



Deportations near border surged as interior removals dropped

Oct. 17, 2014

By Laurie Liles

WASHINGTON – Deportations of immigrants caught at the U.S.-Mexico border surged under the Obama administration even as the number deported from the interior of the country fell sharply, according to a study of a decade’s worth of government data.

The report Thursday by the Migration Policy Institute also confirmed criticism by immigration-reform advocates, impatient for action by the White House, who have labeled President Barack Obama the “deporter in chief.”

The total number of deportations has reached record levels under the Obama administration, said Marc Rosenblum, an MPI deputy director who authored [the report](#).

“The lowest year of removals during the Obama administration is higher than the highest year for any other president,” Rosenblum said Thursday. “There is no ambiguity that removals are at an all-time high.”

The report – based on a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement database of all deportations from 2003 to 2013 – examines removal trends during the Bush and Obama administrations, among other findings.

It comes as Congress has stalled over immigration reform, leading [Obama to say](#) he would consider possible executive actions on the issue. Those could include changes to his immigration enforcement priorities and an expansion of deferred deportation beyond the current Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals group.

The report noted that both President George W. Bush and Obama have focused deportation efforts on three priority groups: noncitizens convicted of a crime, those who disobey immigration court orders or fail to show up for deportation, and those who have recently entered the country.

Following the defeat of comprehensive immigration reform legislation in [2006](#) and [2007](#), the Bush administration ramped up its enforcement actions, with particular focus on removing people caught in the interior of the country.

Obama ratcheted up action against those priority groups in 2009 – and even more so beginning in 2011 – resulting in a growing number of deportations of immigrants who have been convicted of a crime in this country.

While 80 percent of deportations from the interior between 2011 and 2013 were criminals, MPI officials said most of them had not been convicted of violent crimes or of other crimes that ICE considers the most serious offenses.

“The Obama administration has been successful at focusing enforcement on the three priority categories identified beginning in 2010,” said Doris Meissner, director of MPI’s U.S. immigration policy program.

“Yet highly focused enforcement and the characteristics of people removed leave the administration with little additional room to maneuver by simply refining its existing priorities,” she said.

Meissner, who served as commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service under President Bill Clinton, said the institute’s report “shows the potential – and the limitations – of prosecutorial discretion under existing immigration laws and priorities.”

The greatest growth in deportations under the Obama administration has been at the border, where apprehended immigrants accounted for 70 percent of all deportations in 2013, the report said.

Those immigrants were also much less likely to have committed a crime than those arrested in the interior. The MPI analysis showed that just under 60 percent of the 3.7 million immigrants deported from 2003 to 2013 had committed no other crime than crossing the border.

Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst with the Cato Institute, said the report shows that while Bush deported an average of 0.7 percent of illegal immigrants in the interior every year, Obama has deported an average of 1.47 percent of the people in that group during every year of his presidency.

“Even while focusing on interior removals, President Obama has out-deported President Bush based on the data available,” Nowrasteh said.