Are Illegal Immigrants More Likely to Commit Crime?

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Abstract

Illegal immigration has been a hotly contested issue over the past decade. Illegal immigrants have been demonized by both political groups and the media as criminals. The purpose of this study is to determine whether or not illegal immigrants are more likely to commit crime than people who are citizens of the United States. The method of gathering data was data analysis of public and government websites.

Findings from this research indicate when looking at the criminality of illegal immigrants, federal illegal immigration policies cloud the topic. Prioritization categories of dangerousness used by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) puts illegal immigrants captured near the U.S.-Mexico border for the crime of illegally entering the United States in the most dangerous category (Priority 1). If these charges are excluded from the data, then the threat of danger by illegal immigrants would be much more accurate and perhaps less menacing to the general public.

Are Illegal Immigrants More Likely to Commit Crime?

The issue surrounding illegal immigration has been at the forefront of both politics and the media for more than a decade in the United States. Illegal immigration, especially through the southern border, has steadily increased since the 1990s. According to Hoefer, Rytina, and Baker (2011) from the Department of Homeland Security, "between 2000 and 2010, the unauthorized population grew by 27 percent" (p. 1). Immigration reform and securing the border are the two of the most often proposed solutions. Proponents of immigration reform want to allow illegal immigrants an easier path to becoming U.S. citizens and productive members of our society. Supporters of the latter paint the picture that illegal immigrants are criminals that need to be stopped. Calls for increased enforcement have led recently to some states taking the reins on immigration enforcement powers, where previously it fell only under federal jurisdiction. Increased and more aggressive enforcement at the U.S. – Mexico border has also led to a negative outlook on illegal immigrants.

Fussell (2011), examined the threat of deportation as a means to victimize illegal immigrants. The study focuses on illegal, Latino immigrant workers during the post hurricane Katrina rebuilding process in New Orleans, LA. First, to gather data on the study population, a survey of 261 Brazilian, Mexican, and Nicaraguan migrant workers was conducted from 2007 to 2008 in New Orleans. Second, the author used, "focus group interviews of 25 migrants to explore how Latino migrants explain their victimization and their strategies for minimizing it" (p. 599).

According to Fussell (2011), "the survey results showed that about 90 percent of the post-Katrina Latino migrants are unauthorized" (p. 601). The migrant population was predominantly male and worked in construction. Their families remained behind in the countries they came

from. The study found that migrant workers were indeed victimized by their employers. "Two

out of every five reported that they had experienced nonpayment or underpayment of wages,

while one out of five reported another type of worksite abuse such as failure to pay overtime,

denial of breaks, and verbal abuse" (Fussell, 2011, p. 604). Migrant workers also became targets

for robbery by criminals due to the fact that they are paid in cash and don't have access to

normal financial services such as banks. Because of the threat of deportation, migrant workers

are not likely to report the crimes committed against them to the police. The author concludes

that, "the use of deportation as a means of managing illegal migration, especially while the

demand for migrant labor remains strong, has enabled a pernicious interpersonal dynamic that

facilitates Latino migrant victimization" (p. 609). Not only are illegal immigrants victimized by

employers and criminals, but they are stereotyped and subsequently targeted by the federal

government as well.

Diaz (2011) argues that, "racialized stereotypes of immigrants as "criminal threats" have

strengthened anti-immigrant sentiment and have provided rhetorical support for policies that

criminalize immigrants" (p. 35). To validate whether or not immigrants are "criminal threats" the

author looks at both past and contemporary immigration patterns coupled with crime research.

The findings from this research provide an interesting result. According to Diaz (2011), "the

findings were very similar to earlier research: immigrants were less engaged in crime than were

their U.S.-born counterparts" (p. 40). Even though the data shows the contrary, U.S. citizens still

believe that immigrants pose a "criminal threat" because of stereotyping, increased and more

militarized policing, and because of federal and state policies.

The war on drugs, the war on terror, and the war against illegal immigration have cast a

negative light on immigrants in the eyes of U.S.-born citizens. The federal government has vastly

increased the use of placing illegal immigrants in detainment camps until they are deported.

According to Diaz (2011), "detainment has increased by 31% in the past ten years" (p. 45).

Detention has a negative impact on almost every facet of a detainees' life. According to the

authors, "ironically, many detainees have not been convicted of a crime, yet they are held in

facilities that restrict their movement, prevent their access to gainful employment, and most

detrimentally, limit interaction with their families and society" (p. 45).

According to Diaz (2011), "U.S.-led antidrug efforts targeting *Mexicanos,* and the

criminalization of unauthorized immigrants has led to the stereotype of the "drug smuggling"

Mexican *inmigrante*" (p. 42). Both federal and state government policies promote this kind of

attitude towards immigrants. From Diaz (2011), "the growth of anti-immigrant policy is

promoted regularly as "anticrime" legislation in an attempt to portray the government as being

"tough on national security"" (p. 44). Militarizing the border gives U.S.-born citizens proof that

their assumptions about immigrants and stereotypes being portrayed in the media must be

correct.

Kim, Carvalho, Davis, and Mullins (2011) study how the American media, both print and

televised, shape the public's view on illegal immigration. The study looked at news articles and

television transcripts from 1997 to 2006 and came from six regional and national newspapers[1].

The authors used systematic sampling to narrow the data down to 300 articles and 150

transcripts. One finding was that the number of news articles related to illegal immigration

increased from almost 200 articles in 1997 to over 1,000 articles in 2006. According to Kim et al.

(2011), "network news coverage (ABC, CBS, NBC) also indicates a sudden increase from 28

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[1] The Houston Chronicle, the Los Angeles Times, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the New York Times, and USA Today.

news items aired in 1997 to over 240 in 2006" (p. 304). The study analyzed their sample stories to look for whether they talked about causes and/or solutions towards illegal immigration. The author's found that, "there seems to be a considerable unbalance in the media's treatment of the causes and solutions, with the solutions being discussed far more often than the causes (671 vs. 116)" (p. 304). The most talked about solutions were immigration reform and tougher border control, followed next by stricter law enforcement. According to the authors', "helping the Latin American economy was hardly mentioned, appearing only in 10 articles and transcripts" (p. 308). In the study, immigration reform referred to making it easier for people to come into the country legally, whereas tougher border control referred to keeping migrants out. According to the authors', "these two solutions can be seen as opposite approaches to reducing illegal immigration" (p. 311). Yet, even though these solutions are polar opposites, they are the most talked about solutions in the media.

The consequences of illegal immigration, portrayed by national TV were crime, social costs, national security, safety of illegal immigrants, and taking jobs away from citizens (Kim et al., 2011, p. 303). The study found that newspapers from border regions were more likely to mention crime and social costs as consequences stemming from illegal immigration, then non-border regions. The media portraying illegal immigrants as dangerous criminals is concerning. According to Wieskamp (2007), "the media's heavy focus on crimes raises concern that the media can promote a stereotypical perception that there is a strong link between crime and immigration, reproducing racism and immigrant stigma" (cited in Kim et al., 2011, pp. 310-311). Not only are illegal immigrants negatively portrayed by the media, but increased border enforcement has led to the victimization of migrants by human traffickers.

Guerette and Clarke (2005), look at the repercussions of increased border security and enforcement along the U.S. – Mexico border. The study focuses on several immigration acts that were passed by the U.S. Congress during a ten year period: the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) (1986), the Immigration Reform Act (1990), and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (1996). According to the authors:

> These acts expanded the powers of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) by allowing for the detention and deportation of any immigrant (legal or not) who has been charged with or convicted of a drug offense, or who otherwise possessed a criminal record (p. 161).

These acts resulted in increased border security and more aggressive border patrol/enforcement. According to the authors, "the border strategy did succeed in making it more difficult to enter into the United States along the Mexican border illegally" (p. 164). However, this new strategy wasn't without flaws. According to Guerette and Clarke (2005), "there have been two unanticipated consequences of the border strategy – an increase in human smuggling and in migrant deaths" (p. 164). Due to the increased border security, a greater number of migrants have turned towards human smugglers, commonly referred to as "coyotes", to make entry into the U.S. Not only are migrants susceptible to being taken advantage of by the human smugglers, but they are also exposed to increased danger. According to the authors, "analysis of migrant deaths has indicated that deaths have risen in the wake of border enforcement campaigns" (p. 166). This is likely due to environmental conditions as increased border security has pushed human smugglers to more remote and inhospitable terrain. Another factor is the mistreatment of the migrants by the smugglers themselves, which includes insufficient supplies, such as food and water, to safely make the crossing. The authors conclude that the strategy on

the border needs to, "shift from illegal immigration to human smuggling" (p. 172). Calls for tougher enforcement of illegal immigration has led some states to enact policies that give them immigration enforcement powers.

Coonan (2013) takes an in depth look at, "the 287(g) program that delegates traditional federal immigration enforcement powers to state and local law enforcement actors" (p. 283). The 287(g) program was initiated under the Clinton administration and bolstered under both the G.W. Bush and Obama administrations. Both civil liberty groups and groups who support immigrants have opposed the program. In addition, according to Coonan (2013), "the U.S. law enforcement community has itself evinced a mixed reaction to it [287(g)]" (p. 285). Coonan (2013) focuses on the impact of the 287(g) program in Prince William County, VA that "requires officers to investigate the immigration status of persons who are arrested for a violation of a state law or county ordinance when such encounters result in a custodial arrest" (p. 290).

One major criticism of the program is the cost to the taxpayers without significant result. According to Bolick (2008), "[in Maricopa County, AZ] 287(g) efforts led to law enforcement costs four times the rate of the county's population, while violent crimes had simultaneously increased nearly 70%" (cited in Coonan, 2013, p. 285). Another criticism is that the program is racially motivated instead of focusing on crime prevention. In regards to Prince William County, Coonan (2013) states, "researchers concluded that illegal immigrants in the county accounted for a small percentage of offenders for most crimes, particularly serious ones" (p. 290). Another criticism of the 287(g) program is that although its goal is to remove illegal immigrants who are violent criminals, nearly half of the illegal immigrants removed under the programs are either migrant workers or guilty of traffic violations (p. 287). Coonan (2013) concludes, "if the question is whether 287(g) has succeeded in removing dangerous criminal aliens from U.S.

communities, then the program seems to be far from a success" (p. 293). Deportation as a means of reducing violent crime appears to have little effect. If deportation doesn't work, then the relationship between immigration status and recidivism needs to be examined.

According to Hickman and Suttorp (2008), "the goal of the analysis is to assess whether differences exist in rearrests between deportable and nondeportable aliens released from the Los Angeles (LA) county jail" (p. 62). This study looked at 1,297 foreign-born inmates released from LA county jail one year prior. According to the authors, "deportable aliens may have a greater tendency toward reoffending but a larger deterrent effect produced by the jail stay (because of an increased risk of deportation with a subsequent arrest) canceled out this difference" (p. 77). According to Hickman and Suttorp (2008):

First, we compared deportable and nondeportable aliens on the likelihood of rearrest (constructed as a dichotomous variable). Second, we compared the number of days until rearrest during the 1-year follow-up period. Finally, we compared the two groups on their frequency of rearrest during the follow-up period (p. 68).

According to the authors, "in examining recidivism using three different measures of rearrest, we found no differences attributable to deportability status" (p. 77). Instead of deportability status, factors that contributed to rearrests were age, the number of prior arrests, and the type of crime committed.

Stowell, Barton, Messner, and Raffalovich (2013) conducted a longitudinal study of whether or not deportation had an effect on violent crime. The study had some interesting findings. According to Stowell et al. (2013), "increased levels of deportation initially accompanied declining violent crime rates, but these crime rates continued their decline in later years when deportation activity dropped sharply" (p. 932). The authors' also found that, "there is

no significant relationship between the indicator of deportation activity and any of the measure

of violent crime in the dynamic regression models for the sample of MSAs [Metropolitan

Statistical Areas] as a whole" (p. 932). The study also found that comparing the violent crime

link with deportation in border MSAs to that of non-border MSAs was inconclusive. Violent

crime on the border may be linked to cartel drug activity instead of normal migrants looking for

a land of opportunity.

Coronado and Orrenius (2007) study, "the confounding effects of changes in

undocumented immigration and border enforcement on border crime" (p. 40). The study looked

at both the relationship between illegal immigrants and crime, and the relationship between

border enforcement and crime. According to the authors, "the sample consists of crime, police,

demographic and economic data for twenty U.S. counties bordering Mexico" (p. 47). The data

was collected from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), U.S. Border Patrol, and

state agencies that track crime data from the twenty border counties for the FBI's uniform crime

report.

According to Coronado and Orrenius (2007), "not surprisingly, we find evidence of a

positive and significant correlation between the volume of undocumented migration and the

incidence of violent crime" (p. 58). This correlation is most likely aided by the Mexican drug

cartels' cross-border criminal activities. The study also found that the increase in border

enforcement has spread the illegal immigrants and violent crime across the border region,

whereas it used to be concentrated around El Paso and San Diego. The study found that there is a

deterrence link between increased border enforcement and property crimes. Conversely, other

studies have found that immigrants have a positive influence on reducing crime rates.

Martinez, Stowell, and Lee (2010) look at the effect of immigration on crime in San Diego, CA by analyzing "administrative neighborhood-level panel data for the three most recent decennial census years" (p. 808). The study looked at the number of homicides reported to the San Diego Police Department in the selected neighborhoods to gage the crime component (p. 809). The authors had three hypotheses: 1) "ecological structures such as immigration, economic disadvantage, and residential stability will vary over time; 2) immigration is associated with instability; and 3) controlling for other factors, immigration decreases homicide" (pp. 802-804). According to the authors, "the evidence indicates that between 1980 and 2000, many San Diego neighborhoods did shift structurally, thus supporting our first hypothesis" (pp. 811-812). Support for their second hypothesis was also found, "the observed pattern is consistent with the notion that immigrants, on the whole, tend to settle in less residentially stable neighborhoods" (p. 815). Finally the authors found support for their third hypothesis. "We interpret the significant negative effect of immigration as illustrating that increases in the size of the neighborhood foreign-born population over time lead to decreases in levels of lethal violence" (p. 817). Martienz et al. (2010) concludes, "the transformation of San Diego into an increasingly immigrant city with a mobile ("unstable") population has contributed paradoxically to lower levels of lethal violence" (p. 821). Another aspect that leads to delinquency and crime is drug use.

Katz, Fox and White (2011), used data collected as part of the Arizona Arrestee Reporting Information Network (AARIN) (p. 542) to test Merton's strain theory and social disorganization theory in their research. Strain theory is applicable because illegal immigrants can experience strain from a variety of sources, such as poverty, the inability to find work, and discrimination. This strain can cause illegal immigrants to turn towards crime. Social

disorganization theory is applicable because an influx of illegal immigrants could weaken social institutions and controls in a community.

The study looked at 3,050 recently booked arrestees in Maricopa County, Arizona, from April 2007 to September 2008. It compared an individual's immigration status with the use of alcohol, marijuana, powder cocaine, opiates, methamphetamine, or any illicit drug. According to Katz et al. (2011), "compared to illegal immigrants and legal immigrants, US citizens were significantly more likely to self-report and test positive for marijuana, crack cocaine, opiates, methamphetamine, and any illicit drug. Conversely, illegal immigrants were significantly more likely to self-report and test positive for powder cocaine when compare to US citizens and legal immigrants" (pp. 554-555).

Based on previous research, this study will examine whether or not the immigration status of an individual has a significant impact on the crime rate in the United States.

Methods

Purpose

This is a descriptive and explanatory study. Descriptive research will identify the scope of the problem; illegal immigrants who commit crimes in the United States versus U.S. citizens and legal aliens crimes. Explanatory research will describe whether immigration status has an impact on the violent crime rate in the U.S.

Participants & Sampling Procedures

The populations to be studied are illegal aliens, legal aliens, and U.S. citizens that have committed crimes in the U.S. over the past ten years.

Research Design

Quantitative research will be conducted to collect data on illegal aliens, legal aliens, and U.S. citizens that have committed crimes in the U.S. over the past ten years.

Data Collections

Statistical data was collected from government websites.

Ethical Consideration

See the attached IRB application for a review of the ethical considerations.

Bias

Limited to the information provided by the data sources.

Assumptions

Statistical data will be accurate.

Limitations

There is a limited amount of time to conduct this research.

Results

Two agencies within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security are tasked to deal with illegal immigration. They are U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). According to ICE (2015):

ICE focuses on two core missions: 1) the identification and apprehension of criminal aliens and other priority aliens located in the United States; and 2) the detention and removal of those individuals apprehended in the interior of the United States as well as those apprehended by CBP officers and agents patrolling our nation's borders. (Overview, para 1).

CBP officers work the border and surrounding areas, while ICE works the interior of the U.S. and handles the deportation of illegal aliens found by both CBP and ICE. In the fiscal year (FY) 2015 ICE removed 235,413 illegal immigrants (ICE, 2015). Seventy percent of the removals came from illegal immigrants apprehended in or around the border, whereas thirty percent came from illegal immigrants apprehended in the interior of the U.S. (ICE, 2015).

To foster cooperation between federal and state agencies, ICE initiated the Priority Enforcement Program (PEP). According to ICE (2015), "with the implementation of PEP, ICE has engaged in expansive efforts to encourage state and local law enforcement partners to collaborate with ICE to ensure the transfer and removal of serious public safety threats" (Overview, para 4). Prior to the initiation of the PEP program, there was minimal cooperation between ICE and state and local law enforcement, which led to lower enforcement of federal immigration laws.

ICE uses Civil Immigration Enforcement Priorities (CIEP) to identify illegal aliens for removal. The priority levels are as follows:

❖ Priority 1 – consists of threats to national security, threats to public safety, felons, illegal immigrants caught at or near the border.

❖ Priority 2 – consists of misdemeanor offenders.

❖ Priority 3 – consists of illegal immigrants who don't fall into Priority 1 or 2 and have been issued a final order of removal.

Once again, in FY 2015 ICE removed 235,413 illegal immigrants. Of that number, 59% were convicted criminals and 41% were non-criminals (ICE, 2015). Of the illegal immigrants that were convicted criminals, 98% fell into one of the three priority categories (ICE, 2015). The remaining 2% have not been issued a final order of removal.

Illegal Immigrants	Convicted of a Crime	Non-Criminal Immigrants
235,413	139,368	96,045
Priority 1	81%	94%
Priority 2	11%	Not Reported
Priority 3	6%	Not Reported

Ninety-four percent of the non-criminals where caught at or within the vicinity of the border, automatically placing them in Priority 1 (most serious threat) (ICE 2015). This is important because it inflates the numbers of Priority 1 removals by ICE, which makes it appear that ICE is mainly deporting illegal immigrants that pose a serious threat to public safety.

According to Motivans (2015), "agencies of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) accounted for 58% of [all federal] suspects arrested in 2012" (p. 7).[2] In 2012, immigration offenses accounted for 50% of all federal arrests (85,458 arrests) (Motivans, 2015, p. 3). The table below shows the three federal offenses that had the largest increase in arrests from 2008 to 2012.

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[2] DHS Agencies include: U.S. Customs & Border Protection and U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement.
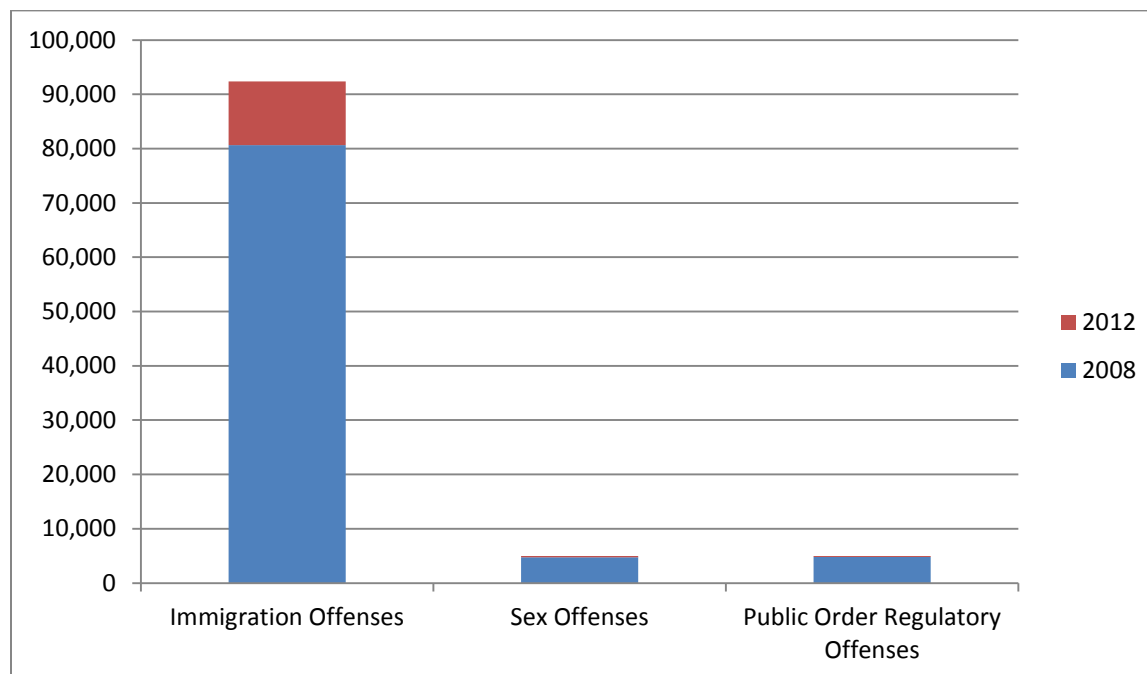
Arrests for immigration offenses had the largest increase from 2008 to 2012 at 4%, while the second highest increase for the same time period, was sex offenses with a 1.3% increase, followed by public order regulatory offenses with a 1.2% increase (Motivans, 2015, p. 12).

According to Motivans (2015), "The Homeland Security Act of 2002 reorganized key federal law enforcement agencies and coincided with increased enforcement of immigration laws, especially in federal districts along the U.S.-Mexico border" (p. 11). According to the author, "the increase in immigration enforcement along the U.S.-Mexico border was accompanied by a strategy to expedite case processing by charging first-time illegal entrants with a petty misdemeanor offense" (p. 14). This policy led to a sharp increase in processing immigration offenses, as indicated in the table below which compares the number of people arrested for the following federal charges: immigration offenses, sex offenses, drug offenses (Motivans, 2015, pp. 4-6). Sex offenses and drug offenses were compared to immigration offenses because sex offenses were the second fastest growing federal offense and drug offenses were the second most common federal offense in 2012.
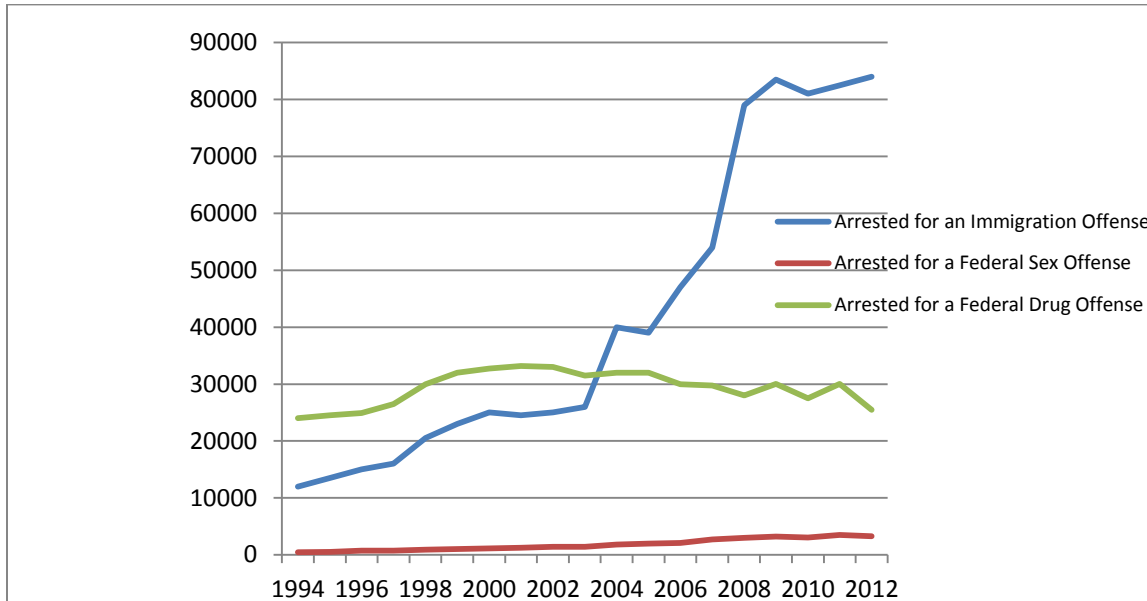
The following table shows the percent of cases adjudicated by U.S. Magistrates and the

% of cases with a guilty conviction (Motivans, 2015, p. 20). Immigration offenses, public order

offenses and property offenses were the top three offenses in both categories.
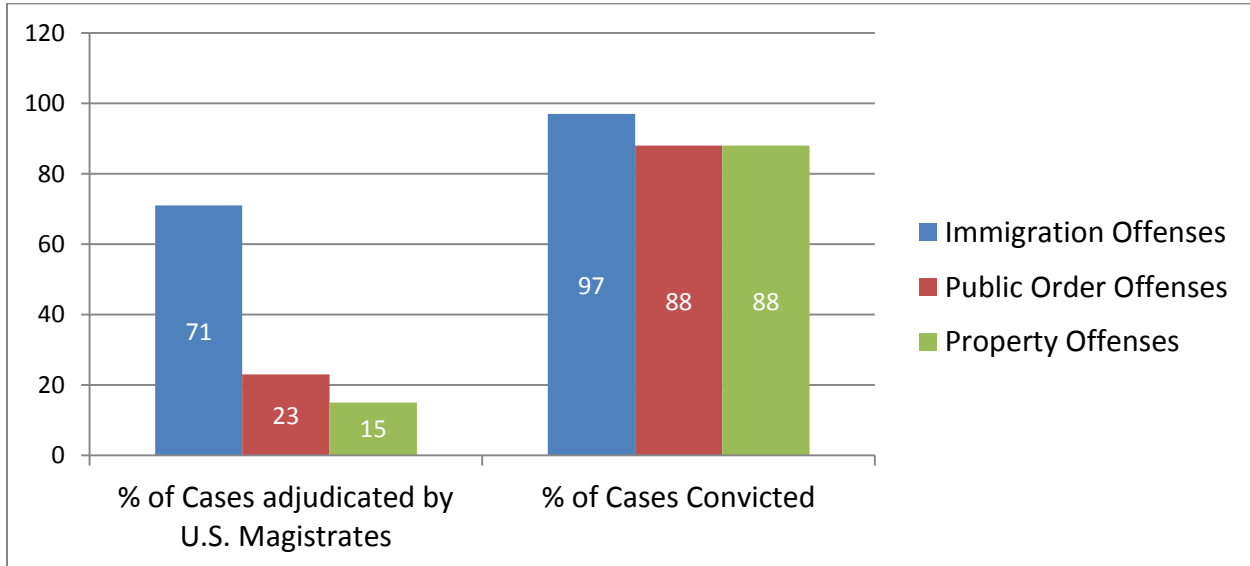
While the conviction rates are similar, there is an overwhelming difference in the number

of immigration cases that go to court. Immigration cases are three to four times more likely to be

adjudicated, then the next two closest offenses.

The highest dismissal rates were for misdemeanor offenses at 27%, followed by public order (regulatory) offenses at 11% (Motivans, 2015, p. 19). Immigration offenses were the least likely to be dismissed in 2012, with a dismissal rate of 3% (Motivans, 2015, p. 19).

The following table shows the median days from case filing to disposition for guilty pleas (Motivans, 2015, p. 21).

Median Days from Case Filing to Disposition

Category		Legend
All Offenses	~205 (red)	Misdemeanor
Property	~330 (blue)	Immigration
Drug	~328 (blue)	Felony
Sex Offenses	~275 (blue)	Property
Violent	~260 (blue)	Weapons
Weapons	~255 (blue)	Violent
Property	~250 (blue)	Sex Offenses
Felony	~210 (blue)	Drug
Immigration	~115 (red)	Property
Misdemeanor	~55 (red)	All Offenses
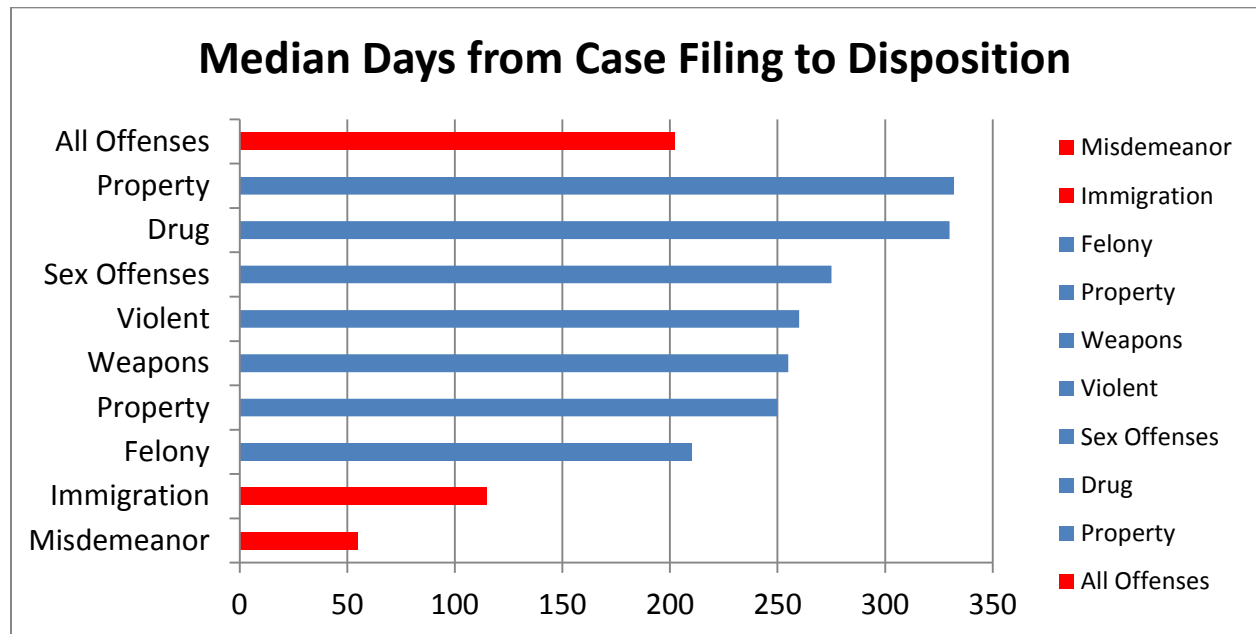
Immigration cases were processed approximately twice as fast as almost every other offense, including all violent crimes and sex crimes. Only defendants charged with misdemeanors where processed faster through the court system than immigration offenders.

Below is a table containing data about the number of federal inmates from 2005 to 2010 who are criminal aliens versus U.S. citizens (GAO, 2011). For the purpose of this next report, criminal aliens include both illegal immigrants and non-U.S. citizens who are in the country legally.

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Criminal Aliens	50,991	50,711	50,785	51,805	52,929	54,718
U.S. Citizens	138,313	144,077	150,520	153,803	156,492	160,348
Total # of Inmates	189,304	194,788	201,305	205,608	209,421	215,066

Note that the criminal alien population as well as the U.S. criminal population has steadily increased through this time period. The criminal alien population in the federal prison system was consistently around 25 percent of the total inmate population (GAO, 2011, p. 8). The next table contains data about the number of criminal aliens in state prisons, including jails in the District of Columbia, and local jails who fall into the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP) category (GAO, 2011).

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
# of SCAAP Inmates in State Prisons	82,117	84,028	86,704	92,479	91,823
# of SCAAP Inmates in Local Jails	151,686	162,309	181,740	201,739	204,136
Total # of SCAAP Inmates	233,803	246,337	268,444	294,218	295,959

To be part of SCAAP, states that have authority over correctional facilities that incarcerate or detain undocumented criminal aliens for a minimum of four consecutive days are eligible to apply to the program. The overall number of SCAAP inmates has steadily increased.

The following table shows the costs for SCAAP (in millions of dollars), from fiscal years 2005 to 2009, which includes the cost of incarceration and the cost of reimbursement to the states from the federal government for participating in the program (GAO, 2011, p. 35).

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Cost of Incarceration	1,140	1,178	1,190	1,234	1,309
Reimbursement Amount	376	376	385	393	323
Total	1,516	1,554	1,575	1,627	1,632

According to this GAO (2011) report, "the estimated annual cost to incarcerate criminal aliens in BOP facilities plus SCAAP reimbursements ranged from about $1.5 billion in fiscal year 2005 to $1.6 billion in fiscal year 2009" (p. 34).

The next table shows the number of SCAAP criminal aliens incarcerated in the state of Idaho from 2005 to 2009 (GAO, 2011, p. 62).

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
# of SCAAP Inmates in Idaho	1,315	1,250	1,262	1,134	1,271

Since Idaho participates in SCAAP, the state actually receives money from the federal government to help pay the costs of incarcerating criminal aliens. This appears to give states an incentive for incarcerating criminal aliens.

Discussion and Implications

Illegal immigration will continue to be a controversial topic in the U.S. for the foreseeable future. The media and the government portray illegal immigrants as dangerous criminals who are a threat to public safety. This is confirmed by both the literature review and the findings in this study. The government's use of CIEP has aided in labeling all illegal immigrants caught at the border as Priority 1, the most serious threat to public safety. Not only does this help label illegal immigrants as dangerous threats, but it also inflates the number of Priority 1 removals by ICE. This makes it appear that ICE is mainly deporting illegal immigrants who are serious public safety threats. When in reality, the threat posed by illegal immigrants

caught at or near the border is not cut and dry. The media has created a link between illegal immigrants and violent crime by showcasing high profile, violent crimes committed by illegal immigrants. While illegal immigrants are capable of committing violent crimes just like U.S. citizens, these crimes are the exception and not the rule. Research shows that the majority of illegal immigrants are arrested for immigration offenses and not violent crimes.

Due to the fact that the media and government portray illegal immigrants as criminals, U.S. citizens don't realize that illegal immigrants can be victims of criminals. Research shows that illegal immigrants are highly susceptible to victimization by their employers, criminals, and human smugglers. Illegal immigrants are afraid to report these crimes committed against them out of fear of deportation. The person victimizing illegal immigrants are likely to threaten to turn them into the authorities who will deport them. This aids the continuous cycle of victimization for illegal immigrants as they feel they have no legal avenue to pursue against their victimizers. Illegal immigrants are also portrayed as a destabilizing force in a neighborhood or a community. Research shows that contraire to popular belief; illegal immigrants can be a stabilizing force in a neighborhood. This can result in lower crime rates. This can be attributed in part by cultural values, such as a strong family bond and a sense of community, which is brought in by the immigrant population.

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 led to increased enforcement of immigration laws. This has resulted in a sharp increase in the number of illegal immigrants arrested for immigration offenses. This has led to illegal immigrants being pushed through the federal justice system faster than all other offenders, except misdemeanor offenders. Immigration offenders have the highest percent of cases adjudicated by U.S. Magistrates coupled with the highest percent of cases that end in a conviction. Alternatively, immigration offenses have the lowest dismissal rate

of all federal offenses. This indicates that the federal criminal justice system targets immigration violators more than other, more violent offenders.

Due to the implementation of SCAAP, states are given a monetary incentive for incarcerating criminal aliens. The total cost of this program annually is over a billion dollars. This includes the state's cost to incarcerate the prisoners plus the money reimbursed to the states by the federal government. While states benefit from the federal reimbursement, the losers are the U.S. taxpayers. Not only do they have to pay into state taxes to incarcerate criminal alien inmates, but they have to pay into federal taxes to fund the reimbursement money that the federal government gives back to the states. This passes the burden of paying for the incarceration of criminal aliens onto U.S. taxpayers.

While a link can be made between violence and illegal immigrants on the southern border with Mexico, much of it can be attributed to the drug cartels and their criminal enterprises. The Department of Homeland Security needs to target the drug cartels and their traffickers. They are the true threat to public safety and the perpetrators of violence on the border, not the illegal immigrants migrating to the U.S. in hopes of a better life. After all, this is one of the core foundations that America was built upon.

While more research is starting to be conducted on this very important issue, further research into all aspects of this topic is necessary. Some examples are research into the victimization of illegal immigrants and crimes committed against them; the sociological effect illegal immigrants have on neighborhoods and communities; better statistics and analysis on crimes illegal immigrants commit, other than being in the U.S. illegally. An in-depth and unbiased look at the policies and enforcement of illegal immigration laws needs to be conducted. Deportation and increased border enforcement have not been successful policies in the

government's fight against illegal immigration. Illegal immigrants continue to enter the country at high volumes.

Finally, when looking at the criminality of illegal immigrants, federal illegal immigration offenses cloud the topic. Immigration offenses account for 50% of all federal arrests. If these charges are excluded from the data, the threat of danger by illegal immigrants would be much more accurate and perhaps less menacing to the general public.

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