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# Immigrants Do Not Commit More Crimes in the US, Despite Fearmongering

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*The American Immigration Council does not endorse or oppose candidates for elected office. We aim to provide analysis regarding the implications of the election on the U.S. immigration system.*

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Across the globe, immigrants are increasingly being blamed for committing crimes, with right-wing groups often leading the charge. In the United States, this rhetoric has intensified as politicians aim to demonize immigrants during the election season. However, a wealth of research has discredited this myth, demonstrating that higher shares of immigrants are not correlated with higher crime rates and that immigrants are not more likely to commit crimes than the U.S.-born.

## **As Immigration Has Risen, Crime Has Fallen**

As immigration increased, the crime rate declined, according to the [American Immigration Council's analysis](#) of demographics and crime data. Between 1980 and 2022, the immigrant share of the

U.S. population more than doubled, from 6.2% to 13.9%, while the total crime rate dropped by 60.4%, from 5,900 crimes per 100,000 people to 2,335 crimes per 100,000 people. Specifically, the violent crime rate fell by 34.5% and the property crime rate fell by 63.3%.

The same pattern holds true for data from recent years. Between 2017 and 2022, the immigrant population grew by 1.7 million people, with its share of the total population increasing from 13.7% to 13.8%. Meanwhile, the national total crime rate dropped from 2,758 per 100,000 people to 2,335 per 100,000 people, a 15.3% decrease.

Furthermore, in support of the research that immigrants do not raise crime rates is the data showing that immigrants are less likely to be incarcerated than U.S.-born individuals and have lower rates of felony arrests than the U.S.-born.

[A recent study](#) led by Stanford economist Ran Abramitsky found that immigrants have consistently had lower incarceration rates compared to U.S.-born individuals—a trend that has held true for 150 years.

Furthermore, immigrants—including undocumented immigrants—have lower rates of felony arrests than U.S.-born individuals. According to [a multi-year study of crime statistics](#) published by the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, undocumented immigrants are roughly half as likely to be arrested for violent and property crimes than the U.S.-born.

Using national data, [an economist from the University of California Riverside](#) found that undocumented immigrants are 33% less likely to be incarcerated than U.S.-born individuals.

## **Immigrants Do Not Increase Crime Rates**

Research has made clear that the growth of the immigrant population in the United States is not correlated with higher crime rates. Instead, growing immigrant populations have been associated with reductions in [violent](#) and [property crime](#) across the U.S.

Drawing on four decades of crime and immigration data across metropolitan cities, a study published in the Journal of Ethnicity and Criminal Justice found that

violent and property crime rates decreased as cities' immigrant concentrations grew. These findings hold up when examining specific groups of immigrants, including [undocumented immigrants](#) and [Latino immigrants](#).

## **Sanctuary Policies Do Not Lead to More Crime**

Another widespread myth is that [sanctuary policies](#) result in higher crime rates. While there is no universal definition of a sanctuary policy, they generally limit local law enforcements' cooperation with federal immigration enforcement authorities. Opponents argue that these policies protect criminals and compromise public safety. However, the evidence proves otherwise.

Sanctuary cities in the U.S. do not experience higher crime rates than non-sanctuary cities. A 2017 [study](#) by the Center for American Progress found that there are, on average, 35.5 fewer crimes committed per 10,000 people in counties that do not honor Immigration and Customs Enforcement's requests for a "detainer" compared to counties that honor them. ICE uses a detainer to request that local law enforcement hold a



potentially deportable person in custody for up to 48 hours after their scheduled release date.

Numerous studies have confirmed that so-called “sanctuary policies,” like limiting compliance with a detainer, are correlated with lower crime rates [at the city and county levels](#). New York City, a [sanctuary city](#) since 2016, has experienced substantial growth in its immigrant population which has been accompanied by [declining crime rates](#).

Studies published in the [International Migration Review](#) and [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#) have demonstrated that jurisdictions with sanctuary policies honor ICE detainers for immigrants with criminal convictions at the same rate as those without. At the same time, sanctuary policies can promote immigrants’ sense of safety when reporting crimes and their trust in law enforcement.

Researchers at Colorado State University estimated that the reductions in violent crime stemming from sanctuary policies can save county governments a total of \$101 million annually, while honoring ICE

detainers costs counties almost \$3.3 billion annually. Importantly, limiting cooperation with federal immigration authorities often allows local law enforcement to build relationships and trust with immigrant communities – which can lead to [more effective policing](#) and [safer communities overall](#).

## **The Bottom Line**

The myths that immigrants increase crime and that sanctuary policies lead to lawlessness are not well supported, and on the contrary, research shows that immigrants, particularly first-generation immigrants, are less likely to commit crimes than U.S.-born citizens. Policies that protect immigrants do not result in higher crime rates but instead contribute to safer, more trusting communities for all residents.

FILED UNDER: [ICE Detainers, Sanctuary Cities, undocumented immigration](#)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



### American Immigration Council Staff

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