



The U.S. vetting system already works, no need for ‘extreme’ visa vetting

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For all of his talk of the need for “extreme vetting” of people entering the United States, President Trump and his administration have offered little insight as to what that actually means. Nor has there been much evidence that current practices are inadequate to prevent extremists from entering the country.

A new report from the Cato Institute sheds some needed light on the country’s system for examining the lives of those who want to come into our country.

Looking at vetting failures — defined as “when a foreigner is granted entry to the United States who had terrorist associations or sympathies and who later committed a terrorism offense, including support for terrorist groups abroad” — before and after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, report author David Bier argues that vetting failures, already rare prior to the attacks, have actually become even rarer.

In the 15 years leading up to the attacks, Bier identified 52 vetting failures. In contrast, Bier could only identify 13 vetting failures in the time since then. Furthermore, while 27 of the pre-9/11 vetting failures resulted in deadly attacks in the United States, just one of the post-9/11 vetting failures did: The admission of Tashfeen Malik, who went on to assist in the 2015 shooting in San Bernardino.

While any number of deaths from vetting failures is obviously one death too many, it is both fortunate and significant that vetting processes have improved to the point where there are not only far fewer vetting failures, but also fewer deadly incidents from those failures.

Bier put the success of vetting systems into further context to highlight the fact that very few foreigners coming to our country with nefarious intent are actually slipping through the cracks.

“From 2002 to 2016, the vetting system failed and permitted the entry of 1 radicalized terrorist for every 29 million visa or status approvals,” the report noted. “This rate was 84 percent lower than during the 15-year period leading up to the 9/11 attacks.”

Since our vetting system is already working as intended, we have to agree with Bier that “if the government insists on additional security spending, it should prioritize domestic counterterrorism efforts over visa vetting.”