

KNOW THE FACTS

IMMIGRATION AND CRIME

Immigration has shaped American history and is a fundamental part of our social fabric. Yet, popular discourse has painted international migration as a growing concern, evoking all sorts of anti-immigrant sentiments. Consequently, many of us are divided between appreciating and fearing what immigration represents. The Immigration Committee is working on a series of informative posts about contemporary immigration challenges. We invite you to learn more about immigration myths and facts. This month's post is about [immigration and crime](#).

MYTH: Immigrants in the U.S. increase crime

As of 2017, according to Gallup polls, almost half of Americans believed that immigrants make crime worse. Is it true that immigration drives crime? Many studies have shown that it does not.¹

FACT: Immigrants are less likely to be criminals than native-born Americans

A vast majority of studies have confirmed that immigrants are less likely to commit serious crimes or be behind bars than people who are native-born, and high rates of immigration are associated with lower rates of violent crime and property crime. This holds true for both legal immigrants and the unauthorized.^{1,3,4}

1) Between 1990 and 2013, the foreign-born share of the U.S. population grew from 7.9 percent to 13.1 percent and the number of unauthorized immigrants more than tripled from 3.5 million to 11.2 million. During the same period, FBI data indicate that the violent crime rate (aggravated assault, robbery, rape, and murder) declined 48 percent and the property crime rate (motor vehicle theft, larceny/robbery, and burglary) fell 41 percent.²

2) In a large-scale collaboration by four universities, researchers compared immigration rates with crime rates for 200 metropolitan areas over the last several decades. According to data from the study, a large majority of the areas have many more immigrants today than they did in 1980 and fewer violent crimes. In general, the study's data suggest either that immigration has the effect of reducing average crime or that there is simply no relationship between the two.¹

3) Even a report that expressed some concerns about immigrant crime cautioned readers about making assumptions. In a report published by The Center for Immigration Studies, the authors noted that, "[in] conclusion, we find that it would be a mistake to assume that immigrants as a group are more prone to crime than other groups, or that they should be viewed with more suspicion than others."³

4) It is also important to note that data on immigrants and crime can be influenced by the fact that immigrants have the stigma of "criminality" ascribed to them by an ever-evolving assortment of laws and immigration-enforcement mechanisms. Whole new classes of "felonies" have been created which apply only to immigrants, deportation has become a punishment for even minor offenses, and policies aimed at trying to end unauthorized immigration have been made more punitive.¹

Sources: 1) www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/03/30/upshot/crime-immigration-myth-html

2) www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/criminalization-immigration-united-states

3) <https://cis.org/Report/Immigration-and-Crime> 4) <https://www.cato.org/blog/immigration-crime-what-research-says>