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Nowrasteh: SB4 aimed at ‘sanctuary jurisdictions’ is wrong for Texas

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President Trump’s focus on immigration enforcement has filtered down to the state-level in Texas. The State Senate passed Sen. Charles Perry’s (R-Lubbock) controversial bill, Senate Bill 4, in February. SB4 would penalize every so-called “sanctuary jurisdiction,” which includes cities, counties and universities who do not honor every federal request for immigration enforcement assistance.

The House will likely vote on SB4 Wednesday. The bill’s proponents argue that sanctuary jurisdictions provide a breeding ground for crime. They and U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions claim “many of these [sanctuary] jurisdictions are also crumbling under the weight of illegal immigration and violent crime.”

This makes sanctuary jurisdictions sound very dangerous. The truth is that they aren’t.

Murder rates have climbed in some cities in recent years, mainly in Chicago, Las Vegas, San Antonio and Phoenix. The first two cities are sanctuaries but the last two are not. Additionally, the cities of Louisville, Memphis, Anchorage, Fort Wayne, Durham and Indianapolis all had more murders in 2016 than in any year back to 1960. None are sanctuaries.

The national murder rate is up slightly over the last two years, but it is still half of what it was in the early 1990s. More importantly, the national murder rate is not correlated with the number of illegal immigrants living in the country. The illegal immigrant population has remained steady for about nine years, after increasing to about 12 million since the early 1990s – the same time as America’s record crime decline.

If Sessions is correct that sanctuary cities breed crime, then he has to account for a number of paradoxes. One such paradox: How a declining illegal immigrant population is driving an increase in homicides— homicides that are concentrated in cities that do not have sanctuary policies.

A major reason sanctuary cities do not have higher crimes rates is because illegal immigrants are less likely to actually commit violent and property crimes. A [recent Cato Institute paper](#) estimates that only 0.85 percent of all illegal immigrants between the ages of 18 and 54 are incarcerated, compared to 1.53 percent of natives in the same age range. The rate drops even further for illegal immigrants, to 0.50 percent, if you disregard incarcerations for non-violent immigration crimes, such as illegal reentry.

Comparing the violent and property crimes that Americans actually care about shows that native-born Americans are about three times as likely to be incarcerated as illegal immigrants.

Large inflows of immigrants from 2000 to 2005 in California, many of whom likely entered the U.S. illegally, were associated with declining violent crime rates on the city level, while property crime rates did not budge. In most cases, illegal immigrants are not committing a crime by merely being in the United States.

Opponents of SB 4 are also concerned that this bill would actually hinder local law enforcement. A recent Statesman opinion piece by five Texas sheriffs stated that SB 4 “would coerce local law enforcement to dedicate frequently scarce resources — such as jail space, on-duty officers and local tax dollars — to a job that is supposed to be done and funded by the federal government.”

They have a point. Forcing cities to enforce federal immigration law could harm vital cooperation between civilians and police. A full 45 percent of Latinos were less likely to report a crime or voluntarily offer information about crimes, for fear that the police would inquire after their immigration status or the status of people they know according, to a 2013 survey by PolicyLink.

SB4 would mark many Texas counties as sanctuaries. Why? Because many outspoken Texas sheriffs like Sally Hernandez of Travis County, Ed Gonzalez of Harris County and Lupe Valdez of Dallas County do not comply with all federal immigration requests. The research supports what these Sheriffs know: SB4 would centralize state law enforcement in Austin without any gains to public safety, and perhaps, even make it worse.

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