

Criminologist: Illegal Immigrant Crime a Border Security Issue

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Illegal immigrant crime is a major component of America's on-going immigration debate; a new essay from criminologist Barry Latzer investigates whether or not crime by illegally resident people merits stricter border enforcement.

Writing in the Manhattan-Institute-affiliated *City Journal*, Latzer argued that while illegal immigrant crime is not on par, proportion-wise with native-born crime, it still rises to a level that merits taking "measures to secure our borders."

President Donald Trump has routinely claimed that there is a connection between illegal immigration and crime. Critics, in turn, have pointed to research—predominantly from the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute—which argues that illegal immigrants commit crimes at rates lower than native-born citizens. This, opponents of Trump argue, indicates that immigrant crime is not a massive issue, because the average immigrant lowers the overall crime rate.

Latzer, however, argues that there is insufficient information about the number of illegal immigrants actually resident in the country to estimate a true rate of crime by the same group. This is necessarily true, as illegal immigrants by their nature prefer not to be identified as such by governments; estimates of the illegal immigrant population are established by backing out their presence in multiple federal data sets.

Additionally, Latzer notes, actual data on the number of illegally resident offenders is unavailable because some states—especially high-immigration California—opt not to provide information on their prisoners' immigration status.

One state does, however: Texas. The Texas Department of Public Safety reported nearly 300,000 crimes committed by illegal immigrants from June 1, 2011, through 2018. These included 624 homicides, 1,911 robberies, and 3,955 sexual assaults. By Latzer's estimate, this means illegal immigrants account for 10 percent of all homicides in the Lone Star state, compared to an estimated 7.3 percent of the population.

But the important takeaway for Latzer is not that illegal immigrants account for some proportion of crimes, given that they account for fewer crimes overall than their native-born counterparts. The question is whether illegal immigrant crime is comparable, apples-to-apples, to native-born crime: Latzer thinks emphatically not.

"No amount of crime by those who enter this country unlawfully should be acceptable, because it is 'extra' crime that wouldn't occur if our border security were effective," Latzer writes.

