

# US deported 260,000 for drug offenses over five-year period

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Almost 260,000 immigrants were deported between 2007 and 2012, often for minor drug offenses, according to a new report by Human Rights Watch.

The report, “A Price Too High: US Families Torn Apart by Deportations for Drug Offenses,” is a damning exposure of the immigration policy of the Obama administration, the most brutal in the country’s history.

Predictably, it has been met with a near-total blackout by the national media. Neither the *New York Times* nor the *Washington Post*, or any of the major news networks, have articles on the study on their web sites as of this writing.

The number of people deported annually steadily increased from 37,000 in 2007 to nearly 50,000 in 2010, the mid-point of Obama’s first term, before leveling off and declining slightly in 2011–2012. The number of deportations for possession, which accounted for a plurality of the deportations, rose sharply over this period, by 43 percent. Twenty-five percent of the deportations were for marijuana convictions.

Even legal immigrants can be deported for literally any drug-related conviction except for small-scale marijuana possession. If the crime is deemed to be “drug trafficking,” no matter how small the amount, they are then branded “aggravated felons” and “disqualified from almost every defense to deportation,” according to the report. In many cases, the drug charges are so minor that the accused quickly plead guilty without ever bothering to get a lawyer, who would have been required to warn them of the immigration consequences of their plea.

As immigration law makes no distinction between recent and older drug convictions, they can live in fear of being deported even if these arrests occurred many

years ago. In one case cited by the study, a 36-year old family man living in the country legally was deported in 2014 for a marijuana possession charge from 2003.

Once arrested, they are placed in mandatory detention with no possibility of posting bail for the entire duration of their case. This process can take months or even years, “during which time many lose their jobs and their homes” even if they are eventually allowed to stay, the report states.

They are not entitled to a court-appointed attorney, and judges are required by law not to consider factors such as “circumstances of the offense, rehabilitation, length of residence in the US, and ties to US family.” If they are deported, they are banned for life from returning to the United States to rejoin their families.

The study notes that the punitive immigration laws governing drug convictions emerged in tandem with the broader attacks on democratic rights under the so-called “War on Drugs,” beginning in the 1980s. This reached a climax with the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, both passed in 1996, which broadened the scope of “aggravated felonies” to include crimes “as minor as shoplifting and turnstile jumping.”

The law also created a significantly broader definition of “conviction” for the purposes of immigration. Even immigrants whose records have been expunged, their charges dismissed, or who have even been pardoned are considered to have been “convicted” for purposes of immigration, and are therefore subject to arbitrary harassment and deportation for the rest of their lives.

The report is particularly significant for what it says about Obama’s supposed policy of focusing on deporting those guilty of crimes. Although the authors are generally friendly towards the administration, the

facts they uncovered make clear that this “refocusing” is simply a means of scapegoating immigrants as criminals in order to justify Obama’s punitive deportation policy.

According to the report, 56 percent of those deported in fiscal year 2014 had been previously convicted of a crime. Yet only 12 percent of these were convicted for crimes considered “serious” by the Department of Homeland Security. In fact, the report continues, “[t]he most serious conviction held by half of those who were deported was an immigration or traffic violation.”

Many of the deportable convictions highlighted in the report were the result of undercover officers goading immigrants into committing minor crimes. For example, a 67-year-old grandmother is currently facing deportation for a drug “trafficking” conviction from 1995, where she purchased crack cocaine at the request of an undercover officer and sold it back to him for five dollars. Another man is facing deportation for selling methadone to an undercover cop hanging around the entrance to his rehab clinic. Both of these crimes qualify as “aggravated felonies” in the eyes of immigration authorities.

The Obama administration has deported more than 3 million immigrants as of the end of last year, more than under any other president. The administration has brought immigration proceedings against more than 60,000 children in the last year and a half alone, and deported over 7,700 without court hearings, many of whom had fled their native countries because of widespread gang violence.

Every fig-leaf “reprieve” plan on offer from the Obama administration, none of which offer amnesty, let alone citizenship, serves only to mask the deepening attacks on immigrant rights. Indeed, in announcing a program offering “temporary deportation waivers” last November, Obama boasted that, under his administration, the federal government now has “more agents and technology deployed to secure our southern border than at any time in our history.”



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