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The White House's Misleading & Error Ridden Narrative on Immigrants and Crime

By ALEX NOWRASTEH

President Trump recently held an event with some of the relatives of people killed by illegal immigrants in the United States. Afterward, the White House sent out a press release with some statistics to back up the President's claims about the scale of illegal immigrant criminality. The President's claims are in quotes and my responses follow.

According to a 2011 government report, the arrests attached to the criminal alien population included an estimated 25,000 people for homicide.

Criminal aliens is defined as non-U.S. citizen foreigners, which includes legal immigrants who have not naturalized and illegal immigrants. The 25,064 homicide arrests he referred to occurred from August 1955 through April 2010 – a 55-year period. During that time, there were about 934,000 homicides in the United States. As a side note, I had to estimate the number of homicides for 1955-1959 by working backward. Assuming that those 25,064 arrested aliens actually were convicted of 25,064 homicides, then criminal aliens would have been re-

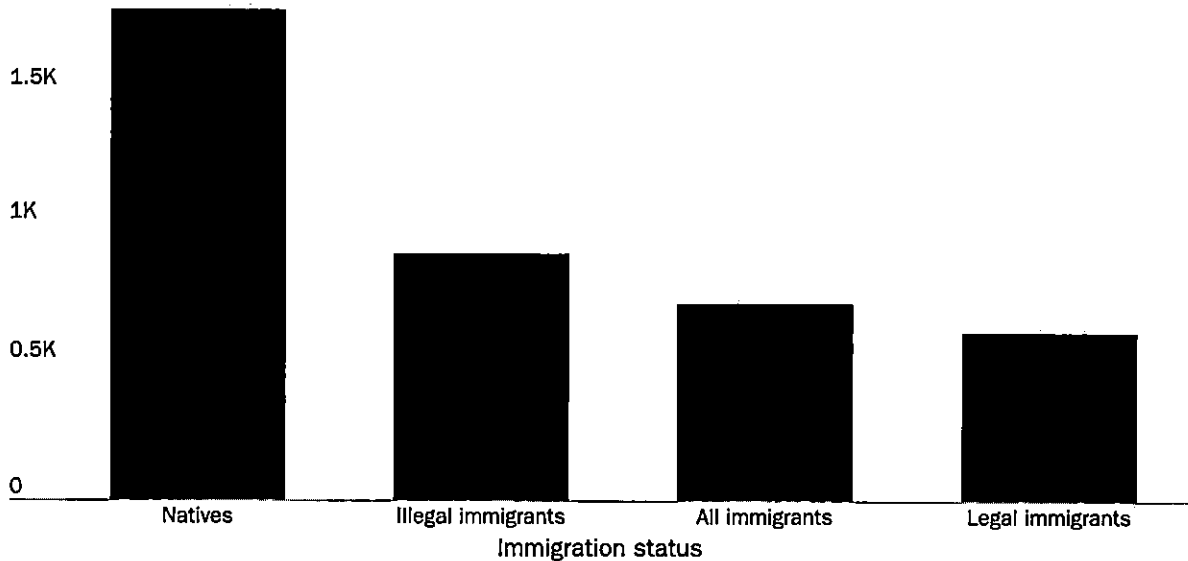
sponsible for 2.7 percent of all murders during that time period. During the same time, the average non-citizen resident population of the United States was about 4.6 percent per year. According to that simple back of the envelope calculation, non-citizen residents were underrepresented among murderers.

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.

We recently published a research brief examining the Texas data on criminal convictions and arrests by immigration status and crime. In 2015, Texas police made 815,689 arrests of native-born Americans, 37,776 arrests of illegal immigrants, and 20,323 arrests of legal immigrants. For every 100,000 people in each subgroup, there were 3,578 arrests of natives, 2,149 arrests of illegal immigrants, and 698 arrests of legal immigrants. The arrest rate for illegal immigrants was 40 percent below that of native-born Americans. The arrest rate for all immigrants and legal immigrants was 65 percent and 81 percent below that of native-born Americans, respectively. The homicide arrest rate for native-born Americans was about 5.4 per 100,000 natives, about 46 percent higher than the illegal immigrant homicide arrest rate of 3.7 per 100,000. Related to this, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services recently released data that showed the arrest rate for DACA recipients about 46 percent below that of the resident non-DACA population.

More important than arrests are convictions. Native-born Americans were convicted of 409,708 crimes, illegal immigrants were convicted of 15,803 crimes, and legal immigrants were convicted of 17,643 crimes in Texas in 2015. Thus, there were 1,797 criminal convictions of natives for every 100,000 natives, 899 criminal convictions of illegal immigrants for every 100,000 illegal immigrants, and 611 criminal convictions of legal immigrants for every 100,000 legal immigrants. As a percentage of their respective populations, there were 50 percent fewer criminal convictions of illegal immigrants than of native-born Americans in Texas in 2015. The criminal conviction rate for legal immigrants was about 85 percent below the native-born rate.

Figure 1: Criminal conviction rates by immigration status in Texas
Per 100,000 residents in each subpopulation, 2015

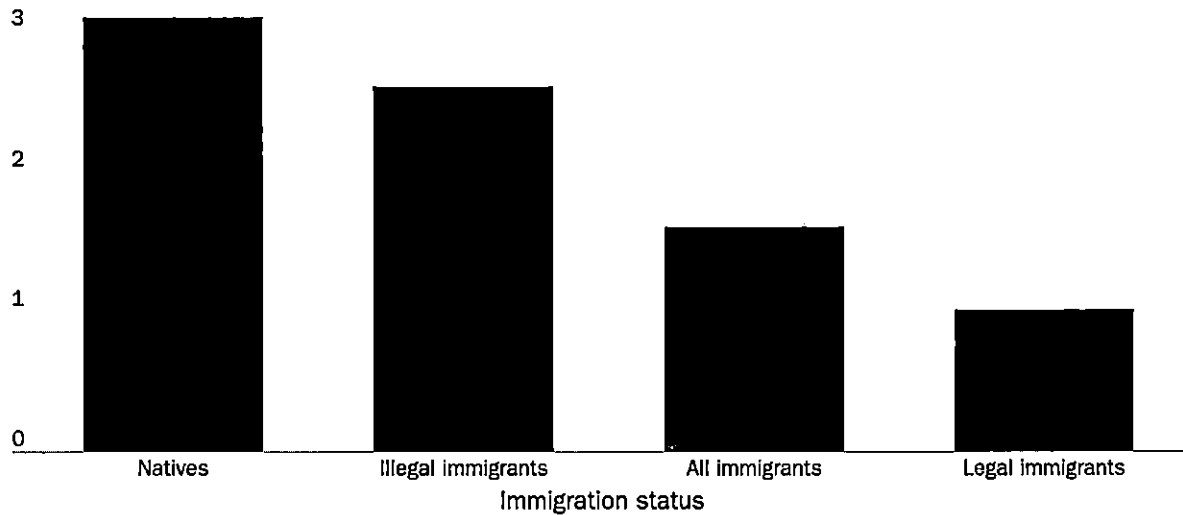


Sources: Author's analysis of Texas Department of Public Safety data, the American Community Survey, and the Center for Migration Studies.

Murder understandably garners the most attention. There were 785 total homicide convictions in Texas in 2015. Of those, native-born Americans were convicted of 709 homicides, illegal immigrants were convicted of 46 homicides, and legal immigrants were convicted of 30 homicides. The homicide conviction rate for native-born Americans was 3.1 per 100,000, 2.6 per 100,000 for illegal immigrants, and 1 per 100,000 for legal immigrants. In 2015, homicide conviction rates for illegal and legal immigrants were 16 percent and 67 percent below those of natives, respectively.

Figure 2: Homicide conviction rates by Immigration status in Texas

Per 100,000 residents in each subpopulation, 2015



Sources: Author's analysis of Texas Department of Public Safety data, the American Community Survey, and the Center for Migration Studies.

Murderers should be punished severely no matter where they are from or what their immigration status is. There are murderers and criminals in any large population, including illegal immigrants. But we should not tolerate the peddling of misleading statistics without context. What matters is how dangerous these subpopulations are relative to each other so the government can allocate resources to prevent the greatest number of murders possible. Thus, enforcing immigration law more harshly is an ineffective way to punish a population that is less likely to murder or commit crimes than native-born Americans. Illegal immigrants, non-citizens, and legal immigrants are less likely to be incarcerated, convicted, or arrested for crimes than native-born Americans are.

Topics: International Economics, Development & Immigration

Tags: immigration, Crime, illegal immigrants, Trump, Angel Moms

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