

Republican Perspective
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MS-13 RESURGENCE

“You can't reason with gang violence: you can't talk to it, sit it at the table, and negotiate with it.” Fr. Greg Boyle, Founder, Homeboy Industries

The Trump administration has declared war on MS-13 the brutal street gang. There was some success by the Bush administration in reducing the gang's violent attacks but MS-13 has been able to rebuild itself in the U.S. since 2012.

Mara Salvatrucha, MS-13, has its origins in the Los Angeles immigrant neighborhoods of the 1980's. “Mara” is Central American term for gang; “salva” refers to El Salvador; “trucha” is slang for clever; “13” represents the letter M indicating allegiance to the Mexican mafia. According to the FBI, MS-13's motto is “kill-rape-control.”

The Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) researched over 500 cases of MS-13 gang members arrested nationwide since 2012. The research does not paint a pretty picture. A large share of the immigrant gangsters in MS-13 as well as gangs Surenos-13, and 18th Street are illegal aliens. These gangs present a clear and present danger to public safety.

Prior to 2012, documented gang members often were arrested on minor immigration violations. These lower-level arrests often led to more significant criminal investigations of gang leaders and disrupting MS-13's growth.

Things changed in 2012 when the Obama administration directed Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) to de-prioritize enforcement against individuals in the country illegally. ICE was no longer permitted to arrest and remove foreign gang members unless they had been convicted of major crimes. Gang arrests by ICE plummeted from about 4,600 in 2012 to about 1,580 in 2014.

After the re-focus of ICE, a surge of Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC) came to our southern border.. The Border Patrol apprehended some 300,000 UAC's, mostly male between the ages of 13-17. Many of these settled in the U.S. and the Department of Homeland Security reported that two-thirds applied for green cards.

Compassionate Americans may believe that taking a lack approach to UAC's is the right policy. The CIS report throws cold water on that view. Their key findings:

- 506 MS-13 members were arrested or charged with crimes in 22 states. The most cases were reported in California (92), Maryland (85), New York (80), and Virginia (63).
- 207 MS-13 members were charged with murder. More than 100 are accused of conspiracy/racketeering, and dozens of others for drug trafficking, sex trafficking, attempted murder, sexual assaults, and extortion.
- 126 of the 506 suspects (and 38 of the 207 murder suspects) were illegal aliens.
- The median age of victims was 19, and victims ranged in age from 14 to 74. 60 of the victims were under the age of 18, including 52 of the murder victims.
- 120 of the 506 (24%) MS-13 suspects arrived as UACs, including 48 (23%) of the murder suspects.
- The location of these MS-13 crimes corresponds with locations of large numbers of UACs who were resettled by the federal government.

One wonders if sanctuary cities have aided MS-13's resurgence. Gangs are not stupid. They know that immigration violations will be overlooked and that their use of fake identities is unlikely to be detected.

To combat criminal gang activity CIS recommends:

- Update the definition of a criminal gang in federal law; create a bar to the admission of gang members and grounds for their removal. Currently, the government must wait for a gang member to commit a crime before disqualifying them from several government benefits.
- Require ICE and the Border Patrol to detain gang members while they are being processed for deportation.
- Update the law to provide for more serious consequences for sanctuary jurisdictions and the officials who impose sanctuary policies.

It's refreshing to see that Los Alamitos and other cities are pushing back against California's sanctuary state law.