



## **In our opinion: Solving immigration issues starts with understanding the facts**

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When it comes to understanding immigration, both documented and undocumented, facts are important.

Congress still holds the power to enact laws that would make entry into this country more orderly, allowing for guest workers and providing the resources necessary to handle all asylum seekers in a timely manner. But even Congress needs reliable facts, not scare tactics.

A [new report](#) from the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, is a big help in that regard. It finds that the link between undocumented immigrants and crime is not what some politicians and anti-immigrant forces maintain. In fact, immigrants of all stripes — those here legally and those who enter without documentation or visas — commit far fewer crimes than those who are native-born Americans.

The argument over immigration and crime has been muddled somewhat by a recent Justice Department report that found arrests of noncitizens make up 64% of all federal arrests, and that the number has tripled over the last decade. Noncitizens, the Bureau of Justice Statistics said in August, made up only 7% of the population in 2018 but accounted for 15% of the arrests.

But a closer look at those figures reveals that most of these arrests were for violations of immigration laws, not for violent crimes. The federal government has become more aggressive in patrolling border areas and nabbing people who come into the United States illegally. As NBC News reported, when other crimes are examined separately, U.S. citizens account for the vast majority of arrests.

But now the Cato Institute has done a deeper dive, using data from the Texas Department of Public Safety. Texas is the only state that records the immigration status of everyone it arrests and convicts, as part of its cooperation with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Texas is a border state with a large population of undocumented immigrants.

Figures from 2017, the latest year available, show that, on a per capita basis, undocumented immigrants were 47% less likely to be convicted of a crime than U.S. citizens. Those who immigrate legally were 65% less likely to be convicted than Americans.

Put differently, 899 undocumented immigrants were convicted for every 100,000, while 599 legal immigrants were convicted per 100,000, and the figure for native-born Americans was 1,702.

The same ratios held true for each category of crime. For homicide, the conviction rate for undocumented persons was 2.5 per 100,000, while the rate for legal immigrants was 1.5, and the rate for native-born Americans was 3.6.

Arrest rates mirror these same ratios, as do convictions for sex crimes and larceny.

When confronting immigration reform, Americans must be careful not to let anecdotal information get in the way. The details of a particular crime may be gruesome and intolerable, but it becomes meaningless to the debate without context.

The same can be said for political ideologies that depend on a certain narrative to garner support.

Americans must come to grips with border security and the need to account for all who cross into this country, but they also must understand the relative effects of immigration, and in the context of more than two centuries of constant influx. Facts, not emotions, should lead the way.