



Fact-checking number of people killed by rifles and by people in US illegally

Tom Kertscher

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“Less than 500 people a year killed by all rifles combined” and “4,000 a year killed by illegals.”

IF YOUR TIME IS SHORT

- Fewer than 500 people were murdered with a rifle in 2019, according to the latest annual FBI statistics.
- Gun-ban proposals have focused on assault-style weapons, not rifles generally.
- No national statistics are kept on the number of people killed by people who are in the United States illegally, but available estimates indicate it's far fewer than 4,000 per year.

The day after the Boulder, Colo., shooting that killed 10 people, President Joe Biden called on Congress to enact legislation to revive a ban on assault rifles and high-capacity ammunition magazines.

A Facebook post suggests the administration is overreacting to gun killings, while being too lax with its border control policies.

"Less than 500 people a year killed by all rifles combined. Let's ban them," the post said, above a picture of an assault-style gun. "4000 a year killed by illegals. Let's give them assistance and register them to vote and keep the border WIDE OPEN."

The claim, originally posted in March 2019 but widely reshared after the mass shootings in Boulder and a few days earlier in Atlanta, was flagged as part of Facebook's efforts to combat false news and misinformation on its News Feed. (Read more about our partnership with Facebook.)

The post wildly exaggerates Biden administration policy on both guns and immigration. Biden's proposal would ban certain semi-automatic rifles classified as assault weapons — not all rifles. And neither he nor his allies in Congress have proposed keeping the border wide open or allowing immigrants who are in the country illegally to register to vote.

But for this fact-check, we're looking at the accuracy of the numbers the Facebook post cites in arguing for stricter border enforcement over stricter gun control.

Fewer than 500 people were murdered with a rifle in each of the past three years, according to the latest annual FBI statistics available.

No national statistics are kept on the number of people killed by people who are in the country illegally. But the available figures indicate the number is far below the 4,000 per year claimed. One estimate puts it at about 300.

It's important to note that this claim compares two different things: killings with a type of weapon vs. killings by a category of people.

The FBI's latest annual figures show there were 10,258 murders committed with guns in 2019, including 364 with rifles. The number for rifles was 297 in 2018 and 403 in 2017. That includes various kinds of long guns, including AR-15-style semi-automatic rifles involved in many deadly mass shootings over the past decade.

We found no evidence to support the claim about 4,000 killings a year by people in the country illegally. There are no national crime statistics that are broken down by immigration status.

For a rough estimate of the numbers, we looked at administrative arrests by the Immigrations and Customs Enforcement. These are arrests of people who were either present in the U.S. illegally or had somehow violated the terms of their entry or status in the country. Many such arrests occur after local law enforcement officials do background checks on people they have arrested for crimes, said ICE spokesman Shawn Neudauer.

In the fiscal year ended Sept. 30, 2020, ICE made a total of 103,603 administrative arrests. It said 90% of those arrests were for immigrants with a history of criminal convictions or pending criminal charges.

The criminal histories included 1,837 offenses involving homicide — 1,468 convictions and pending 369 charges. In the previous year, the total was 1,923 — 1,549 convictions and 374 pending charges.

But the combined offenses noted in those two years didn't necessarily involve homicide cases from those years. They were people who had been charged with or convicted of homicide in the United States at some time in the past — ICE data doesn't indicate when. So the claim of 4,000 homicides a year is not supported by ICE data.

Alex Nowrasteh, director of immigration studies at the libertarian Cato Institute, said that in Texas, which does track immigration status in crimes, 42 immigrants in the country illegally were convicted of committing a total of 50 homicides in 2019. If those numbers were representative of the country overall, he estimated, about 294 homicides would have been committed by immigrants in the country illegally in 2019.

Our ruling

A widely recirculated Facebook post claimed: "Less than 500 people a year killed by all rifles combined" and "4,000 a year killed by illegals."

The latest FBI figures show there were 364 murders committed with rifles in 2019.

No national crime statistics are kept on the number of people killed by people who are in the country illegally. One estimate based on Texas data puts the national number at under 300.

In fiscal 2020, ICE arrested people on immigration violations whose criminal histories included 1,837 homicide convictions or charges sometime in the past, but its data doesn't say when the killings or convictions occurred.

The post contains only an element of truth. We rate it Mostly False.

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