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Immigrants are not more prone to crime

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Are immigrants especially prone to crime?

A recent editorial in Lubbock Avalanche-Journal (Editorial: Arrest of gang members shows immigration reality, July 27, www.lubbockonline.com) seems to suggest so.

Citing the arrest of three MS-13 gang members at the border, the editorial states, “There are also many individuals who enter this country illegally with the goal of committing crimes. These are facts.”

Are they “facts,” though? How many is “many?”

There’s a reason researchers say that the plural of anecdote is not data. We need to look at the social science research on immigration and crime to get a fuller picture.

As Alex Nowrasteh of the Cato Institute shows, illegal immigrants are more likely to be arrested for violent crime than legal immigrants, but less likely than native born Americans. In fact, we can consult data from right here in Texas, because Texas keeps track of the immigration status of those arrested and convicted of crimes.

In 2015, Texas saw 1,794 convictions of natives per 100,000 natives; 782 convictions of illegal immigrants for every 100,000 illegal immigrants; and 262 convictions of legal immigrants per 100,000 immigrants. Thus compared to natives, illegal immigrants are less prone to crime, and legal immigrants are much less so.

What happens when we look specifically at violent crime? We see the same pattern: for homicides, Texas saw 3.88 convictions of natives per 100,000 natives; 2.90 convictions of illegal immigrants for every 100,000 illegal immigrants; and 0.51 legal immigrants per 100,000 immigrants.

The data simply do not bear out the claim that immigrants, even illegal immigrants, are especially prone to crime. If concern about the criminality of immigrants, legal or otherwise, entitles us to bar them from the country, then consistency demands we consider expelling natives convicted of crimes. Nobody supports this, and for good reason. It’s obviously unjust - as is punishing the many immigrants who do not commit crimes just because there are some who do.