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Dallas Morning News' Credulity = Incredibility

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In Houston alone, about 300,000 sex trafficking cases are prosecuted each year.

(Dallas Morning News [Editorial: Cracking down on sex traffickers](#)).

The number is such obvious nonsense that anyone who gave it any serious thought would decry it. ([Amy Alkon](#) and [Walter Olson](#) got there before me.) But the DMN blithely published it as fact.

In Harris County, according to [Texas Office of Court Administration statistics](#), 2,650 new felony cases were filed by indictment or information and 5,819 new misdemeanor cases were filed in Harris County in 2012.¹ So the total of *all* new cases filed in Harris County is nowhere near the 300,000 sex trafficking cases asserted by the Dallas Morning News.

According to the [Harris County District Clerk's website](#), there hasn't been a prosecution for sex trafficking in Houston since 2010. But when people say "sex trafficking," they may mean "compelling prostitution." There have been *two* compelling-prostitution cases filed in Harris County this year.

Not 300,000. Two.

There are federal prosecutions as well. Statistics are not as handy,² but I have a

feel for what's going on in the federal courthouse, and the DOJ loves putting out press releases. The number of people prosecuted for sex trafficking in the Southern District of Texas each year is in the double digits.

Here's where I think the wide-eyed nincompoops at the Dallas Morning News got their number:

Poe, a Republican from Humble, said sex trafficking rings prey on the large number of immigrant women and girls living in the Houston area and across Texas, accounting for a disproportionate share of the estimated 300,000 sex trafficking cases prosecuted each year.

([Texas on the Potomac.](#))

Nobody seems to know where that 300,000 number comes from. (Maggie McNeill suggests a plausible genesis [here](#) and [here](#).) It's a couple of orders of magnitude less obviously wrong than the same number attributed to Houston, but still glaringly obviously wrong—if the wrongness of “300,000 sex-trafficking cases in Houston” were equivalent to getting smacked upside the head with a 2X4, “300,000 sex-trafficking cases in the United States” would be getting poked in the arm with a fork.

The population of the United states is 314 million, give or take. The population of Texas is 26 million, give or take. For Texas to have a “disproportionate share of the estimated 300,000 sex trafficking cases prosecuted each year,” Texas would have to have more than 24,840 sex trafficking prosecutions every year.

In 2010, there were 91,047 people prosecuted in federal court. All told. Nationwide. If that number is still about right (and I suspect that federal prosecutions have dropped, rather than increasing, since 2010, given Congress's laudable inability to keep the government running), even if federal prosecutors were prosecuting *nothing but* sex trafficking offenses³, for there to be 300,000 sex trafficking cases prosecuted nationwide each year state courts would have to prosecute 210,000 such cases. For Texas's share of these 210,000 prosecutions to be “disproportionate” Texas would have to prosecute 17,389 sex-trafficking

cases each year.

In Texas, statewide, there were 15,629 criminal cases of all types filed last year in district court;⁴ of these, 3,608 were not classified into categories that are recognizably not sex trafficking (murder, theft, etc.).

In Texas, statewide, there are 32,991 misdemeanor cases filed each year in county court; of these, 9,122 were not classified into categories that are recognizably not sex trafficking (DWI, drug offenses, etc.)

So even if *every crime* charged in Texas that was not classified as something recognizably not sex trafficking were a sex trafficking crime,⁵ there would only have been 12,730 sex-trafficking cases filed last year in Texas—nowhere near the 300,000 promoted by the DMN, and nowhere near a “disproportionate share” of the 300,000 cases that Poe says are prosecuted each year.

So either Texas doesn't have a disproportionate share of sex-trafficking cases, or there are not 300,000 sex-trafficking cases prosecuted each year.

Texas is less populous than California, but it has the world's longest stretch of border between a first-world country and a third-world country. Texas's economy is humming along while California's is faltering. It would surprise me if Texas didn't have more sex-trafficking cases than its population alone dictated.

So 300,000? Utter and complete nonsense.

 1

1. Those numbers seem low to me, given the crowds in the courthouse lobbies but I think the source can be trusted. ↩
2. The bureau of justice statistics is eight years behind. ↩
3. A ludicrous proposition—Alkon has BJS statistics:

Federally funded human trafficking task forces

opened 2,515 suspected incidents of human trafficking for investigation between January 2008 and June 2010.

Most suspected incidents of human trafficking were classified as sex trafficking (82%)...



4. All but 216 were felonies.

5. A ludicrous proposition.



5 responses to *dallas morning news' credulity = incredibility*



Charles Kuffner says:

23 november 2013 at 10:54 am

Actually, California's economy is doing pretty well:

<http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2013/0723/California-economy-is-on-the-comeback-trail.-Can-America-follow>

Not really sure what that has to do with your main point, but if we're going to be sticklers for detail...

By the way, Ted Poe also once claimed that "illegal immigrants" committed as many as 25 murders per day in the US:

<http://patterico.com/2007/06/12/deport-the-criminals-first-part-ten->

[of-an-ongoing-series-the-killing-of-officer-rodney-johnson/](#)

That's 9,125 murders per year. Given that there were 14,187 people murdered in the US last year (<http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2013/09/16/u-s-murder-rate-higher-than-nearly-all-other-developed-countries-fbi-data/>), that would be pretty darned remarkable if it were true. Add this to the ridiculous claims about sex trafficking, and one can see a clear pattern of rhetorical excess at play.

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Mark Bennett *says:*

23 november 2013 at 2:13 pm

My thinking was that during boom times people have more money to spend on non-essentials like sex slaves.

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Nancy Ann Knox *says:*

23 november 2013 at 11:11 am

Mainstream media is a hoot...lol

[reply](#)



Mark Bennett *says:*

23 november 2013 at 2:14 pm

And yet it's the Internet's fault that papers are failing?

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Alex Bunin *says:*

24 november 2013 at 12:54 pm

The total numbers are somewhere in between. During FY 2012 approximately 126,000 cases were added to Harris County court dockets, including 44,053 felonies, 72,102 misdemeanors, and 9,722 juvenile cases. See Texas Indigent Defense Commission "Harris County Data Sheet, 2012," <http://tidc.tamu.edu/public.net/>, accessed August 12, 2013. The Dallas Morning News numbers are still impossible, as you rightly point out.

[reply](#)
