



The Role of Immigration in the Risk of Terrorism in America

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With the new Trump Administration making very significant and controversial moves to limit the influx of people from seven Muslim-majority nations in the name of protecting the homeland, a study by the CATO Institute looks at the real risk of death from terrorism on United States soil and helps us put into perspective the “risk from abroad”.

The authors of the study looked at the 41 year period from January 1, 1975 to December 31, 2015, a timeframe that includes the influx of Cuban and Vietnamese refugees which, given the current state of paranoia in Washington, would now be considered “high risk” immigrants. The study identifies foreign-born terrorists who were either convicted of committing or planning a terrorist attack on U.S. soil and then links them with the visa that they were issued and the number of people that they murdered in their attacks. It also includes terrorists who were discovered trying to enter the United States using forged immigration documents as well as asylum seekers. The analysis excludes native-born American terrorists except where the information is used for comparative purposes.

The main source materials used includes:

- 1.) “Terrorism Since 9/11: The American cases” edited by John Mueller.
- 2.) Fordham University Centre on National Security’s compilation of the trials for members of ISIS in the United States.
- 3.) The Congressional Research Service report from 2013 entitled “American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat”.
- 4.) The Global Terrorism Database maintained by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Response to Terrorism at the University of Maryland.

5.) The RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents covering the years from 1968 to 2009.

In addition, the authors used data supplied by the New American Foundation, Mother Jones, the Investigative Project on Terrorism and research by Dr. Charles Kurzman at the University of North Carolina as well as news stories, court documents and government reports.

Now, let's get to the data. From 1975 to the end of 2015, we have the following statistics:

– over the forty-one year period, there were 154 foreign-born terrorists who committed acts of terrorism that led to death of American citizens in the United States. Of these, 54 were lawful permanent residents, 34 were tourists, 20 were refugees, 10 were illegal immigrants, 9 were students, 4 were asylum seekers, 3 were from Visa Waiver Program nations and 1 was a K-1 fiancée visa. The visas for 9 terrorists could not be determined. As you can see from this data, only 6.5 percent of foreign-born terrorists were illegal immigrants over the 41 year period.

– over the forty-one year period, there were 3,024 people murdered by foreign-born terrorists with 98.6 percent of those being murdered on September 11, 2001. There were two other spikes in deaths over the rest of the period with 6 people being killed in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and a combined 19 people that were killed in 2015 in the Chattanooga shooting on July 16, 2015 (5 people) and the San Bernardino shooting on December 2, 2015 (14 people).

– over the forty-one year period, the annual chance that an American would be murdered in a terrorist attack by a foreign-born terrorist was 1 in 3,609,709.

– over the forty-one year period, the annual chance that an American would be murdered in a terrorist attack committed by a refugee was 1 in 3.64 billion.

– over the forty-one year period, of the 768,000 murders committed in the United States, 3,024 or 0.39 percent were committed by foreign-born terrorists.

– over the forty-one year period, the U.S. murder rate declined from a high of 10.17 per 100,000 in 1980 to a low of 4.45 per 100,000 in 2015. By comparison, the 1975 to 2015 murder rate by foreign-born terrorists averaged 0.026 per 100,000 with a high of 1.057 per 100,000 in 2001, thanks to 9/11. In other words, from 1975 to 2015, the annual chance of being murdered in the United States was 252.9 times as great as the chance of dying in an attack committed by a foreign-born terrorist on U.S. soil.

Here is a table that summarizes the odds of dying in an attack by a foreign-born terrorist:

Here is a graph comparing the overall U.S. murder rate to the murder rate at the hands of foreign-born terrorists over the period from 1975 to 2015:

Interestingly, over the forty-one year period, there were 408 Americans killed by native-born terrorists with the largest number (168) being killed in a single incident in Oklahoma City in 1995. In the post-9/11 period, 24 people were murdered on U.S. soil by a total of 5 foreign-born terrorists with 65 other foreign-born terrorists attempting to commit or actually committing acts of terrorism that did not result in fatalities. During the same period, 80 people were killed by native-born American terrorists.

Given that, since September 11, 2001 government frequently reminds us that the use of extraordinary measures are necessary to protect us from the foreign-born terrorist hordes that are trampling each other to gain access to American soil, it is interesting to see from this study that Americans run a far greater risk of death at the hands of one of their own than they do at the hands of someone born elsewhere, particularly since 9/11. Governments have long used fear to control the masses, a methodology that has become well-honed by Washington over the past 15 years.