



Immigrant Criminality

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Reasonable people can disagree on how serious a problem illegal immigration is in the United States.

With an estimated 11 million people having either sneaked into the country or overstayed their visas, they could be straining some social services and taking some jobs away from U.S. citizens.

What they are not doing, though, is rampantly robbing, raping and killing U.S. citizens, as President Trump shamefully keeps trying to suggest.

The president, whose strategy of using a partial government shutdown as leverage to get congressional funding for a border wall with Mexico appears to be failing, once again resorted to trying to stoke fear of aliens during his Oval Office address last week. He cited a handful of examples where brutal crimes were committed by people who were in this country illegally and suggested that all Americans are in mortal danger unless the flow of illegal immigrants is blocked by a physical barrier.

This is the kind of rhetoric demagogues always use. They cite a few sensational cases and then claim that is the rule, rather than the exception. Those who fought for segregation in the Deep South used this ploy regularly to try to drive fear in whites of African-Americans, when, in truth, blacks were the ones most in danger of race-based crimes of violence during that time.

So, too, with illegal aliens. They are the ones who are living in fear, knowing that any day they could be found out, locked up for who knows how long, and sent back to a place whose poverty or chaos they tried to escape. They are, in fact, less likely to commit crimes than people born in this country, according to most reputable studies.

Last year, The Washington Post reported on a couple of them. One, by the libertarian Cato Institute, looked at criminal convictions in Texas, a state with one of the largest number of illegal immigrants. It found that the conviction rate of illegal immigrants was 56 percent less than that of native-born Americans. In the other study, published in the journal *Criminology*, the authors found no correlation between illegal immigration and crime, other than, of course, the laws broken by entering the country without proper documentation.

Cooking the numbers to manufacture an “immigration crisis” runs throughout the administration. Vice President Mike Pence and White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders pedaled the falsehood in the days prior to the president’s address that 4,000 known or suspected terrorists had entered this country by crossing the border with Mexico. The true number is only 41 — a figure that the administration later acknowledged — and 35 of them were either U.S. citizens or permanent residents.

If we are going to have a debate about illegal immigration and whether the wall is a cost-effective response to it, let's at least start with facts, not falsehoods, and with rational statistical analysis, not with isolated incidents that are blown out of proportion.