking of firearms.

An analysis of 2010 Census data in a report from the American Immigration Council, a pro-immigration group, shows that 1.6 percent of immigrant males 18 to 39 years old were incarcerated, compared to 3.3 percent of native-born males. That disparity in incarceration rates has been consistent in the decennial Census since 1980, the report says.

Just as immigrants are not causing crime they are not engaged in work that most American workers want to do. Here’s a list of the top ten jobs held by immigrants according to Forbes Magazine.

1. Graders and Sorters, Agricultural Products

2. Personal Appearance Workers
3. Plasterers and Stucco Masons
4. Sewing Machine Operators
5. Drywall Installers, Ceiling Tile Installers, and Tapers
6. Agricultural Workers
7. Tailors, Dressmakers, and Sewers
8. Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners
9. Pressers, Textile, and Related Materials
10. Taxi Drivers and Chauffeurs

A quick review of this list reveals that these are not jobs that Americans yearn to work at. They are the kind of jobs that, by and large, are extremely hard to fill because they are grueling, low paying, have high accident rates and quite frequently do not offer health/ fringe benefits.

While more than three-quarters of Americans, according to a recent Pew Research study understand that immigrants, especially undocumented ones, are not taking jobs that U.S. Citizens want, President consistently said the opposite. According to the American libertarian think-tank, The Cato Institute, President Trump indicated that there were two reasons to halt all immigration to the United States in response to COVID-19. The first was to prevent the spread of the disease domestically. The second was to save American jobs for American citizens.

The Cato Institute found that reducing immigration further would not save jobs for Americans or that immigrants push natives out of jobs. “The impulse to close immigration to protect jobs for American citizens is known as the lump of labor fallacy, which is a fundamental misconception that there is a fixed amount of work in a society. Believers in this fallacy apply it to immigration by arguing that any job held by an immigrant could be held by an American citizen, but this just simply isn’t true. The number of jobs available depends on a myriad of economic factors and is never stable. The so-called displacement effect, which is the term for when immigrant workers push native-born American workers out of the labor market, is rarely ever even observed in practice and always very small when it is detected.”

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, our economy is in a recession and we are experiencing skyrocketing unemployment. This will, no doubt, continue until we have a safe vaccine to inoculate all Americans. In the short-run, millions upon millions of American desperately need additional temporary assistance to just tread water until the economy can re-open.

For the good of our nation, both political parties should agree on the provision of this short-term assistance to those who are hurting, due to no fault of their own; and Republicans should stop blaming our unemployment problems on immigrants.