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Sessions Cites a Study Ordered by Trump to Back Visa Limits

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The Trump administration released a study Tuesday claiming that most people convicted in U.S. courts of crimes related to international terrorism are foreign-born, a move that amplifies the president's efforts to invoke national security concerns to justify tighter immigration policies.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions said in a statement that the report provides "sobering" evidence that "our immigration system has undermined our national security and safety."

Three-quarters of people convicted of U.S. federal crimes related to international terrorism investigations since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks were foreign-born, according to a report released Tuesday by the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security.

The report does not specify how many convicted terrorists came to the U.S. through visa programs President Donald Trump would end.

The report, ordered by Trump and promoted through a White House-organized briefing for reporters, was released as the White House and congressional Democrats are locked in a stalemate over a proposal to restore protections against deportation for young, undocumented immigrants brought to the country as children.

Trump mandated the report in a March 6, 2017, executive order banning travel to the U.S. from six Muslim-majority nations. An administration official who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity said the report was being released because it is months overdue and that it wasn't intentionally timed to coincide with negotiations this week on immigration.

Trump is seeking to end the U.S. diversity lottery visa program, falsely claiming that other countries use the program to send their "worst" people to the U.S., as well as visa preferences

currently given to family members of U.S. residents. The president ignited outrage last week by reportedly disparaging Haiti and African nations as "shithole countries" in talks on the issue.

The report excludes instances of domestic terrorism without an international link as well as instances in which people were tried in state courts. It covered 549 people convicted of federal offenses through 2016 based on investigations that "involved an identifiable link to international terrorism," according to the report. Seventy-three percent were foreign-born.

The analysis includes investigations linked to planned or actual attacks in other parts of the world and includes people convicted of any offense, even if the criminal charge wasn't related to terrorism, according to the report.

The report didn't provide further data on the crimes for which people were convicted, nor did it break down what portion on the investigations involved planned or actual attacks inside the U.S.

The report also didn't include data on what portion of the people were living inside the U.S.; federal law allows charging of foreign nationals outside the U.S. for actual or planned attacks that target U.S. interests.

Federal international terrorism trials have included Ahmed Abu Khattala, the Libyan militant convicted of orchestrating the deadly attack on the U.S. facility in Benghazi, and Sulaiman Abu Ghaith, a Kuwaiti cleric and son-in-law of Osama bin Laden convicted of his support for al Qaeda. Both were flown to the U.S. to stand trial.

Of the 549 people convicted on such charges, 295 were U.S. citizens and 254 were not. Of the U.S. citizens, 148 were born abroad and 147 were born in the U.S., according to the report, which was based on a list maintained by the Department of Justice's national security division. The report didn't provide data on the people's country of origin or immigration history.

An immigrant from Uzbekistan who was admitted to the U.S. as part of the diversity visa program killed eight people last year in a terrorist attack in New York, sparking condemnation from Trump.

Several studies have found that immigrants on average are less likely to commit crimes than U.S.-born citizens. A March 2017 report by the Cato Institute found that undocumented immigrants were 44 percent less likely to be incarcerated than native-born Americans.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, several mass shootings by U.S.-born gunmen have killed significantly more people than terrorist attacks.

The Trump administration's report also found that 1,716 non-citizens have been removed from the country since the Sept. 11 attacks because of national security concerns.