



## Trump's Ugly, Hateful Rants in Michigan Should Be Covered as a Scandal

Greg Sargent  
April 3, 2024

Donald Trump has invented a new criminological category he describes as “Migrant Crime,” and in Michigan on Tuesday, he seized on the horrible murder of a young woman, allegedly by an undocumented immigrant, to underscore the point. Some news accounts covered this by quoting GOP strategists, with one enthusing that this will win over “security moms,” as if Trump is engaging in something like a conventional campaign strategy here.

But Trump’s ugly demagogic rants in Michigan, and others like it, deserve to be treated as a national scandal. The cherry-picking of isolated terrible crimes to smear migrants as a class is not something we would tolerate if it were directed toward other groups. Never mind what Trump is attempting to do politically. His deranged, malicious, hateful public conduct should be seen as the real story here. It should be covered that way.

Trump’s appearance in Michigan has been overshadowed by the news that Trump may have lied about relatives of the victim, 25-year-old Ruby Garcia. At his event, Trump claimed he had spoken to “some of her family,” but her sister flatly denied he or his campaign had contacted them, and blasted Trump for singling out crimes committed by “illegal immigrants.”

That did shape some of the coverage. But it should not require a brave public intervention from a young woman enduring a horrific tragedy to prod the media into registering the appalling way Trump is twisting this murder and other similar crimes to viciously smear undocumented immigrants across the board.

During his rants in Michigan, Trump also discussed the killing of another woman in Georgia by an “illegal alien animal.” He mocked Democrats for describing undocumented immigrants as “human,” declaring, “They’re not human, they’re animals,” while keeping what “they” means vague. Trump insisted other countries are sending “prisoners, murders, drug dealers, mental patients, and terrorists” to our country, claimed migrants have “wrecked our country,” and blamed it all on “Biden’s border bloodbath.”

It’s pure degeneracy to use Ruby Garcia’s killing this way. Here’s what we know: Brandon Ortiz-Vite, a 25-year-old Mexican citizen, was charged with the murder. He and Garcia may have been romantically involved, though the sister says it didn’t get that far.

Ortiz-Vite originally qualified for legal protections for people brought here illegally as children. According to Immigration and Customs Enforcement, that status expired in May 2019, and after

getting arrested on local charges, he was deported to Mexico in September 2020. He reentered the country on an unknown date.

It's simply absurd to pin this on Biden's immigration policies. Trump and the right criticize Biden for things like letting in migrants on parole who apply for entry from abroad, and for releasing migrants awaiting asylum hearings into the interior of the country. But none of that applies to Ortiz-Vite.

He is not here on Biden's parole programs. And he doesn't appear to have applied for asylum. According to an ICE official, his deportation in 2020 was the last known immigration action taken toward him by the federal government prior to his current arrest.

"He wasn't here due to any policy put in place by this administration," David Bier, associate director of immigration studies at the Cato Institute, told me.

In short, Ortiz-Vite is what is known in government-speak as a "gotaway"—that is, someone who crosses the border illegally and eludes capture. Based on what we know, at no point did he interact with our immigration machinery or law enforcement before the alleged murder, so Biden's policies couldn't have applied to him one way or the other, Bier notes.

"If Border Patrol had caught him, they would have deported him immediately," Bier said. "That's what happens to single Mexican adults, including under Biden."

If the argument is supposed to be that fewer migrants with criminal intent would dare enter the country due to Trump's alleged toughness, well, efforts to cross the border illegally by convicted criminals reached record numbers under Trump's presidency, Bier has shown. "Trump's policies wouldn't have deterred this guy for a second," he said.

It is true that with any large group of people—undocumented migrants included—one risks seeing a small percentage of them turn to violent crime. But that's not an argument against Biden's immigration policies. As has been demonstrated again and again, there is no evidence that migrants are driving any kind of crime wave in the United States.

In covering Trump's Michigan event, some news accounts dutifully noted that fact. But they tended to treat this as a conventional fact-check of typical political rhetoric, rather than treating his heinous smearing of a large class of people as itself being the story.

Trump's constant use of the deranged "migrant crime" trope provides the hook for doing just that. The Republican National Committee now has an official website devoted to chronicling "migrant crime" and "illegal alien crime," listed out by state (in some states no "illegal alien crimes" have yet been documented). The casual use of such terms to smear large classes of immigrants is the official party position.

All this is straight from the authoritarian playbook. As *The Atlantic's* Anne Applebaum has noted: "The repetition of the phrase 'migrant crime' is a tactic stolen from Victor Orban, who used to use 'Gypsy crime' in the same way."

How about some stand-alone news analysis pieces devoted to that sort of malign confluence of tactics? Why not cover this hateful, dangerous rhetoric as a sign of Trump's seething contempt for even the most minimal standards of conduct in public service and public life?

Democrats could consider fighting back too. What about holding events with, say, the families of the immigrant pothole-repairing workers killed in the Baltimore bridge collapse, or with immigrant essential workers who got our society through the pandemic? Democrats could say: This is what immigrants are really doing for our country. They could call on Trump: Stop the hate.

If the press won't tell the story this way, then Democrats should do so themselves, and prod the media to pick up on it, just as both parties constantly push the media to adopt other chosen narratives. The Trump-GOP smearing of immigrants is an absolute scandal. And it should be treated as exactly that.