

# Data indicate there is no immigration crisis

October 22 2014

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Is there an "immigration crisis" on the U.S.-Mexico border? Not according to an examination of historical immigration data, according to a new paper from Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy.

"'Illegal' Immigration on the U.S.-Mexico Border: Is it Really a Crisis?" was co-authored by William Gruben, a research associate at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas' Globalization and Monetary Policy Institute, and Tony Payan, the Baker Institute's Françoise and Edward Djerejian Fellow for Mexico Studies and director of the institute's Mexico Center. The paper examines historical immigration data, the "push" and "pull" factors currently motivating Mexicans and Central Americans to migrate to the U.S. and attempts to explain why current undocumented

immigration across the U.S.–Mexico [border](#) has been perceived as a crisis.

"In recent months, print and television journalists have presented the American public with a 'crisis' of illegal immigration on the U.S.–Mexico border," Payan said. "Much of this recent discussion has centered on Central American children traveling alone and on allegations that they are responding to motivations created by the Obama administration's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival policy. The word 'crisis,' however, can have alternative meanings. If a 'crisis' of undocumented immigration means a historically large or very rapidly growing flow of undocumented immigrations, the overall national evidence shows today that there is no such crisis. Border Patrol apprehensions of undocumented immigrants attempting to cross the U.S.–Mexico border have in fact plummeted and remain far below levels a decade earlier."

According to the authors, the overall number of unauthorized immigrants apprehended by the U.S. Border Patrol in 2013 was about 64 percent below that of 2004. Overall apprehensions had increased 26.5 percent between 2011 and 2013. Apprehensions were declining consistently before then, with 2011 being the trough year, the authors said. Principal determinants of this decline likely include the almost doubling of Border Patrol personnel over 2004-2013 and the Great Recession of 2007-2009, together with its lagged effects.

The authors acknowledge that apprehensions of Central American children traveling alone have indeed surged. However, while references to a record of apprehensions of unaccompanied child immigrants are correct, publicly available data for this category only go back to 2010, the authors said. "Thus, it may be preliminary to draw definitive conclusions about record numbers of unaccompanied children based on four full-fiscal-year observations plus monthly observations into a fifth

year," they said. "Other data, including total apprehensions for any undocumented child immigrants, accompanied or otherwise, extend more than a decade. Preliminary estimates for fiscal year 2014 suggest that these apprehensions have remained below levels a decade earlier."

There are many dynamics, economic and social, that seem to have motivated additional unauthorized travel across the U.S.–Mexico border in the last few years, the authors conclude. "Finally, there is always the [immigrants](#)' ongoing calculation of the constantly changing probabilities of apprehension, remuneration and survival," they said. "The key with all of these variables, however, is to understand which tug in what direction and weigh them accordingly in order to understand the overall effect on migration wave—this is true for both push and pull factors. But given the statistics story we have presented, we can conclude that there is hardly an immigration crisis—something that would have been a different story around 2005."

**More information:** Paper: [bakerinstitute.org/media/files ...  
ben\\_Payan-101714.pdf](http://bakerinstitute.org/media/files/ben_Payan-101714.pdf)

Provided by Rice University

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