



Sanctuary Cities Undermined by Police Officers Working with ICE

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New Mexico, California, Philadelphia, Chicago. These are some of the city, county and state governments that have attempted to protect immigrants from local law enforcement working with immigration authorities by becoming “sanctuary” locations.

These sanctuary cities are meant to protect immigrants from a myriad of injustices, including holding people in jail on local charges past their release date at the request of ICE officers who want to pick them up for deportation.

Last month, leaders of Bernalillo County, New Mexico’s largest county, learned that the sanctuary policy was being disobeyed from inside the jail.

Staff at the Bernalillo County jail in Albuquerque were letting ICE officers use its database and informing them when a “person of interest” was being released. Staff members let immigration officers walk into the private areas of the jail and even use the county computers to look up names, birthplaces and addresses. No staff member has been disciplined.

Bernalillo County is not the only sanctuary having this problem. Immigration officials have informal relationships with local police. The American Civil Liberties Union reported that a detective in Orange County, California, regularly looked up license plate information for an immigration officer.

While the immigration officers say that sanctuary cities make the streets less safe, studies have shown that the majority of immigrants follow the laws and commit less crime than native-born Americans.

However, unauthorized immigrants make up less than four percent of the total US population and make up less than six percent of the total US prison population. State-based studies have also shown that immigrants are both much more likely to be targeted and convicted of a crime but commit far less crime than native-born Americans.

A study by the Cato Institute, which uses figures from Texas in 2015 as a case study to look at how crime rates compare among immigrant and native-born populations, showed that the rate per 100,000 residents in each subpopulation was 899 for undocumented immigrants, 611 for legal immigrants and 1,797 for native-born Americans.

“As a percentage of their respective populations, there were 56 percent fewer criminal convictions of illegal immigrants than of native-born Americans in Texas in 2015,” author Alex Nowrasteh wrote in the study. “The criminal conviction rate for legal immigrants was about 85

percent below the native-born rate.” The data shows similar patterns for violent crimes such as homicide and property crimes such as larceny.

Another study, published in March 2018 in the journal *Criminology*, looked at population-level crime rates to see if places with more undocumented immigrants have higher rates of crime. The answer: no.

States with more undocumented immigrants tended to have lower crime rates than states with smaller shares in the years 1990 through 2014.

“Increases in the undocumented immigrant population within states are associated with significant decreases in the prevalence of violence,” the study found.