

## IMMIGRANTS AND CRIME

**On July 2, 2007, 166 leading scholars and practitioners in legal issues and the criminal justice system sent an open letter to the President, Members of Congress and Governors about immigrants and crime.** Some universities represented include Boston College, Boston University, Harvard University, Northwestern University and the University of California.

The letter states that it is a myth that immigrants are more prone to criminality than are native-born. Moreover, they say, this inaccurate assumption has flourished in a post-9/11 climate of fear in which terrorism and undocumented immigration are often mentioned in the same breath.

The letter also states that immigrants long have been scapegoats for many social problems that afflict the nation. As a result, myths and stereotypes about immigrants, rather than established facts, far too often serve as the basis for public perceptions that drive misguided immigration policies.

Here are the facts they present:

- Numerous studies by independent researchers and government commissions over the past 100 years repeatedly and consistently have found that immigrants are **less likely to commit crimes or to be behind bars than are the native-born.**
- **Immigrants in every ethnic group in the United States have lower rates of crime and imprisonment than do the native-born.** This is true for all immigrant groups -- including the Mexicans, Salvadorans and Guatemalans -- who comprise most of the undocumented immigrants in the country.
- Immigration does not automatically lead to higher crime rates is evident in the fact that **crime rates have fallen in the United States at the same time that immigration has increased.** Rates of violent crime and property crime have also declined sharply over the same period and the violent crime rate has reached historic lows.
- **Teenage immigrants are much less likely than native-born adolescents to engage in risk behaviors** such as delinquency, violence and substance abuse that often lead to imprisonment.

*Read the complete letter and see the signatories at [www.aifl.org/ipc/ipc\\_openletter0507.shtml](http://www.aifl.org/ipc/ipc_openletter0507.shtml)*

**Research by the Immigration Policy Center provides further evidence that immigrants do not disproportionately engage in criminal activity. The Center found that:**

- Cities with large immigrant populations such as Los Angeles, New York, Chicago and Miami have **experienced declining crime rates since 1994.**

- Among men age 18-39 (who comprise the vast majority of the prison population), the 3.5 percent incarceration rate of the native-born in 2000 was five times higher than the 0.7 percent incarceration rate of the foreign-born.
- The foreign-born incarceration rate in 2000 was nearly two-and-half times *less* than the 1.7 percent rate for native-born, non-Hispanic white men and almost 17 times less than the 11.6 percent for native-born black men.
- For all ethnic groups, the risk of imprisonment was highest for men who were high-school dropouts. *But among the foreign-born, the incarceration gap by education was much narrower than for native-born.*

Read the complete report at [www.immigrationpolicy.org](http://www.immigrationpolicy.org)

Recent work by the Migration Policy Institute has again confirmed that “In fact, immigrants have the lowest rates of imprisonment for criminal convictions in America Society.”

Read the complete report at [www.migrationinformation.org](http://www.migrationinformation.org)

*In Massachusetts, the June 2009 “Massachusetts Immigrants by the Numbers: Demographic Characteristics and Economic Footprint” found that of the 10,132 criminally sentenced persons incarcerated by the Department of Corrections on January 1, 2008, 9.7 percent were foreign-born. This proportion is significantly less than the 17.6 percent of the population aged 18-64 who were immigrants.*

## REFERENCES

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