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## Fact-checking President Trump's numbers on the 'human toll of illegal immigration'

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Fact Check: Do illegal immigrants commit more crimes?

The president has made this claim for over two years — but there is still no evidence. (Meg Kelly/The Washington Post)

*“So here are just a few statistics on the human toll of illegal immigration. According to a 2011 government report, the arrests attached to the criminal alien population included an estimated 25,000 people for homicide, 42,000 for robbery, nearly 70,000 for sex offenses, and nearly 15,000 for kidnapping. In Texas alone, within the last seven years, more than a quarter-million criminal aliens have been arrested and charged with over 600,000 criminal offenses. ... Sixty-three thousand Americans since 9/11 have been killed by illegal aliens. This isn't a problem that's going away; it's getting bigger.”*

— **President Trump**, remarks at the White House, **June 22, 2018**

In the midst of uproar over his administration's family separation policy, President Trump highlighted the stories of families who have been “permanently separated” because a loved one was killed by an undocumented immigrant. This theme is nothing new. The president has claimed without evidence that undocumented immigrants bring “tremendous crime” since he announced he was running for office.

We've looked at the overarching claim [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#) — but what caught our eye in these comments were all the specific numbers Trump used. It's rare for the president support his case with statistics.

The White House and the Department of Homeland Security did not respond to our request for comment, but we dug in anyway.

### The Facts

As we've reported, researchers on all sides of this debate generally agree that it's impossible to quantify the impact on crime rates from illegal immigration because no nationwide data track offenders by their immigration status.

Almost all the independent research suggests crime declines in areas where immigrants settle. Studies also show that immigrants, both legal and undocumented, are less likely to commit crimes than the native-born. With that context, let's dive into the president's claims.

***“According to a 2011 government report, the arrests attached to the criminal alien population included an estimated 25,000 people for homicide, 42,000 for robbery, nearly 70,000 for sex offenses, and nearly 15,000 for kidnapping.”***

Trump gets into trouble right off the bat. The report he's referencing defines “criminal alien” as any “noncitizen residing in the United States legally or illegally and convicted of a crime.” In other words, it combines arrest statistics for both legal and undocumented immigrants, but the president points to it as evidence of the “human toll of illegal immigration.”

The report says there were 25,064 homicide arrests for both classes of immigrants. How does that compare to homicide arrests among nonimmigrants during the same time period?

The crime tally Trump uses spans a 55-year period — from August 1955 to April 2010. Alex Nowrasteh, a senior immigration policy analyst at the pro-immigration Cato Institute, found that there were about 934,000 homicides total during that period. Let's generously assume that (a) each arrest led to a conviction and (b) no person was arrested twice. That means approximately 2.7 percent of all homicides during the 55-year period were committed by noncitizens, whether they were legal or undocumented immigrants. Considering they made up 4.6 percent of the U.S. population during that time, according to Nowrasteh, “they were underrepresented among murderers.”

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Trump again subs in data for both legal and undocumented immigrants to make a broad point about illegal immigration, citing a number for arrests — not convictions — over a seven-year period. “There is no reason to use that statistic,” Nowrasteh argues, since “we have the actual numbers of crimes committed by illegal immigrants” in Texas.

When we asked the Texas Department of Public Safety (TDPS) about Trump's comments, they pointed us to an updated chart that shows 258,000 “criminal aliens” (of which 173,000 were undocumented) were booked into Texas jails between June 1, 2011, and June 30, 2018. The undocumented immigrants were charged with more than 269,000 criminal offenses.

Nowrasteh points out these statistics aren't as clear as they might seem. “It is important to note that the Texas DPS data report the number of convictions and arrests, not the number of people actually convicted or arrested.” That means one person is convicted of say five crimes, the data will show five convictions, not one person. In other words, there is not a perfect head count.

With that in mind, how did Trump land on “over 600,000 criminal offenses”?

Some sleuthing led us to a TDPS chart that is no longer available online. (We found a copy in this PolitiFact article, but the TDPS link is now dead.) It shows “criminal aliens” arrested between June 1, 2011, and Dec. 31, 2017, were charged with 638,411 criminal offenses over the course of their criminal careers. Key words there: criminal careers. Assuming that “criminal career” means every crime an individual has been arrested for in their life, it's safe to assume many of these individuals committed crimes outside of Trump's seven-year time frame.

Put simply, not only is Trump combining figures for both legal and undocumented immigrants, he's using an exaggerated figure for the number of criminal offenses they were arrested for — but not necessarily convicted of — in the past seven years.

***“Sixty-three thousand [Americans have been killed by illegal aliens since 9/11]. And that number, they say, is very low because things aren't reported. Sixty-three thousand, and you don't hear about that.”***

Our colleague Philip Bump [did the forensics on this statistic](#). He found it was the product of tortured math that originated in a [2006 blog post](#) from Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa). “The lives of 12 U.S. citizens would be saved who otherwise die a violent death at the hands of murderous illegal aliens each day,” King claimed. “Another 13 Americans would survive who are otherwise killed each day by uninsured drunk driving illegals.”

King explained his math [in a speech](#) on the House floor: “That means then that criminal aliens are committing 28 percent of the crimes in the United States. And so that means 28 percent of the murders, 28 percent of the rapes, 28 percent of the violence and the assaults and battery, first- and second-degree murder and also manslaughter attacks are committed by criminal aliens.”

King is referencing a [2005 government report](#) that looks at “criminal aliens incarcerated in federal prisons, state prisons and local jails.” But [as we've pointed out](#), most crimes are prosecuted at the state level and there are no nationwide data tracking offenders by immigration status. So, King's 28 percent (which is really 27 percent) is the number of legal and undocumented immigrants in federal prison. The Justice Department says only 10 percent of U.S. prisoners are housed in the federal system (the rest being in the state or local systems).

Setting that large caveat aside, there are several things wrong with the Trump-King claim. First, the 2005 report on which it's based does not distinguish between legal and undocumented immigrants. It does not in any way assume that, because immigrants made up 27 percent of the federal prison population, that means they committed 27 percent of all crimes. That's like saying because 15 percent of people in prison are blond, blonds committed 15 percent of all crimes. It just makes no sense.

Plus, [a separate government report](#) from the same year proves arrests of undocumented immigrants were neither evenly distributed nor equal to 27 percent. Nearly half of all arrests were for immigration or drug offenses.

### **The Pinocchio Test**

It's rare to see the president using data to back up his immigration claims. But we would have been more pleased if that data had been used correctly.

Trump started this statistical dive saying, “Here are just a few statistics on the human toll of illegal immigration.” He then used data for all immigrants — not just those here illegally — to make his points. He used numbers for arrests, not convictions, which are more authoritative when discussing crime rates. And even with all those misleading errors, his numbers still showed immigrants were underrepresented among homicide offenders relative to their share of the population, according to Cato.

Pointing to Texas as an example, the president used data that lumped together all arrests in an immigrant's "criminal career" but misleadingly claimed all 600,000-plus offenses happened within a seven-year period.

To round out the trifecta, he highlighted a decade-old, made-up statistic from King.

Trump's track record on this issue is laden with Four Pinocchio rulings. He earns another Four Pinocchios.