

US immigration agency arrests 3,100

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A six-day sweep by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency has resulted in the arrest of more than 3,100 immigrants. The nationwide “Cross Check” operation, the largest such sweep to date, involved more than 1,900 ICE officers and agents in all 50 states, as well as Washington DC, Puerto Rico, and several US territories.

Since the Obama administration initiated “Cross Check,” seven regional and three nationwide sweeps have resulted in more than 7,400 arrests. Those arrested have included both documented and undocumented immigrants, those with criminal records, and individuals who have illegally re-entered the US after being removed by authorities.

The government claims to be targeting immigrants wanted for serious criminal offenses. But immigrant advocates argue that the sweeps are being used as a general deportation tool to round up large numbers of immigrants who have come to the US in search of work, but who have been unable to navigate the bureaucratic and costly immigration system. Also included among those swept up are individuals charged with traffic offenses or accused of petty crimes, such as shoplifting.

According to ICE, the 3,168 people arrested in the most recent sweep included 698 “immigration fugitives,” 559 “illegal re-entrants,” and 1,063 individuals with more than one conviction. More than 90 percent of those arrested, 2,834, were classified by ICE as “criminal aliens.” The arrests included 2,843 males and 325 females, of 116 different nationalities. Mexican nationals made up the largest proportion of arrestees.

ICE says that about 1,000 of those picked up had been convicted of felonies such as murder, drug trafficking and aggravated assault; 149 sexual predators and 50 gang members were also reportedly arrested. That leaves more than 1,800 individuals allegedly

guilty of misdemeanors, or lesser criminal or immigration-related crimes.

At a Washington press conference, ICE Director John Morton said the recent operation underscores “ICE’s ongoing commitment and focus on the arrest and removal of convicted criminal aliens and those that game our nation’s immigration system. These are not people we want roaming our streets.”

In fact, the ICE sweeps are part of a broader, aggressive anti-immigrant agenda pursued by the Obama administration. Immigrants have been deported in record numbers since 2009, with nearly 400,000 rounded up and deported in each of the last three years.

Last June, Morton issued new guidelines claiming that ICE would adopt a more lenient attitude toward undocumented immigrants who are military veterans, had been in the US since childhood, had relatives who were citizens or legal residents, or were elderly.

The Department of Homeland Security announced last August that it would also review about 300,000 cases in the overloaded immigration courts, and would begin giving reprieves to “low-priority” offenders. These moves have mainly been seen as cynical efforts to court the Latino vote with an eye to the upcoming presidential election, while the deportations continue to mount.

Undocumented immigrants who have no criminal records are undoubtedly being picked up in the “Cross Check” dragnets. An Associated Press account of a raid last Wednesday in San Diego suggests this is the case. As in other cities, agents began the day knocking on the doors of the homes of targeted individuals in the early morning hours.

The ICE agents in San Diego had targeted 14 illegal immigrants to be arrested, including a Laotian man with burglary and assault convictions and a Cuban with convictions for involuntary manslaughter, vehicle theft and spousal abuse. Neither of these last two individuals

was apprehended. Agents did arrest another person: a Somali man on supervised release for a drug conviction, who was living at a halfway house.

Of the 14 people targeted, six were picked up. The ICE agents did, however, arrest an additional six people who had not been targets. A spokesperson for ICE, Lauren Mack, claimed these “non-targets” either had deportation orders or were previously removed from the US. These individuals were not specifically targeted—and presumably were not the type of “convicted criminal aliens” supposedly being pursued by operation “Cross Check” but they were rounded up nonetheless.

A key component of Obama’s anti-immigrant policy is use of the Secure Communities (S-Comm) immigration enforcement program, managed by ICE under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Piloted in 2008 under the Bush administration, the deportation program seeks to integrate federal, state, and local police agencies in an effort to ramp up deportation. S-Comm was initiated by executive order and has no Congressional oversight.

S-Comm utilizes biometric and other technologies to build up a massive database of immigrants. By March 2011, President Obama had expanded the program to over 1,210 state and local jurisdictions, and seeks to have all 3,141 jurisdictions participating by 2013.

When anyone is booked into jail, local authorities run their fingerprints against federal criminal and immigration databases. The IDENT database, owned by DHS, keeps biometric records of immigration applicants, as well as some criminals and terror suspects. IAFIS, a biometric database of criminal records, is administered by the FBI.

Prior to Secure Communities, the fingerprints of county and state arrestees would only be submitted to the FBI. Now they are sent to ICE as well. If an individual’s fingerprints match those of a non-US citizen, including legal residents, ICE is automatically notified. The agency will then evaluate whether to pursue that individual.

ICE officials can also place a “detainer” on an individual who has been brought in to a local jail, meaning someone can be held for up to 48 hours to give ICE time to take custody and begin deportation proceedings. Julie L. Myers, ICE assistant secretary from 2006 to 2008, ominously described the program

as “a virtual ICE presence at every local jail.”

Several local jurisdictions and three states—Illinois, Massachusetts and New York—have attempted to end or restrict their participation in the S-Comm program. ICE responded last August by ripping up the contracts they had with states, arguing that the agreements were not necessary to authorize the sharing of data between federal agencies.



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