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Immigrants Commit Fewer Crimes Than Trump Wants You To Believe

A pair of new studies shows how U.S.-born citizens commit more crimes than non-native residents

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Two new studies suggest that foreign-born residents pose less of a public safety threat than people born in the United States, offering the latest challenge to President Trump's ongoing claims about immigration and crime.

A report published late last week by the Sentencing Project [shows](#) that immigrants commit crimes at lower rates than American-born citizens and that violent crime rates in the U.S. plummeted as immigrant populations increased. Meanwhile, a separate analysis by the Cato Institute [found](#) that all immigrants — including the undocumented — are less likely to be incarcerated than native-born Americans.

Since his first days as a candidate Trump has repeatedly asserted an inextricable link between criminal activity and undocumented immigrants, arguing that an aggressive crackdown on immigration would help rid American communities of rapists, drug traffickers, and killers. As president, Trump's rhetoric on immigration has softened only somewhat.

“My administration has answered the pleas of the American people for immigration enforcement and border security,” Trump said in a speech to Congress last month. “By finally enforcing our immigration laws, we will raise wages, help the unemployed, save billions of dollars and make our communities safer for everyone. We want all Americans to succeed, but that can't happen in an environment of lawless chaos. We must restore integrity and the rule of law to our borders.”

The president is now seeking nearly \$7.5 billion in new spending on immigration enforcement, according to [an analysis](#) of his proposed budget by the Wall Street Journal.

Drawing on survey data analyzing 40,000 immigrants ages 18 or older, the Sentencing Project, a criminal justice reform advocacy group, showed that immigrants commit fewer non-violent and violent crimes than U.S.-born citizens over their lifetime, “despite being more likely to have lower levels of income, less education, and reside in urban areas.”

The report goes so far as to suggest that higher levels of immigration to the U.S. in recent decades may have contributed to an historic drop in crime rates. Violent crimes plunged from 730 per 100,000 citizens in 1990 to 362 in 2014, according to the study. During that same period, the number of undocumented immigrants grew from 3.5 million to 11.1 million.

The findings by the Cato Institute, a libertarian-leaning think tank, show that U.S.-born citizens land behind bars at nearly twice the rate as undocumented immigrants and more than three times the rate of immigrants with legal status. Roughly 1.53 percent of those born in the United States between the ages of 18 and 54 were behind bars, as were 0.85 percent of undocumented immigrants and 0.47 percent of legal immigrants, the think tank's analysis of American Community Service data found. That's roughly 2 million American-born prisoners, 123,000 undocumented immigrants and 64,000 legal immigrants.

"All immigrants are less likely to be incarcerated than natives relative to their shares of the population," the Cato study reads.