

New research shows illegal immigrants are actually less dangerous than Americans

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Do illegal immigrants pose a threat to public safety? It's one of the key questions at the heart of today's debate over immigration policy. But new research from the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute suggests that the common tough-on-crime talking point just isn't true.

A [new policy brief](#) authored by Cato's Director of Immigration Studies Alex Nowrasteh sheds light on the issue. After examining 2017 data from the Texas Department of Public Safety, Nowrasteh found that "399,155 native-born Americans, 16,275 illegal immigrants, and 18,235 legal immigrants were convicted of crimes" that year in Texas.

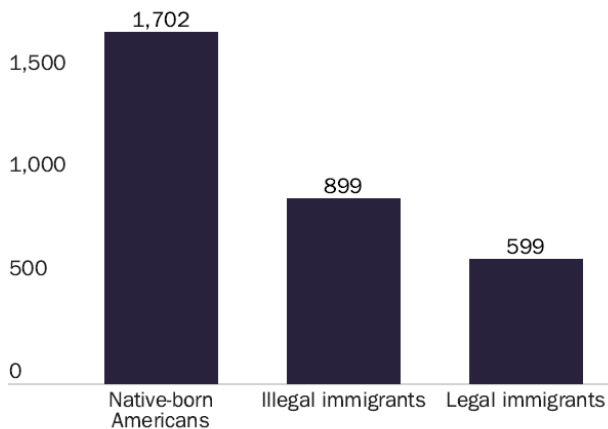
This means that as a proportion of the state's population, "illegal immigrants were over 47% less likely to be convicted of a crime than native-born Americans. Legal immigrants were about 65 percent less likely to be convicted of a crime than native-born Americans."

Cato provided this figure to the *Washington Examiner*:

Criminal conviction rates by immigration status in

Texas, 2017

2,000



Sources: Author's analysis of data from the Texas Department of Public Safety, the American Community Survey, and the Center for Migration Studies.

Notes: Rates are per 100,000 residents in each subpopulation.

The data may not be perfectly nationally representative, but Nowrasteh says there are many reasons Texas is a good state to study, such as its shared border with Mexico, large illegal immigrant population, and conservative political slant.

Still, while the revelation that illegal immigrants are less likely to commit crimes certainly runs counter to the conservative, hawkish narrative, it doesn't mean we ought to just shut down the border patrol, pack up our bags, and stop border security efforts. Obviously, while proportional rates are lower, there are still undoubtedly some dangerous people who enter the country illegally, and surely more would attempt to do so if enforcement waned. Moreover, unlike crimes committed by persons lawfully present in the U.S., every crime committed by someone illegally present could have been prevented through immigration enforcement.

But importantly, this briefing shows that legal immigrants have *even lower* crime rates than their undocumented counterparts — meaning that the more we can do to encourage legal immigration rather than illegal flows, the better. Yet Nowrasteh also told me that offering more illegal immigrants legal status could potentially reduce their crime rate even further, as it would bring them out of the shadows and give them a greater stake in the communities where they live.

Ultimately, this new research strengthens the argument for a compassionate, sensible, amnesty-based approach to the roughly 10.5 to 12 million undocumented immigrants already in the country, who are largely going about their lives peacefully and working. Plus, if there are actually more than 12 million illegal immigrants in the U.S., as hawks such as Ann Coulter often insist, then the illegal immigrant crime rate would be even lower than the Cato research estimates.

Immigration naysayers often point to the presence of such a large illegal immigrant population as a national security threat, seizing on isolated instances of high-profile violence in an effort to bolster their argument for mass deportations and harsh enforcement. Yet the latest research suggests that their claims are statistically unsupported, and that we have less to fear than they think from the illegal immigrants among us.