

# The Philadelphia Inquirer

## Immigration debate has little to do with crime and everything to do with racism | Opinion

Abraham Gutman

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Who is the worst person that someone can associate with you? If you are one of the 50,000 undocumented immigrants living in Philadelphia, the answer to that question is probably Juan Ramon Vasquez.

Born in Honduras, Vasquez was deported from the U.S. in 2009. He came back, this time to Philadelphia.

In 2014, Vasquez was arrested by Philadelphia police for aggravated assault and was released even though Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) asked the city to keep him in jail due to his immigration status. Because of Philadelphia's sanctuary city policy, the city only respects such requests when signed by a judge. In Vasquez's case, ICE failed to obtain the signature.

This year, Vasquez was arrested again after raping a 5-year-old family member. He is currently serving an eight- to 20-year sentence.

For conservative pundits, Vasquez's story is proof that sanctuary cities expose their citizens to heinous crime.

On Aug. 9, Fox News' Laura Ingraham went on an anti-immigrant racist rant, in which she spent several minutes talking about Philadelphia. "Check out what happened courtesy of Philadelphia's refusal to cooperate with ICE detainees," she said almost victoriously as an introduction to Vasquez's story. "This is an unspeakable act of evil that should have never occurred and never occurred on American soil," she continued, before calling Mayor Kenney "an embarrassment" and "a disgrace" for supporting the city's sanctuary status and calling on voters to vote him out of office.

But if Ingraham and other conservatives genuinely care about crime, there is good research to suggest that they should support *more* immigration to the U.S., not less. Here are some highlights:

- A study published in the prestigious Criminology Journal analyzed crime and immigration data from 1990 to 2014 and concluded that, "Increases in the undocumented immigrant population within states are associated with significant decreases in the prevalence of violence."

- An analysis conducted by the right wing think-tank Cato Institute found that in Texas in 2015, "the conviction and arrest rates for illegal immigrants were lower than those for native-born Americans."
- There is even research to suggest that while first-generation immigrants commit crimes at lower rates than their American-born peers, American-born children of immigrants commit crimes at the same rate of children of American-born parents.

But wait, argue those who oppose sanctuary cities: Even though *most* immigrants are unlikely to commit crimes, sanctuary cities attract and protect the worst immigrants and put American-born citizens at risk.

The evidence does not support that proposition either:

- The Center for American Progress, a progressive think-tank, compared counties that assist ICE with counties that do not and found that sanctuary counties not only have lower levels of crime but also less poverty, unemployment, and higher incomes.
- A study by researchers from Highline College and the University of California at Riverside concludes that, "sanctuary policies have no effect on crime rates."
- Police chiefs have come out in support of sanctuary cities, saying that collaborating with immigration enforcement will "harm community trust."

Juan Ramon Vasquez's crimes are heinous, but he is the outlier, not the norm.

Any of us could be associated with someone who enrages us and embarrasses our community.

Any white man could be associated with a mass shooter. Any police officer could be associated with a cop who killed an unarmed black person. Any soldier could be associated with the prison guards in Abu Ghraib. And any woman could be associated with Laura Ingraham.

But we constantly hear that these comparisons are not appropriate. Mass shooters are "lone wolves," and killer cops are "bad apples."

Why don't undocumented immigrants get that benefit of the doubt? Why if one undocumented immigrant commits a crime, is the message that all undocumented immigrants are criminals?

The answer has more to do with the color of their skin than the way they entered the United States.