Immigrant Deportation in Texas: Inhumane Policies Build on Crime Falsehoods

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Executive Summary

Debates about immigration, crime, and deportation in Texas have been markedly hostile for some time and growing more so each day. Unfortunately, the information most Texans receive about this issue is short-sighted, repetitive, and misguided. The premise on which the current deportation binge is based, "Latino immigrants are crime-prone", is not only false, the opposite is true. In fact, volumes of research shows that places with a large proportion of Latino immigrant residents are often safer than white, black, and native-born Latino communities.

This policy report examines deportation policy in Texas by referencing the most authoritative published research on Latino immigration and crime. It also draws on crime data and recent deportation data to illustrate several key points. The results present a striking contrast to the narrative that supports mass deportation. It therefore argues that Texas will "shoot its own foot" if it continues to be in lockstep with federal immigration efforts. After several decades of record-low crime rates in the state, hard line immigration policies will disrupt the delicate social networks and patterns responsible for low crime, reversing that trend.

Criminological Framework

Most crime researchers know that local crime rates are socially and environmentally determined. Disrupting the balance of factors that work to suppress crime in Texas, and replacing them with forceful, predatory roundups of immigrants has many detrimental effects for the affected communities. This is also true for those who support these actions both in practice and in principle. The formula that helps to yield low crime levels among Latino immigrants is familiar to Texans who live alongside or near those at risk

of deportation. Nearly all Texans know that the typical Latino immigrant profile in the state includes:

1. Engaging in a Tireless Work-life;
2. Staunch Religiosity;
3. Strong Family Attachment & Involvement; and
4. Abiding the Law to Avoid Police Contact and possible deportation.

In criminological terms, these characteristics are embodied in *control theory*[1] and the claim that it captures the behavior of the overwhelming majority of Latino immigrants is all but irrefutable. In fact, very few Latino communities in Texas are high in crime, with immigrant enclaves as the lowest and those far from the Mexican border as the highest. When combined, native and foreign-born Latino communities comprise a non-negligible 12 million people or 40 percent of the state's population. In short, ***we can thank the Latino immigrant community for its part in keeping crime in Texas low***.

Despite this characterization of Latino immigrants as largely non-criminogenic, Texas leads the U.S. with the largest number of detained Latino immigrants, with Louisiana ranked second. Yet, Texas has nearly twice the number of detainees as Louisiana (TRAC 2025). For these reasons, it is time to seriously re-think Texas's approach to managing immigration before it is too late to reverse the effects of its ill-conceived deportation policies. This policy brief discusses the dynamics at play and recommends several measures to help mitigate those negative effects.

Recent Legislation

Texas' overarching policy on immigration enforcement is embodied in Senate Bill 4, a Governor Rick Perry-era bill passed by the state legislature in 2017, and SB 8, passed in 2025.

- ***SB 4 makes illegally crossing the border a state crime***. This is redundant with federal law and paved the way for local law enforcement to become deputized as U.S. immigration agents. This began the most damaging policy-era the state has seen in its modern history of immigration enforcement.
- ***SB 4 allows state and local police to arrest individuals suspected of illegally entering the US***. This law, reiterated in SB 8, is redundant with Section 287(g) of the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act. It explicitly enables local law enforcement (sheriffs in particular) to become deputized as U.S. immigration agents. This

[1] The idea that a life filled with pro-social, productive, values-laden activity leads to conformity and belief in the good of the social order.

practice is likely to have opposing effects in destabilizing the factors that helped to bring decades of low crime rates in Texas and the nation.

- ***SB 4 allows judges to order the deportation of migrants to ports of entry along Texas's border with Mexico***. This occurred on a large scale when SB 4 was passed, creating humanitarian crises at various border crossings that resembled makeshift concentration camps. It also exacerbated many of the social problems related to forced gang recruitment in Mexico, the extortion of immigrants, and the type of insidious human smuggling that lingers today on the Texas-Mexico border.

While the federal versions of these laws were once blocked by appeals court orders, it did not stop deportation actions by the Trump or Abbott administrations. The year 2025 saw unprecedented roundups and deportations, with little regard for criminal history. In September of that same year, the U.S. Supreme Court essentially authorized racial profiling in *Noem v. Vasquez Perdomo et al. 2025*. Bills such as SB-4 and SB-8 promote these unjust and misguided policies for the State of Texas.

The Marshall Project found that 88 percent of all persons deported in the first half of 2025 had either no prior contact with law enforcement, or solely traffic violations and other such minimal, non-criminal citations. Most of the "criminal" cases on record for the remaining 12 percent are petty, non-violent misdemeanors such as marijuana possession **(Thompson, Flagg, & Torres 2025).**

Immigration and Crime

The narrative that Latino immigrants are generators of crime has no basis in fact. Instead, decades of research on immigration and crime shows the exact opposite to be true. The recent Texas-based research clearly shows that Latino immigration brings less crime (Light, He, and Robey 2020). This echoes the findings of past studies on this topic for Texas (Rodriguez 1993; Martinez 2014; Valdez 1993).

In fact, this is known to be a general finding, consistent across place, context and time periods (Kubrin and Ousey 2025). Numerous criminological studies show that violence levels in U.S. Latino communities, and immigrant ones in particular, are among the lowest in the country (e.g. Bradshaw et al. 1998; Desmond and Kubrin 2009;; Lee, Martinez and Rosenfeld 2001; Martinez 2014; 2002; Xie and Baumer 2018). They are often less violent than white communities (e.g. Sampson, Morenoff, and Raudenbush 2005). Whereas a large segment of Texas' population is of Mexican origin, whether by ancestry or citizenship, this no doubt contributes to the low rates in Texas as a whole.

Not only are crime rates in all U.S. places currently at historically low levels, but this is particularly true of U.S-Mexico border cities in Texas, Arizona, and California. Table 1 shows that Texas' largest border cities are among those with the lowest levels of violent crime in the state at two recent points 2013 and 2019.[2]

Table 1: Violent crime rates per 100,000 population, 2013 and 2019.

City	2013 Rate	2019 Rate	Direction of change	City	2013 Rate	2019 Rate	Direction of change
Mobile	1,413	590	-	Kansas City	468	1618	+
Tulsa	970	529	-	**San Antonio**	**460**	**516**	+
Philadelphia	921	909	-	Tucson	433	447	+
Oklahoma City	821	461	-	**LAREDO**	**431**	**322**	**-**
Odessa	**806**	**882**	+	Sacramento	415	354	-
New Orleans	782	551	-	Chicago	414	NA	
Detroit	780	517	-	**Waco**	**403**	**428**	+
Albuquerque	742	1,043	+	**Abilene**	**399**	**317**	-
Las Vegas	678	526	-	Atlanta	389	241	-
Amarillo	**661**	**595**	-	Los Angeles	375	477	+
Lubbock	**658**	**838**	+	**Ft. Worth**	**362**	**451**	+
Miami	655	422	-	San Diego	348	341	**-**
Baltimore	633	699	+	**EL PASO**	**347**	**333**	**-**
Nashville	596	1,095	+	**Dallas**	**333**	**863**	+
San Fran/Oakl	570	471	-	Riverside	333	426	+
Houston	**559**	**1,097**	+	Washington DC	331	1,005	+
Corpus Christi	**523**	**737**	+	Denver	328	878	+
Fresno	510	433	-	**Midland**	**286**	**142**	-
Boston	503	559	+	**BROWNSVILLE**	**240**	**375**	**+**
Arlington	**485**	**515**	+	**McALLEN**	**283**	**269**	**-**

FBI Uniform Crime Report, https://www.ucrdatatool.gov/Search/Crime/Local/RunCrimeOneYearofData.cfm

The Consequences of Modern Deportation Policy

The majority of immigrants rounded up in 2025 had no criminal backgrounds (Rose 2025; Thompson, Flagg, and Torres 2025), a pattern seen long before 2025 (East 2020; Theodore 2013). The grave implications of this unjust and illegal action aside, it uproots valuable members of the community, wreaking havoc on families and economic lives beyond those of the deported. It is slowly creating a humanitarian and politically polarized crisis of a type rarely witnessed in Texas.

Another consequence familiar to most Texans is that some 10 percent of the Texas workforce is comprised of undocumented immigrants (Lynch and Ettlinger 2024), with a

[2] 2019 is the latest year violent crime rates for cities are publicly available from the FBI. A random set of large American cities is also included for comparison. All 40 cities are rank ordered by their 2013 rates.

large majority of these two million people born in Latin American countries (Juel 2023). Texas would therefore experience a serious labor shortage following the deportation of a critical mass of the undocumented Latino population (e.g. East 2020). Industries such as farming, construction, hospitality, and food services in Texas are rightly concerned about this.

Continued mass deportation practices would affect localities in several other ways too, all stemming from the fact that Latinos are such an important part of the social and economic fabric of virtually all Texas communities. Strained family stability and security, avoidance of essential services, trust erosion, physical and mental health problems, and education attainment exemplify detrimental effects on well-being.

Latino immigrants bring many amenities and social network ties that reach across race and class divisions. The desire to rid the state of this segment of the population is almost incomprehensible and clearly driven by a debilitating bias. The social disruptions it will create will ruin the delicate balance of factors producing low crime rates in Texas for the past three decades.

Policy Recommendations

- Texas counties must decline participation in ICE's 287-g program: https://www.ice.gov/identify-and-arrest/287g.

1. **California, New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, Illinois, New York and seven other states havedeclined participation with no federal repercussions (Walsh 2025).** Following a federal appeals court ruling in Rhode Island in September 2025, federal funds cannot be withheld from localities for their "sanctuary" policies. Therefore, like minded local law enforcement and corrections agencies (i.e. police and sheriff's departments, county jails) may decline to enter into any binding agreements or otherwise cooperate with federal immigration enforcement.

- SB-8 must be countered and repealed:

1. **Decades of research on immigration and crime shows *that Latino immigration decreases crime*** (Bradshaw et al. 1998; Desmond and Kubrin 2009; Kubrin and Ousey 2025; Light, et al. 2020; Martinez 2002; 2014; Rodriguez 1993; Sampson, et al. 2005; Valdez 1993; Xie and Baumer 2018).

2. **Participation in the 287-g program will damage local Law Enforcement's relationship with its Latino community.** It will erode trust and create

unintended consequences of all types, socially, economically, and public safety-wise. The repercussions of this aggressive and overreaching action are likely to go beyond simple mistrust of police by the Texas Latinos, as seen in recent research on the matter (Salinas-Thompson 2024).

3. **Current deportation practices are clumsy, inaccurate, and driven by shallow nativism.** Deportation actions are not driven by research or sound prior policy, but by anti-immigrant rhetoric disguised as public safety policy. This xenophobic campaign plays on the unfounded fears of Texans and all Americans. For example, it is slowly coming to light that the threat posed by the Venezuelan gang, *Tren de Aragua* is a fabrication.

4. **Texas is now positioned to create the circular flow of gang networks in and out of the U.S.** Similar experiments in California gave birth to, if not strengthened central American gangs like MS-13 and 18th Street (Stoll 2017; Ward 2013). This will continue to create serious social problems on the Texas-Mexico border involving the underground economy.

5. **Local law enforcement lacks the capacity (and in many cases, the will) to engage in federal deportation efforts per 287-g.** Local police departments, sheriff's departments, and jails simply lack the space and personnel to add this function to its list of duties. Some Texas Sheriffs have resisted the deportation frenzy that is currently sweeping Texas and the nation (e.g. Corchado 2024).

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