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## Immigrants in Texas commit fewer crimes, new report says

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Immigrants in Texas commit fewer crimes than native-born citizens, according to research from the Cato Institute, a libertarian think-tank.

In recent years, political rhetoric has characterized immigrants as criminals. When announcing his presidential campaign, President Donald Trump associated Mexican immigrants as rapists and people who bring crime into the United States, perpetuating this stereotype.

However, while this data negates this political rhetoric, it is unlikely such data would cause a substantial number of people to change their views on immigration, said Victoria DeFrancesco Soto, a lecturer in the LBJ School of Public Affairs.

“During tough economic times or times of economic angst, native-born folk tend to scapegoat immigrants,” said DeFrancesco Soto, who specializes in immigration. “The data doesn’t really matter when you’re feeling vulnerable and scared.”

The institute obtained data from the Texas Department of Safety and focused on convictions and arrests made among legal immigrants, undocumented immigrants and native-born citizens in 2015.

The data, which was released on Feb. 26, showed criminal convictions per 100,000 residents. For criminal convictions, native-born Texans accounted for 1,784, undocumented immigrants accounted for 782 and documented immigrants accounted for 262. In 2015, documented and undocumented immigrants combined made up 16.8 percent of the Texas population, which was around 27 million.

Bob Libal is the executive director of Austin non-profit Grassroots Leadership — an organization that advocates for immigrant rights and separation between federal and local law enforcement. Libal said this information from Cato is nothing new.

“Not only is there the data that immigrants as individuals commit fewer crimes than people that are born in the United States, there’s also lots of evidence that sanctuary (city) communities are safer than communities that allow immigration (enforcement) and local law enforcement to co-mingle,” Libal said.

Sanctuary cities are communities that chose not to comply with federal immigration forces such as U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Data from Tom Wong, a senior fellow at the public policy nonprofit American Progress, shows there were 35.5 fewer crimes per 100,000 people committed in sanctuary counties than non-sanctuary counties in 2016.

Immigrants tend to commit less crime since it could lead to serious repercussions, said Elissa Steglich, clinical professor for Texas Law's immigration clinic, which provides pro bono support to immigrants.

"It's not surprising that you would see a lower incidence of criminal activity in immigrant communities (because) there is a lot at stake," Steglich said. "Folks in the undocumented community know any interaction with law enforcement, particularly here in Texas after (state Senate Bill 4), may lead to deportation or detention."

Despite comprehensive data that dispels negative stereotypes of immigrants, DeFrancesco Soto said it would take substantial time to reform immigration policy in today's political climate.

"I think it would (take) baby steps," DeFrancesco Soto said. "I mean we're not going to see a comprehensive immigration reform (soon) ... I think pretty much you're not going to find unanimous agreement on anything in American politics these days, but I do think there are certain things (where) you can find some path (to reform)."