



## The real hoax about the border crisis

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It's all a hoax. A great big hoax.

Not the family separations, the babies alone in cages, the drugged immigrant children, the stolen toddlers too traumatized to speak, the wailing children whom Ann Coulter slanders as "child actors." Sadly, those cruelties are all too real.

The hoax is the premise that President Trump's administration has invented to rationalize such crimes against humanity: his narrative that America has been "infest(ed)" with hordes of crime-committing, culture-diluting, job-stealing, tax-shirking, benefits-draining "aliens."

No part of that description is remotely true. Yet the Trump administration seems to have successfully shifted the national dialogue away from "*Do* we have a border immigration problem?" to "What's the right way to *fix* our border immigration problem?"

Truly, it's bizarre. Unauthorized border crossings have been falling over time. In fact, apprehensions of unauthorized immigrants along the Southwest border last fiscal year declined to about 300,000, the lowest level since 1971, according to data from U.S. Customs and Border Protection. They've risen in recent months, though year-to-date they're still below historical levels.

Let's say you believe, though, that even those numbers are too high, because of the calamities these immigrants have been inflicting upon America's public safety, culture and economy. Trump, after all, suggests that even one border-crosser is too many, since most come bringing crime, drugs and general bloodthirst.

In fact, immigrants in general, and undocumented immigrants in particular, commit crimes at far lower rates than native-born Americans. That includes violent crime, according to research from the Cato Institute. Another recent study, published in the journal *Criminology*, found that states with larger shares of undocumented immigrants tended to have *lower* crime rates. The finding jibes with lots of earlier research, too.

Which makes sense: Most immigrants want to stay off law enforcement's radar. One wrong move, after all, could get them deported – in some cases, to their death.

Let's consider the *other* claims that Trump makes about our supposed alien infestation, such as foreigners' alleged assault on our culture and values. The gothic horrors of a "taco truck on every corner" notwithstanding, recent waves of immigrants have actually proved themselves reasonably adept at assimilating into American culture. Particularly those given the opportunity to escape the shadows.

"Immigrants are now more assimilated, on average, than at any point since the 1980s," according to a 2013 study by Jacob L. Vigdor for the Manhattan Institute, using metrics such as English-language ability and intermarriage rates.

Maybe, you say, the immigrants' real damage is economic, as those not-at-all-bigoted "economic nationalists" claim. Immigrants are stealing our jobs, our benefits and shortchanging Uncle Sam!

This is a curious claim to make in a labor market with 3.8 percent unemployment. Nonetheless, let's consider what the research says about the longer-term relationship between immigration levels and job market health.

There's reason to believe that new immigrants may depress wages for earlier waves of immigrants who have similar skill sets. However, recent studies suggest that immigration (both authorized and unauthorized) actually boosts labor force participation rates, productivity and wages and reduces unemployment rates for native-born American workers, whose skills these immigrants tend to complement.

But don't these people drain the public coffers?

Immigrants, including undocumented immigrants, pay taxes – taxes that fund government benefits that in many cases they are not legally eligible to collect. A report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine found that the net fiscal impact of first-generation immigrants, compared to otherwise similar natives, is positive at the federal level and negative at the state and local levels. That's due mostly to the costs of educating their children. When their children grow up, though, they are "among the strongest economic and fiscal contributors in the U.S. population, contributing more in taxes than either their parents or the rest of the native-born population." In other words, by the second generation, immigrants are net-positive for government budgets at all levels.

What about the most destitute immigrants who come here, though? Surely they're sucking the government dry!

Nope.

An internal government report *commissioned by Trump* found that refugees brought in \$63 billion more in tax revenue over the past decade than they cost the government. Finding those results inconvenient, the administration suppressed them, though they were ultimately leaked to The New York Times last year.

It's hard to comprehend how Trump has so successfully hijacked the national conversation around immigration. With virtually no facts on his side, he has managed to fabricate a multipart border emergency, and convince a majority of his own party that this imagined emergency necessitates state-sanctioned child abuse. Sadly, Trump's manufactured crisis has now led to very real tragedy.

