



## Are U.S. Immigrants More Likely To Be Criminals?

*Let's dig into the data.*

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As the debate over immigration reform rages on, much has been made about the rate and severity of immigrant crime in the United States.

But the issue of how bad immigrant crime is — and the frequency with which it happens — has been overblown by politicians and news media alike. In fact, several studies and data points reflect that immigrants, both documented and undocumented, commit crime at lower rates than native-born Americans.

"There's no way I can mess with the numbers to get a different conclusion," Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst at the Cato Institute, a libertarian immigration think-tank, told *The New York Times*.

And those numbers tell a clear story, no matter how you slice it: **immigrants commit less crime than their native-born neighbors**. Between 1980 and 2010, immigrants were one-half to one-fifth as likely to be incarcerated as their native-born counterparts, according to Census Data.

Supporters of a strict immigration crackdown often cite the fact that federal prison populations are 22 percent noncitizens. But this data is misleading, as federal prisons only hold 216,000 prisoners, compared to the 2 million prisoners in state and local prisons. It's also worth noting that federal prisons are typically where people convicted of illegal immigration are housed.

But it isn't just that immigrants commit less crime, it's that they also usher in *lower crime rates*. Because immigrants commit less crime, when they heavily populate a city, there is less collaboration between criminals, which drops the crime rate ever further. Here is how the Cato Institute describes it:

Imagine 1 out of every 20 people is a criminal. If you are a criminal, you have a 5% chance of bumping into another criminal who tells you about an opportunity to commit a crime or helps

you carry it out. When an influx of low-crime immigrants enters the country, they reduce the chances of you making that connection, thus reducing overall crime.

Another study, one that focuses on the crime rate in so-called "sanctuary cities" — or cities where local law enforcement agencies refuse to assist federal agents in prosecuting undocumented immigrants for violating immigration laws — seems to prove out the theory that immigrants usher in lower crime rates. Sanctuary counties — as defined by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) — typically experience lower crime rates than non-sanctuary counties of comparable size.

Via *The Washington Post*:

In 2015, the typical sanctuary county in a large metropolitan area experienced 654 fewer crimes per 100,000 residents than the typical non-sanctuary county in a big, metropolitan area. That's an overall crime rate approximately 15 percent lower.

Of course, there were exceptions to this trend. Medium and large fringe metro areas saw nearly identical or slightly higher crime rates in sanctuary counties vs. non-sanctuary counties, but the data on large metropolitans, small metropolitans and rural areas was clear: those with more immigrants see lower crime rates.

That might be why the Major Cities Chiefs Association, which represents the 63 largest urban areas in the United States, has backed the methods of law enforcement that sanctuary cities have embraced. In their M.C.C. Immigration Committee Recommendations report, they said that "immigration enforcement by local police would likely negatively effect and undermine the level of trust and cooperation between local police and immigrant communities." The result, according to the M.C.C., would be "increased crime against immigrants" and "a class of silent victims" while eliminating "the potential for assistance from immigrants in solving crimes or preventing future terroristic acts."

All this isn't to say that immigrant crime doesn't occur, either. There are about 1.9 million non-citizens in the United States — both illegally and legally — that have been convicted of criminal offenses that could result in deportation. What isn't fair to say is that immigrants are more likely to be criminals, or that big sanctuary cities are less safe than their non-sanctuary counterparts because of immigrants.

According to the data, it's far more likely that the opposite is true.