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The Myth of the Migrant Crime Wave



Jeremy Odrich, Social Policy & Politics Fellow

Despite what Donald Trump and Fox News say, there's no migrant crime wave in America. Study after study shows that immigrants commit crimes at lower rates than native-born Americans, yet far-right commentators and politicians continue to go on the news and claim that immigration increases crime in the United States. This claim is part of a larger right-wing playbook designed to sow resentment toward immigrants using misinformation.

But the politicians who are fearmongering about immigrants aren't serious about fixing our border. When they were presented with a bipartisan bill to actually fix the border instead of just complaining about it, they refused. While they continue to play politics with our border, the Biden-Harris administration is focused on restoring order and keeping our communities safe.

Immigrants Commit Crimes at Lower Rates

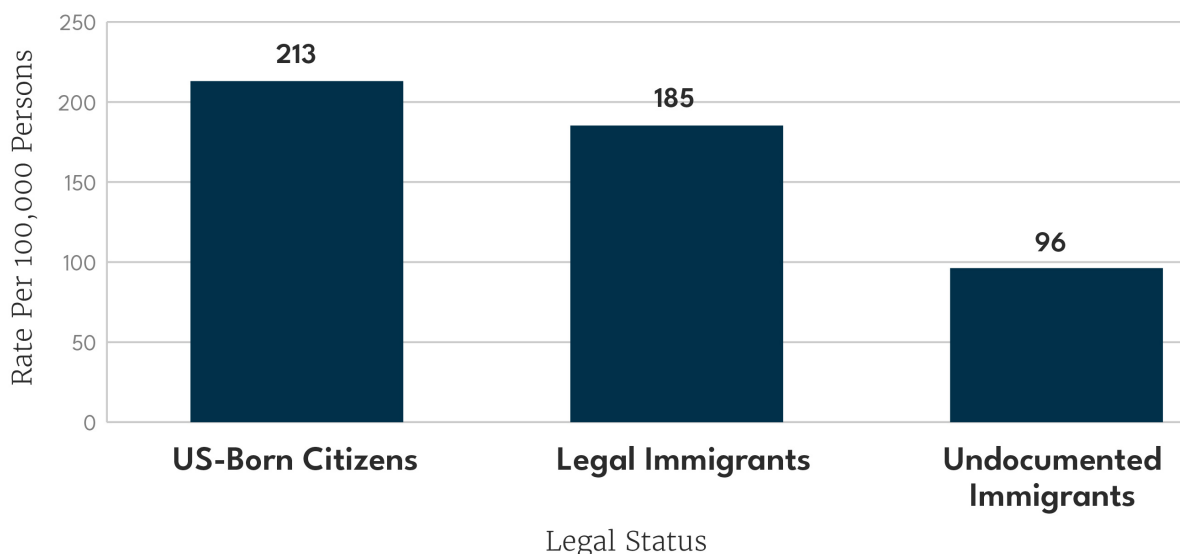
Far-right politicians and their allies are making two dishonest claims about the connection between immigration and crime. First, they're claiming there is currently a wave of violent crime in the United States. This is false. In fiscal year (FY) 2023, violent crime fell near its lowest rate in 50 years. Second, they are claiming that undocumented immigrants are the cause of this violent crime wave. This too is false and easily debunked by the data.

Research by the American Immigration Council looked at FBI data over a 23-year period and found that immigrants are **less likely to commit violent crimes** than native-born Americans. Not only are immigrants less likely to commit violent crimes, but higher rates of immigration are associated with decreases in both violent and property crime in communities. Put differently, where there are more immigrants, there is less crime.

In FY 2023, a record 2.3 million immigrants were encountered at our southern border. If right-wing accusations were correct, we would expect that with record levels of immigration, we would also see record levels of violent crime, especially in border states. Yet in 2023, Texas saw a 15% drop in violent crime and Arizona saw an 8.8% drop. In a year with more migrants arriving than ever before, border states are reporting precipitous drops in crime rates.

Another study using arrest data from the Texas Department of Public Safety, an agency headed by a Republican appointee, compared the criminality of undocumented migrants, legal migrants, and native-born Americans between 2012 and 2018. Of the three groups, undocumented migrants had the lowest rates of committing crimes. This finding entirely refutes the right-wing argument that migrants are the source of a crime wave in American communities.

Violent Crime Rates 2012-2018



Source: Light, Michael T., et al. "Comparing Crime Rates Between Undocumented Immigrants, Legal Immigrants, and Native-Born US Citizens in Texas." Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 05 Oct. 2020, <https://www.pnas.org/doi/pdf/10.1073/pnas.2014704117>. Accessed 13 Mar. 2024.

The data are clear: immigrants follow the law with more fealty than those who are born here. Not only are they more law abiding, but immigrants actively reduce crime rates. In the rare instances where immigrants commit crimes, they should be held accountable for their actions, just like everybody else. But the facts show that they are not driving up crime rates in our country.

The Right Wing Isn't Serious About the Border

The anti-immigrant politicians who are pushing these misperceptions would rather complain about the border than fix it. In February, Congressional Republicans killed a bipartisan border deal that would have beefed up border security and streamlined migrant processing. They opposed a bill that would have increased border security funding by \$20 billion, increased the number of border agents and asylum officers, and improved fentanyl detection technology. Rather than give Democrats a political win in an election year, Donald Trump ordered Republicans to kill the bill and then bragged about it so he could use immigration as a campaign issue. The truth is that those who are doing the most complaining would rather fearmonger about immigrants than do their jobs and pass legislation to restore order at the border and fix our immigration system.

While these folks are focused on inflammatory language, the Biden-Harris Administration has taken several historic actions to restore order at the border. In fact, they have taken 535

immigration actions in their first three years, making them the most active immigration administration in American history. They have:

- Increased Border Patrol's budget by \$7 billion over four years compared to Trump;
- Increased border arrests by 3 million compared to Trump;
- Removed 5 times as many people per month without valid immigration cases compared to Trump;
- Seized nearly six times as much fentanyl a year at the border compared to Trump;
- Brokered deals with the Chinese and Mexican governments to crack down on fentanyl production and smuggling;
- Doubled the number of asylum "credible fear" cases heard each week so migrants can get a decision that is fast, fair, and final; and,
- Established regional processing centers throughout Latin America so fewer make the dangerous trip to the southern border.

This is what an administration that's serious about the border and immigration looks like.

Conclusion

Although Fox News and right-wing politicians are set on spreading the myth that migrants increase crime rates, their claim is simply not true. Immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants, commit crimes at much lower rates than native-born citizens. Rather than spreading these baseless claims, they should do their jobs and work with serious policymakers on both sides of the aisle to pass legislation that will restore order at the border and modernize our immigration system to work for America.