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IMMIGRATION ARRESTS ROSE SHARPLY IN TRUMP'S FIRST 100 DAYS

Percentage of those who had no criminal record also rose markedly

By Laura Meckler
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WASHINGTON – During the opening months of the Trump administration, immigration agents significantly increased the pace of arrests of people suspected of being in the U.S. illegally, while the share of those arrested who had no criminal record rose markedly, immigration officials said on Wednesday.

Overall, the number of arrests jumped by more than a third and the portion involving people without criminal records increased to 26 percent during the first 100 days of the administration, compared with 14 percent in the same period a year earlier, according to Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The figures quantify the stepped-up enforcement promised by President Donald Trump and his aides, who say they are enforcing the law as Congress intended.

To immigration advocates, the new data confirm accounts they have publicized about otherwise law-abiding undocumented immigrants being arrested and processed for deportation, and view the effort as a way to both frighten people and tear apart families.

The statistics represent a marked change from the final two years of the Obama administration. But the number of arrests remains well below figures from earlier in that administration, before a 2014 presidential directive instructed immigration agents to focus on recent border-crossers and people with serious criminal records.

During the last two years of the Obama administration, most people in the U.S. illegally but without criminal records were all-but safe from removal. Prior to that, deportations had increased so significantly that immigration activists dubbed President Barack Obama the “deporter-in-chief.”

While Mr. Obama winced at that title, the Trump administration was eager to advertise the increase in arrests since Inauguration Day. ICE created a website to announce the new data with a large headline touting the increase in arrests. The headline was laid over video showing an arrest under way.

“ICE will no longer exempt any class of individuals from removal proceedings if they are found to be in the country illegally,” the agency said on the new webpage.

Thomas Homan, acting director of ICE, said his agency still prioritizes arresting people with criminal records, but officers will arrest others in the U.S. without authorization if they encounter them during their work.

The new ICE figures show that its officers arrested nearly 42,000 people during the first 100 days of the Trump administration, including nearly 11,000 without criminal records. That is up from just over 31,000 in the same time span during 2016.

Separately, ICE data show that the number of people actually deported during this period dropped from 2016. There is a delay between arrest and deportation while cases are processed.

Immigration advocates said the numbers confirm what they have seen on the ground, and said the administration appears to be trying to frighten illegal immigrants, perhaps hoping that they will leave the U.S. voluntarily.

"ICE's newly released data confirms the heartbreaking stories we are reading everywhere are not isolated instances," said Brian Root, quantitative analyst at Human Rights Watch.

Kamal Essaheb, policy director for the National Immigration Law Center, said he suspects the numbers will rise in coming months, and in particular if Mr. Trump succeeds in tripling the number of ICE agents, as he has pledged. "What we're seeing is the tip of the iceberg," he said.

Supporters of tougher immigration rules welcomed the rising numbers. "Considering the collapse in enforcement during the last few years of the Obama administration, I'd say this turnaround is long-overdue good news," said Mark Krikorian of the Center for Immigration Studies.

On Thursday, the House Judiciary Committee plans to consider legislation that would increase enforcement by withholding federal grant money from local jurisdictions that don't detain people whom ICE wants to arrest, and by increasing the number of ICE agents by 12,500 – even more than Mr. Trump requested, among other things.

Mr. Homan said more officers are needed, saying the number of deportations each year is a fraction of the estimated 11 million people living in the U.S. illegally. "We certainly could use resources to...more actively work all these cases," he said.

Corrections & Amplifications

The Trump administration was eager to advertise an increase in arrests of people suspected of being in the U.S. illegally in the months since Inauguration Day. An earlier version of this article incorrectly said the administration was eager to advertise an increase in deportations. Deportations, which lag behind arrests, dropped by a modest amount during the first 100 days of the Trump administration. (May 18, 2017)