

# Immigration Has Little To Do With California Crime

## Press Release

SAN FRANCISCO, California, February 25, 2008 — Immigrants are far less likely than the average U.S. native to commit crime in California, according to a report released today by the Public Policy Institute of California. Significantly lower rates of incarceration and institutionalization among foreign-born adults suggest that longstanding fears of immigration as a threat to public safety are unjustified.

Key findings in the report, *Crime, Corrections, and California: What Does Immigration Have to Do with It?*:

- People born outside the United States make up about 35 percent of California's adult population but represent only about 17 percent of the state prison population.
- U.S.-born adult men are incarcerated in state prisons at rates up to 3.3 times higher than foreign-born men.
- Among men ages 18-40 – the age group most likely to commit crime – those born in the United States are 10 times more likely than immigrants to be in county jail or state prison.
- Noncitizen men from Mexico ages 18-40 – a group disproportionately likely to have entered the United States illegally – are more than 8 times less likely than U.S.-born men in the same age group to be in a correctional setting (0.48% vs. 4.2%).

The findings are striking because immigrants in California are more likely than the U.S.-born to be young and male and to have low levels of education – all characteristics associated with higher rates of crime and incarceration. Yet the report shows that institutionalization rates of young male immigrants with less than a high school diploma are extremely low, particularly when compared with U.S.-born men with low levels of education.

The low rates of criminal involvement by immigrants may be due in part to current U.S. immigration policy, which screens immigrants for criminal history and assigns extra penalties to noncitizens who commit crimes. The PPIC report has important implications for several reforms to immigration policy now under consideration.

“Our research indicates that limiting immigration, requiring higher educational levels to obtain visas, or spending more money to increase penalties against criminal immigrants will have little impact on public safety,” says Kristin Butcher, co-author of the report. “In California, as in the rest of the nation, immigrants already have extremely low rates of criminal activity.”

Consistent with national studies, the report also found lowered property and violent crime rates in California cities with a higher share of recent immigrants than in those with a lower share.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

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Research for this report was conducted while both authors held visiting fellow positions at PPIC.

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