



The

CONNECTION

between

Illegal Immigrants & Crime

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The Connection between Illegal Immigrants & Crime

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Background

Over the past several years, Arizona policymakers have debated a number of immigration-related crime control policies. These discussions have ranged from arguments over the wisdom of granting local law enforcement agencies the authority to arrest and prosecute illegal aliens, to enacting legislation that sanctions employers for hiring illegal aliens. The perception that illegal aliens are responsible for a disproportionate amount of crime and violence in the state is at the root of many of these policy discussions.

Many citizens, community groups, and policymakers believe that illegal aliens are disproportionately responsible for crime and disorder and for placing a strain on jails, prisons, and law enforcement.

Without question, illegal immigration has increased significantly, both in the United States in general and in Arizona specifically. As of January 2006, 11.6 million illegal aliens were living in the United States, more than one-third of whom had entered since 2000.¹ According to the Department of Homeland Security, approximately 40 percent of illegal aliens resided in California or Texas, and another 4 percent lived in Arizona.² An estimated 500,000 illegal aliens were residing in Arizona³, up from 95,000 in 1992.⁴

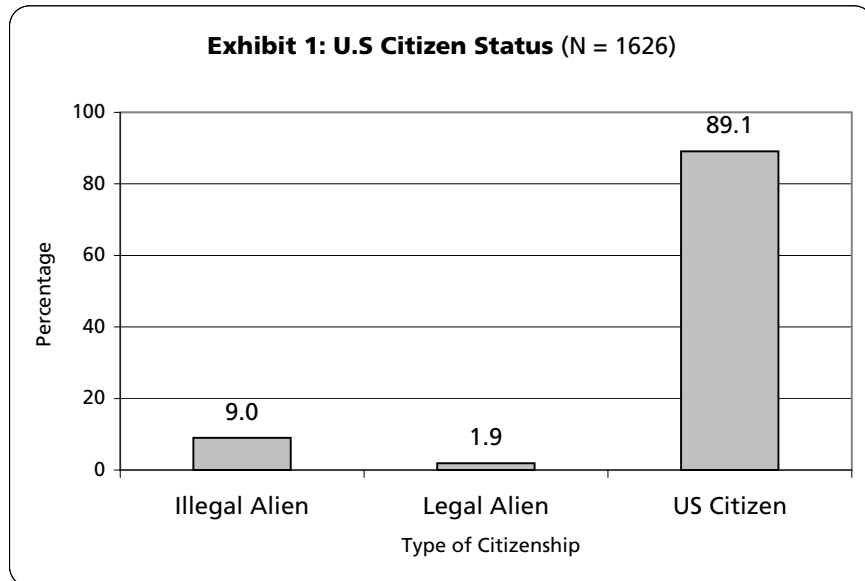
There is significant evidence that the number of illegal aliens in the United States is growing. Many citizens, community groups, and policymakers believe that illegal aliens are disproportionately responsible for crime and disorder and for placing a strain on jails, prisons, and law enforcement. One recent national poll indicated that about one-third of Americans believe that illegal aliens increase crime rates; another local poll indicated that illegal immigration was the number one concern among Phoenix, Arizona residents.⁵ Unfortunately, to date little research has systematically examined the relationship between crime and illegal aliens; as a result, Arizona policymakers have little information with which to make informed, data-driven policy and legislation decisions.

This report examines the connection between illegal aliens and crime in Maricopa County, Arizona, using data from the Arizona Arrestee Reporting Information Network (AARIN).

The report is intended to answer several questions about the illegal alien arrestee subpopulation:

- What proportion of arrestees are illegal aliens?
- What does the illegal alien arrestee population look like?
- What types of crime do illegal aliens engage in?
- What types of drugs do illegal aliens use?
- Are illegal aliens more likely than U.S. citizens to be victims of violent crime?

What proportion of arrestees are illegal aliens?



Analysis of data obtained from recently booked arrestees in Maricopa County, Arizona, indicated that 89.1 percent of arrestees were U.S. citizens, 1.9 percent were legal aliens, and 9 percent were illegal aliens.

Our findings indicated that most illegal aliens arrested in Maricopa County, Arizona, were from Mexico. Specifically, 97.2 percent were born in Mexico, 1.4 percent were born in Central or South America, 0.7 percent were born in Africa, and 0.7 percent were born in Asia.

Exhibit 2: Country of Origin (N = 143)

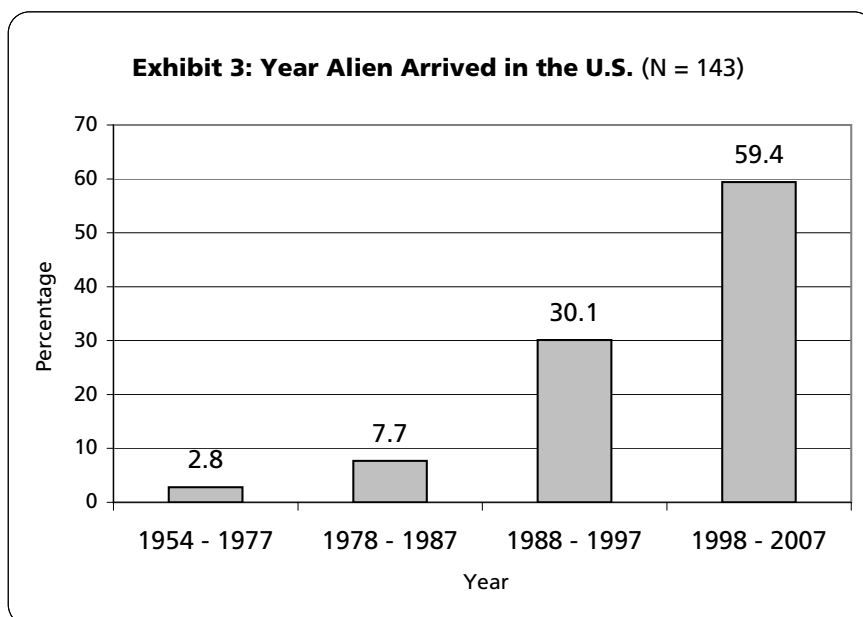
Country	%	N
Mexico	97.2	139
Central or South America	1.4	2
Africa	0.7	1
Asia	0.7	1
Total	100	143

...data obtained from recently booked arrestees in Maricopa County, Arizona, indicated...9 percent were illegal aliens.

...most illegal aliens arrested in Maricopa County, Arizona, were from Mexico.

Self-report data suggested that most illegal aliens arrested in Maricopa County had arrived in the United States within the past 10 years.

About 60 percent had arrived since 1998, 30.1 percent had arrived between 1988 and 1997, 7.7 percent had arrived between 1978 and 1987, and 2.8 percent had arrived between 1954 and 1977.



Research Definition of 'Illegal Alien'

In the current study, we measured respondents' citizenship status by their responses to two items. The first was adapted from a question included in the 2000 United States Census Survey Instrument that asked whether the respondents were or were not citizens of the United States. Next, we asked how they had entered the United States. Response options included "entered with an immigrant visa issued by the U.S. State Department," "admitted as a refugee, seeking asylum," "entered with a student, work, or long-term visa," "entered with a non-immigrant visa and overstayed," and "entered without documents."

Respondents who self-reported that they were not citizens of the United States and had entered with an immigrant visa issued by the U.S. State Department, were admitted as a refugee seeking asylum, or had entered with a student, work, or long-term visa were coded as legal aliens. Respondents who self-reported that they were not citizens of the United States and either had entered the U.S. with a non-immigrant visa and overstayed or had entered without documents were coded as illegal aliens for the purposes of this report.

What does the illegal alien arrestee population look like?

Exhibit 4 provides descriptive information for the arrestee sample and compares the arrestees' background characteristics by immigration status. The results show numerous differences between illegal aliens and U.S. citizens. Arrestees who were illegal aliens were significantly more likely to be male. In particular, males accounted for 95.8 percent of illegal aliens arrested compared with 72.9 percent of U.S. citizens arrested. Illegal aliens also were significantly younger than U.S. citizens (28.97 years old compared with 31.84 years old).

The data indicated significant differences between the two groups in ethnic composition. U.S. citizens were ethnically heterogeneous; 45.4 percent were Caucasian, 26.1 percent were Hispanic, 12.3 percent were African American, and 16.2 percent indicated being from an "other" ethnic group. On the other hand, illegal aliens were ethnically homogeneous, with 97.2 percent of arrestees self-reporting as Hispanic. Of special interest was the finding that 27 percent of all Hispanic arrestees self-reported being illegal aliens.

Significant differences in education were found between the two groups, with illegal aliens having significantly less formal education than U.S. citizens. For example, 52.8 percent of illegal alien arrestees had not attended high school, 9.9 percent had received some high school education, and 37.3 percent had graduated from high school or completed a GED. Comparatively, 26.5 percent of U.S. citizen arrestees had not attended high school, 9.5 percent had received some high school education, and 63.9 percent had graduated from high school or completed a GED.

Exhibit 4: Demographic Characteristics by Status (N = 1570)

	Illegal Alien		U.S. Citizen	
	%	N	%	N
Gender*				
Male	95.8	136	72.9	1041
Female	4.2	6	27.1	387
Race/Ethnicity*				
Caucasian	0.0	0	45.4	648
African American	0.7	1	12.3	176
Hispanic	97.2	138	26.1	372
Other	2.1	3	16.2	232
Education*				
Less than HS	52.8	75	26.5	379
Some High School	9.9	14	9.5	136
HS Graduate or GED	37.3	53	63.9	913
Income (Past 30 days)*				
Working Full Time	76.8	109	44.7	639
Working Part Time	11.3	16	16.1	230
Other Legal Sources	4.9	7	21.3	304
Illegal Sources	1.4	2	9.0	129
No Income	5.6	8	8.8	126
Age*	Mean = 28.97		Mean = 31.84	

* p < .05

Illegal alien arrestees were significantly more likely to be employed and significantly less likely to receive income from illegal sources than U.S. citizens.

Illegal alien arrestees were significantly more likely to be employed and significantly less likely to receive income from illegal sources than U.S. citizens. For example, 88.1 percent of illegal aliens reported working full- or part-time compared with 60.8 percent of U.S. citizens. Conversely, U.S. citizens were significantly more likely to report their primary form of income being derived from “other” legal sources such as family and friends (21.3 percent versus 4.9 percent) and from illegal sources (9 percent versus 1.4 percent) when compared with illegal aliens.

Study Methodology*

The present study used data collected as part of the Arizona Arrestee Reporting Information Network (AARIN). Maricopa County established AARIN in January 2007 to monitor drug use trends, treatment needs, and at-risk behavior among recently booked arrestees in Maricopa County, Arizona. For eight weeks each quarter, trained local staff conducted voluntary and anonymous interviews with adults and juveniles who had been arrested within the past 48 hours.

The primary instrument generated self-report data on a variety of socio-demographic and behavior variables. At the beginning of the survey, arrestees reported age, ethnicity, and educational background, and the interviewer recorded gender. Arrestees then answered a series of questions about their drug use history, treatment needs, mental health history, criminal history, prior experiences with victimization, and immigration status. At the end of the interview, charge data were collected from official processing records, and each arrestee was asked to provide a urine sample to be analyzed for four different drugs and alcohol.

Analysis for this report relied on our adult sample. The interviews were conducted in 2007. Researchers initially contacted 2,407 adult arrestees; about 90 percent agreed to be interviewed. Of those interviewed, 86 percent agreed to provide a urine sample.

*For a complete description of methodology, see: Nancy Rodriguez (2008). *Arizona Arrestee Reporting Information Network: Final Report*. Tempe: Center for Violence Prevention and Community Safety, Arizona State University.

What types of crime do illegal aliens engage in?

Although no significant difference emerged between illegal aliens and U.S. citizens with regard to the proportion arrested for a violent crime, significant differences did appear with respect to drug, property, and other crime types. Specifically, U.S. citizens were significantly less likely to be arrested for drug crimes (17.1 percent versus 27.4 percent) and property crimes (17.5 percent versus 29.5 percent) when compared with illegal aliens. Conversely, U.S. citizens were significantly more likely to be arrested for an "other" crime compared with illegal aliens (49.1 percent versus 26.7 percent). Additionally, U.S. citizens self-reported being arrested more often in the past 12 months; on average, U.S. citizens reported being arrested 1.02 times in the past 12 months versus 0.37 times for illegal aliens.

Data collected from the AARIN project allowed us to examine the relationship between citizenship and gang membership. Exhibit 6

shows that we found no significant difference between U.S. citizens and illegal aliens with respect to gang membership. Roughly 5 percent of U.S. citizens reported being a gang member compared with 3.5 percent of illegal aliens. Related, 5.3 percent of U.S. citizens reported being a gang associate whereas 4.2 percent of illegal aliens reported being a gang associate. About 3 percent of illegal aliens and 5.1 percent of U.S. citizens self-reported being former gang members.

Exhibit 5: Current Charge and Arrest History by Status
(N = 1569)

Charge Type	Illegal Alien		U.S. Citizen	
	%	N	%	N
Violent	16.4	24	16.2	231
Drug*	27.4	40	17.1	244
Property*	29.5	43	17.5	249
Other*	26.7	39	49.1	699
No. of Past Year Arrests*	Mean = .3699		Mean = 1.0183	

* p < .05

Exhibit 6: Gang Membership and Status (N = 1569)

Gang Status	Illegal Alien		U.S. Citizen	
	%	N	%	N
Non-Gang Member	89.4	127	84.4	1204
Gang Associate	4.2	6	5.3	76
Gang Member	3.5	5	5.2	74
Former Gang Member	2.8	4	5.1	73

* p < .05

...no significant difference emerged between illegal aliens and U.S. citizens with regard to the proportion arrested for a violent crime...

What types of drugs do illegal aliens use?

In Exhibit 7, we show the differences in drug use by immigration status. Data analysis revealed that immigration status was significantly related

to all of the marijuana drug-use measures. U.S. citizen arrestees were about twice as likely to self-report using marijuana in the past 12 months, the past 30 days, and the past 3 days; citizen arrestees were more than twice as likely as illegal alien arrestees to test positive for marijuana.

Although no significant differences were found between illegal aliens and U.S. citizens with respect to past-12-month powder cocaine use and testing positive for cocaine, illegal aliens were significantly more likely to self-report past-30-day and past-3-day powder cocaine use. Specifically, illegal aliens were twice as likely to self-report using powder cocaine in the past 30 days (16.3 percent versus 8.6 percent) and 3 days (8.8 percent versus 4.4 percent) when compared with U.S. citizens.

On the other hand, U.S. citizens were substantially more likely to report using crack cocaine. For example, citizens were 2.4 times more likely to self-report using crack in the past 12 months, 2.5

times more likely to self-report using crack in the past 30 days, and 6.2 times more likely to self-report using crack in the past 3 days.

Likewise, U.S. citizens were significantly more likely to self-report and test positive for methamphetamine than illegal aliens. Specifically, when compared with illegal aliens, citizens were 2.5 times more likely to self-report using methamphetamine in the past 12 months, 2.4 times more likely to self-report using methamphetamine in the past 30 days, and 2 times more likely to self-report using methamphetamine in the past 3 days. Furthermore, citizens were 2.2 times as likely to test positive for methamphetamine compared with illegal aliens.

Exhibit 7: Drug Use by Status (N = 1568)

	Illegal Alien		U. S. Citizen	
	%	N	%	N
Marijuana				
Past 12 Months*	25.2	37	52.3	743
Past 30 Days*	23.8	35	44.9	638
Past 3 Days*	17.0	25	30.6	435
Urinalysis*	17.1	26	39.7	564
Powder Cocaine				
Past 12 Months	19.0	28	14.6	208
Past 30 Days*	16.3	24	8.6	122
Past 3 Days*	8.8	13	4.4	63
Urinalysis	25.2	37	19.6	278
Crack Cocaine				
Past 12 Months*	6.8	10	16.2	230
Past 30 Days*	4.8	7	12.2	173
Past 3 Days*	1.4	2	8.7	123
Methamphetamine				
Past 12 Months*	15.0	22	38.1	542
Past 30 Days*	13.6	20	32.2	458
Past 3 Days*	11.6	17	23.2	330
Urinalysis*	17.0	25	37.9	538

Are illegal aliens more likely to be victims of violent crime?

Exhibit 8 presents the results of group comparisons of the victimization measures by citizenship status. The exhibit shows a strong relationship between citizenship status and victimization, with U.S. citizens being significantly more likely than illegal aliens to have been the victim of a violent crime within the past 12 months and to have been the victim of a violent crime more frequently within the past 12 months.

Approximately 25 percent of U.S. citizens and 10 percent of illegal aliens self-reported being the victim of a gun crime in the past 12 months.

More than 23 percent of U.S. citizens reported being the victim of a non-gun weapons crime in the past 12 months, compared with 8.3 percent of illegal aliens.

Similarly, about 27 percent of U.S. citizens self-reported having been assaulted in the past 12 months, compared with about 15 percent of illegal aliens. The analysis indicated no difference between U.S. citizens and illegal aliens in terms of having been the victim of a robbery in the past 12 months. Likewise, U.S. citizens self-reported a greater number of violent victimizations than did illegal aliens. For example, U.S. citizens reported more than two times the number of gun crime victimizations, assaults, and robberies, and five times the number of non-gun weapons crime victimizations as illegal aliens.

Exhibit 8: Victimization by Status (N = 1575)

	Illegal Alien		U.S. Citizen	
	%	N	%	N
Victimized Past 12 Months				
Gun Crime*	10.4	15	24.5	350
Non-Gun Weapons Crime*	8.3	12	23.5	337
Assaulted*	14.6	21	26.6	381
Robbed	11.1	16	15.0	215
No. of Times Victimized (Past 12 Months)				
Gun Crime*	M = .3333		M = .9518	
Non-Gun Weapons Crime*	M = .1806		M = .9532	
Assaulted*	M = .4375		M = .9776	
Robbed*	M = .4375		M = .9776	

* $p < .05$

...U.S. citizens [were] significantly more likely than illegal aliens to have been the victim of a violent crime within the past 12 months...

Policy Implications

A number of conclusions and policy implications can be drawn from the study's findings. First, we estimated that approximately 9 percent of arrestees in Maricopa County were illegal aliens. Taken alone, this finding suggests that the magnitude of the problem is not as substantial as some suggest. However, we do believe that the number of illegal aliens arrested within the county is having an impact on county resources. In mid-2007, housing an arrestee cost the County an estimated \$62.29 per day.⁶ Given the thousands of individuals arrested and booked each year, significant fiscal resources are required to house this particular subpopulation.

If employer-sanctions legislation is effective, unemployment among illegal aliens could rise substantially. This might have the unintended consequence of increasing levels of crime and drug use among illegal aliens.

Second, we found that most arrested illegal aliens were from Mexico and had come to the United States within the past 10 years. These individuals had very low levels of education, but the vast majority were working full or part time. Given the high levels of "legal" employment among the illegal alien arrestee subpopulation and recent legislative changes, policymakers should closely observe this situation. If employer-sanctions legislation is effective, unemployment among illegal aliens could rise substantially. This might have the unintended consequence of increasing levels of crime and drug use among illegal aliens.

Third, our analysis indicated that illegal aliens were, for the most part, less involved in criminality and drug use than U.S. citizens. Specifically, when compared with U.S. citizens illegal aliens were no more likely to be arrested for a violent crime or to be involved in a gang. Additionally, illegal aliens were significantly less likely to use marijuana, crack, and methamphetamine, and reported significantly lower arrest and victimization rates. However it is important to note that illegal aliens were significantly more likely to use cocaine and to be arrested for drug and property crimes. These findings suggest that criminal justice practitioners might benefit by further examining the involvement of illegal aliens in economically motivated crimes.

...law enforcement, courts, and corrections agencies should begin to systematically collect data on illegal aliens so that policymakers in the future have more information to make data-driven decisions and to assist in the evaluation of legislation and policies aimed at illegal aliens.

Future research should examine the full impact of the illegal alien subpopulation within the criminal justice system. Unfortunately, few criminal justice agencies collect and report such data. As a first step, law enforcement, courts, and corrections agencies should begin to systematically collect data on illegal aliens so that policymakers in the future have more information to make data-driven decisions and to assist in the evaluation of legislation and policies aimed at illegal aliens.

Endnotes

1. Hoefer, M., N. Rytina, & C. Campbell (2007). *Estimates of Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the U.S.* Washington DC: Department of Homeland Security.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. McDonald, William (1997). Crime and illegal immigration. *National Institute of Justice Journal*, 232.
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About the Center for Violence Prevention and Community Safety

Arizona State University, in order to deepen its commitment to the communities of Arizona and to society as a whole, has set a new standard for research universities, as modeled by the New American University. Accordingly, ASU is measured not by whom we exclude, but by whom we include.

The University is pursuing research that considers the public good, and is assuming a greater responsibility to our communities for their economic, social, and cultural vitality. Social embeddedness – university-wide, interactive, and mutually supportive partnerships with Arizona communities – is at the core of our development as a New American University.

Toward the goal of social embeddedness, in response to the growing need of our communities to improve the public's safety and well-being, in July 2005 ASU established the Center for Violence Prevention and Community Safety. The Center's mission is to generate, share, and apply quality research and knowledge to create "best practice" standards.

Specifically, the center evaluates policies and programs; analyzes and evaluates patterns and causes of violence; develops strategies and programs; develops a clearinghouse of research reports and "best practice" models; educates, trains, and provides technical assistance; and facilitates the development and construction of databases.

For more information about the Center for Violence Prevention and Community Safety, please contact us using the information provided below.

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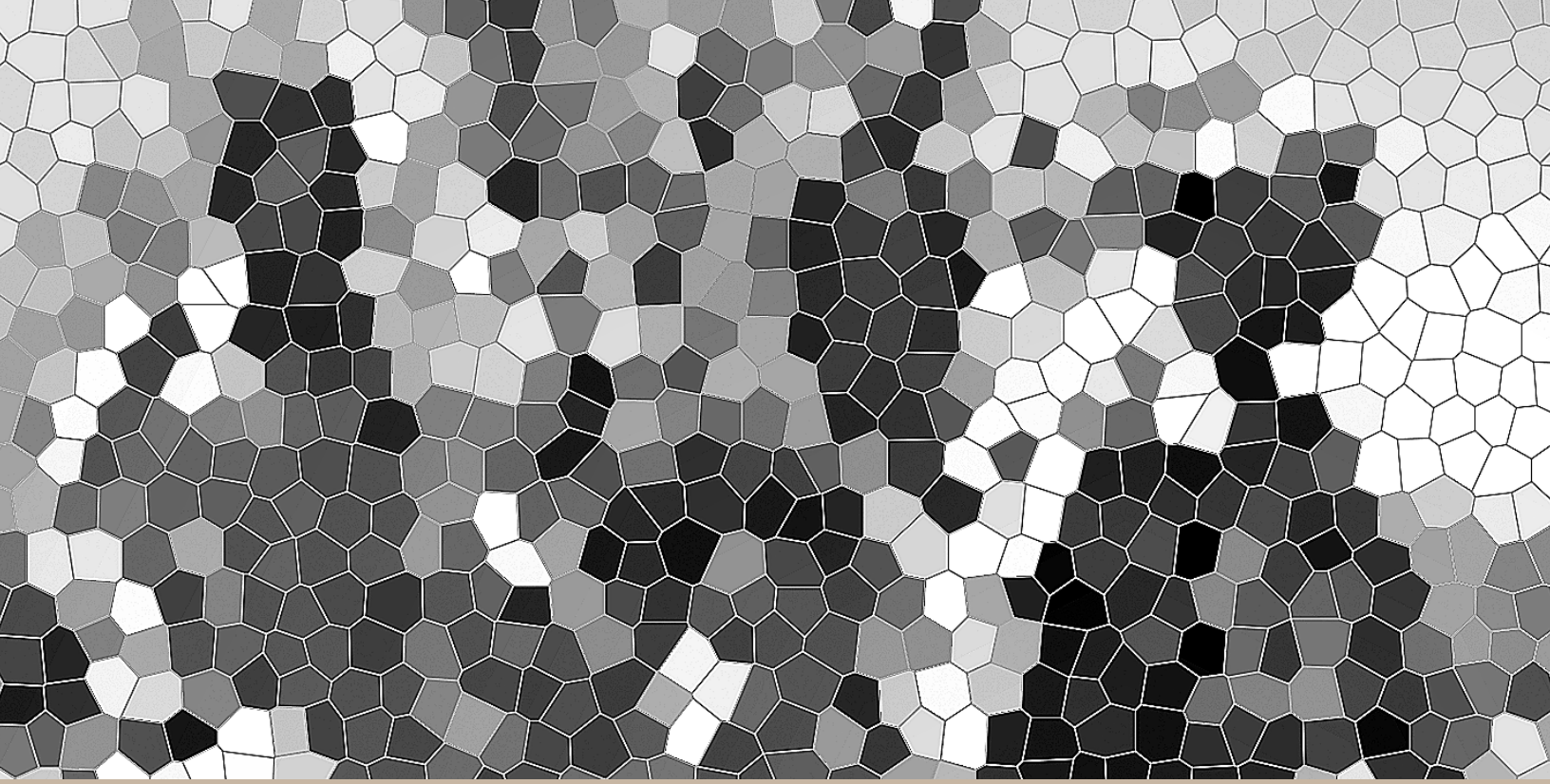
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