

# ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

## Undocumented immigrants are less crime-prone than native-born Americans, studies show

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Public policy should always be rooted in reality and guided by the facts, even if the facts are inconvenient to a desired worldview.

Reasoned, informed debates and discussions on the problem and problems of illegal immigration in the United States are all too rare, with competing factoids, anecdotes and narratives often serving to obscure the complicated reality of the situation.

One aspect of the illegal immigrant issue which has proven most prone to being overcome with emotion and rhetoric above all is the connection between illegal immigration and crime.

Incidents involving the killing or harming of individuals by illegal immigrants in particular tend to spark understandable outrage among those who would like to see stricter border controls and crackdowns on illegal immigrants. However, little good tends to come from such bursts of anger, while the disproportionate focus on the few illegal immigrants who commit horrible crimes distorts the perception of the overwhelming majority of illegal immigrants who do not commit such crimes in the minds of many Americans.

Facts matter and the fact is, the vast majority of illegal immigrants aren't here to do anyone any harm, and a growing body of research is underscoring that reality.

Multiple recent studies evaluating the relationship between undocumented immigration, crime and the prevalence of drug and alcohol problems have found no connection between greater undocumented immigration and more crime and more drug and alcohol problems.

One study published in the journal *Criminology* for instance evaluated the relationship between illegal immigration and violent crimes nationwide between 1990 and 2014.

The conclusion?

“More undocumented immigration meant less violent crime,” a press release on the study noted. “According to the study, a 1 percent increase in the proportion of the population that is undocumented is associated with 49 fewer violent crimes per 100,000 people.”

One of the potential reasons for this finding is the idea that illegal immigrants, in general, tend to be the sort of people less likely to commit crimes.

“The idea is, immigrants are driven by pursuit of education and economic opportunities for themselves or their families,” said study author Michael Light, a professor of sociology at University of Wisconsin–Madison. “Moreover, migration — especially undocumented migration — requires a lot of motivation and planning. Those are characteristics that aren’t highly correlated with a high crime-prone disposition.”

This idea is consistent with research by Light published last year which found that increases in illegal immigration haven’t been associated with increases in the prevalence of drug and alcohol problems like drug arrests, drug overdose deaths and driving under the influence arrests.

Further research from the libertarian Cato Institute specifically looked at arrest and conviction rates in Texas and found that “the conviction and arrest rates for illegal immigrants were lower than those for native-born Americans” with a “criminal conviction rate 56 percent below that of native-born Americans.”

Obviously, none of this means illegal immigration is perfectly fine and should be uncritically accepted by everyone. Nor does it mean we should throw up our hands and do nothing about illegal immigration. Nor does it mean all illegal immigrants are willing to live law-abiding, respectable, crime-free lives.

But the research should undermine the false notions that illegal immigrants, on aggregate, are especially threatening to Americans, are especially crime prone and can’t possibly be successfully integrated into American society.

Considering the vast majority of illegal immigrants here in America right now have been here for a long time, and have tried their best to live otherwise normal, law-abiding lives, it is unsurprising that most Americans recognize this and therefore support amnesty.

Ultimately, fact-driven policymaking will take us there. It’s only a matter of time.