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## Security experts say US attempt to link terror and immigration 'skews the data'

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National security experts have criticized the departments of justice and homeland security, describing a report that attempts to link terrorism and immigration as misleading, “awfully thin” and of “little value” to the US.

The Trump administration claimed the report demonstrated a need for stricter immigration policies, though it presented little new information on terrorism convictions and omitted key data points and context.

Alistair Millar, chairman of the board of directors at the Global Center on Cooperative Security, a nonpartisan thinktank, said the report distorted terrorism numbers to suggest foreign-born people carry out the majority of terrorist attacks in the US.

“They are really skewing the data, almost coincidentally, it seems, with this fever-pitch attempt to get people from coming from certain countries into the US,” Millar told the Guardian.

The report concentrates on the 549 people convicted of terrorism-related charges in US federal courts from 11 September 2001 to 31 December 2016, 254 of whom were not American citizens, while 148 were naturalized citizens and 147 citizens born in the US. In all, 402 of the 549 people were foreign-born; 295 were US citizens.

National security experts were quick to note that the report did not distinguish which people were brought to the US for trial versus those who had immigrated there first. The report also included people who were charged with terrorism-related offenses carried out overseas.

“It’s an awfully thin report for an absolutely important topic,” Karen Greenberg, director of Fordham University’s Center on National Security, told the Washington Post. “There’s almost no rhyme or reason to the things they choose to include or not include – they don’t explain it.”

Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst at the libertarian Cato Institute, criticized the report for failing to introduce new information. “It’s remarkable that, given almost a year to produce such a report and with the vast resources of the federal government combined with reams of government information unavailable to the public, that they were able to produce a report of so little of value,” he wrote for the thinktank.

In the Cato Institute's own analysis of terrorism, it found that from 2002 to 2017, native-born Americans were responsible for 78% of murders in terrorist attacks in the US.

Trump provoked further criticism with a tweet about the report that did not include the word "international" – implying that most people convicted of terrorism in the US are foreign-born, when the report is specific to people convicted on charges of international terrorism. "We need to keep America safe, including moving away from a random chain migration and lottery system, to one that is merit-based," Trump said.

The report was also criticized for ignoring the threat of domestic terrorism, which resulted in 225 deaths from 12 September 2001 to the end of 2016, according to a Government Accountability Office (GAO) study. The study said violent extremist groups with far-right beliefs were responsible for 73% of the 85 incidents counted in the report, while radical Islamist extremists were responsible for 27%.

The DHS and DOJ's joint 11-page report was released the same day that the secretary of homeland security, Kirstjen Nielsen, testified before Congress for a routine update on the department.

"They are obviously trying to make news with the report but I'm not sure it's going to have a real long-term effect on the overall immigration discussion," said James Norton, a deputy assistant secretary of legislative affairs at the homeland security department under George W Bush.

Norton said the report was another example of the administration's hardline position on new, strict immigration policies, including several versions of a travel ban, capping refugee admissions and ending temporary protected status for people from four different countries.

"A lot of folks are hopeful that we can find some ways to improve parts of the system, at least in the short term, to get to a broader fix," Norton said. "But it doesn't seem like there is a lot of willingness to do that."

The DHS and DOJ report was published to comply with a March 2017 executive order that first banned entry to the US for people from six predominantly Muslim countries. The order has since expired and been replaced with a new travel ban.