



Immigrants Commit Far Fewer Crimes than Native-born Americans

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To listen to Trump and his fellow bigots, you'd think that immigrants come here and go on massive crime rampages. The reality is quite the opposite. Immigrants, both legal and illegal, commit fewer crimes than Americans. Far fewer. Like it isn't even close.

But the social-science research on immigration and crime is clear: Undocumented immigrants are considerably less likely to commit crime than native-born citizens, with immigrants legally in the United States even less likely to do so. A number of studies published in the past several months clearly illustrate the consensus.

The first study, published by the libertarian Cato Institute in February, examines criminal conviction data for 2015 provided by the Texas Department of Public Safety. It found that native-born residents were much more likely to be convicted of a crime than immigrants in the country legally or illegally.

“As a percentage of their respective populations, there were 56 percent fewer criminal convictions of illegal immigrants than of native-born Americans in Texas in 2015,” author Alex Nowrasteh writes. “The criminal conviction rate for legal immigrants was about 85 percent below the native-born rate.”

The data shows similar patterns for violent crimes such as homicide and property crimes such as larceny. The study did find that immigrants in the United States illegally were more likely than native-born people to be convicted of “gambling, kidnapping, smuggling, and vagrancy.” But as those crimes represented just 0.18 percent of all convictions in Texas that year, they had little effect on overall crime rates...

Another study, published in March in the journal *Criminology*, looked at population-level crime rates: Do places with higher percentages of undocumented immigrants have higher rates of crime? The answer, as the chart above shows, is a resounding no.

States with larger shares of undocumented immigrants tended to have lower crime rates than states with smaller shares in the years 1990 through 2014. “Increases in the undocumented

immigrant population within states are associated with significant decreases in the prevalence of violence,” authors Michael T. Light and Ty Miller found.

So why do Trump and the other bigots keep lying about this? Because it works. Fear is a powerful motivator and demagoguery works. What’s really bizarre in our history is how well such anti-immigrant fervor works, with the same false claims and arguments made against every new group of immigrants, but at the same time how successfully immigrants have assimilated into American culture and contributed so enormously to it. We have this Jekyll and Hyde thing going on with immigrants and it’s been there from the start.

This is also why the bigots always rely on anecdotes. Stories are powerful. You bring out the widow or children of someone killed by an immigrant and everyone gets all weepy-eyed — and they should, that death is a tragedy. But that short circuits their ability to think logically or to look at actual data, which shows that story to be an anomaly rather than commonplace. But you don’t get elected by telling the truth, you get elected by making people afraid of one another.