

# The Washington Times

## Texas Data Indicates Illegal Immigrants Have Higher Murder Rates

Stephen Dinan

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For years, Texas' crime data has been used to argue that illegal immigrants commit crimes at a lower rate than the general population.

A new report by the Center for Immigration Studies says it's all wrong, and when the data is considered more broadly, rates of serious crimes such as homicide and sexual assault are substantially higher among illegal immigrants than native-born and legal residents.

In 2012, for example, the overall population recorded three homicide convictions for every 100,000 people in the state. The rate among only illegal immigrants is 30% higher, at 3.9 for every 100,000 people. Indeed, illegal immigrants showed a higher rate of homicide in all but one year from 2012 to 2019.

For sexual assaults, the rate among illegal immigrants is roughly double that of the general population, the Center for Immigration Studies found.

“At least when it comes to serious crime, illegals in Texas seem to have relatively high crime rates,” said Steven A. Camarota, one of the researchers on the new report. “The argument to the contrary is based on a misunderstanding or a misreading of the data.”

The criminal behavior of illegal immigrants — beyond their initial illegal entry or violation of their visa that left them in unauthorized status — has raged for decades.

Sanctuary-city backers argue that illegal immigrant crime rates are low, and the bigger danger is scaring them into not reporting when they are victims of crimes. Those who favor stricter enforcement argue that every crime committed by an illegal immigrant wouldn't have happened had the government been doing its job.

The problem is there's not very much good data available to draw conclusions.

The dataset from Texas' Department of Public Safety had been considered an exception. The state includes an entry for immigration status in its prison records, giving researchers a chance to look at convictions and make calculations.

Several researchers have done so, including the Cato Institute and a University of Wisconsin researcher whose work was published by Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Cato, in a 2020 version of its study, said illegal immigrant conviction rates in Texas were 782 per 100,000 people in 2018, compared to 1,422 for native-born Americans.

For homicide specifically, Cato said, the rate was 2.5 per 100,000 among illegal immigrants and 3.3 among native-born Americans.

But Mr. Camarota said that study looked at a snapshot in time — who was categorized as an illegal immigrant at intake.

It turns out that not all illegal immigrants are flagged at the start, and Texas learns about their status over time. So someone who didn't flag at intake could be determined to be an illegal immigrant several years into incarceration.

Using the initial intake data to judge is akin to looking at a football score at halftime and naming the winning team.

The longer people are incarcerated, the better the chance that Texas will properly flag their unauthorized status, Mr. Camarota said.

Applying the more complete data to 2018, he found Texas flagged 48 homicide convicts as illegal immigrants at intake, for a rate of 2.7 per 100,000. But Texas has since flagged another eight, bringing the rate to 3.1. The overall rate is just 2.9, according to the new data released this week.

Mr. Camarota said the data becomes less reliable for lesser crimes because they earn shorter sentences, and people just aren't in the system long enough for the process to flag all the illegal immigrants.

But the data he did collect showed striking differences in rates for various crimes.

Illegal immigrants had significantly lower rates of theft, drug crimes, fraud offenses and public order entanglements. But they had higher rates of traffic offenses, sex offenses, sexual assaults and homicides.

The Washington Times has reached out to Texas public safety officials for comment on its data and the new findings.

Alex Nowrasteh, Cato's immigration expert, said he ran the same numbers as Mr. Camarota and still found a lower homicide rate among illegal immigrants in 2018, with 3 per 100,000 compared to 3.2 for the native-born population.

He also said Mr. Camarota is using a lower estimate for the illegal immigrant population. Mr. Camarota uses the one from the Center for Migration Studies.

Using the Homeland Security Department's estimate for 2018, which is higher than CMS's estimate, would drop the homicide conviction rate for illegal immigrants in Texas to 2.9 per 100,000 persons.

Mr. Nowrasteh said Mr. Camarota's own estimates track closely with Homeland Security's, so he said it was striking that Mr. Camarota used CMS's numbers.

"In other words, CIS picked a lower illegal immigrant population estimate produced by CMS that drives their results," he said.

Mr. Camarota said he doesn't do a state breakdown in his illegal population estimates, so he doesn't have a figure for Texas. He also said CMS's numbers are the most up-to-date, which is why he used them.

He acknowledged that if CMS is underestimating the illegal immigrant population, it would mean the denominator is wrong and the crime rate would be lower. But he said whatever estimate is used, the results undercut Cato's conclusions.

"What we can say is whether you use DHS or CMS numbers, the crime rates are not low," Mr. Camarota told The Times. "People have cited and cited [those numbers], and it's an echo chamber that illegal immigrants have low crime rates based largely on this analysis — and it's not correct." Mr. Camarota also said it's "unclear" whether the crime rates in Texas are matched elsewhere in the country.

Cato has raised questions about how Texas identifies illegal immigrants.

Someone who was in the country on a legal visa at the time of their crime, but later fell out of status and was then flagged as here illegally, would have been a legal immigrant at the time of their crime. If Texas is including them, it could skew the numbers toward a higher rate of illegal immigrant crime.

Mr. Camarota said his understanding of Texas' data is that it doesn't recategorize legal immigrants to illegal immigrants over time.