

THE NEW YORK TIMES

September 28, 2011

2,901 Arrested in Crackdown on Criminal Immigrants

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WASHINGTON — The [Immigration and Customs Enforcement](#) agency announced on Wednesday that it had arrested 2,901 immigrants who have criminal records, highlighting the Obama administration's policy of focusing on such people while putting less emphasis on deporting illegal immigrants who pose no demonstrated threat to public safety.

Officials from the agency portrayed the seven-day sweep, called Operation Cross Check, as the largest enforcement and removal operation in its history. It involved arrests in all 50 states of criminal offenders of 115 nationalities, including people convicted of manslaughter, armed robbery, aggravated assault and sex crimes.

“These are not people who are making a positive contribution to their communities,” said the agency's director, John Morton. “They are not the kind of people we want walking our streets.”

More than 1,600 of those arrested had been convicted of a felony. The remainder had a misdemeanor conviction for matters like theft, forgery and driving while intoxicated, the agency said. Those arrested included illegal immigrants and lawful resident noncitizens who had been convicted of crimes that made them eligible to be deported.

The agency did not release the names of all the people arrested. But a sampling that showed the geographical breadth of the operation included one person from the New York City area: Virgilio Lopez-Ruiz, a 54-year-old Dominican who was living in the Bronx. He had been convicted on Nov. 16, 1988, of second-degree attempted murder, it said. It did not provide his [immigration](#) status.

Mr. Morton issued a [memo](#) in June suggesting that the agency should place a priority on deporting noncitizen criminals like drug dealers and gang members, as well as people who have flagrantly violated immigration laws, for example by ignoring deportation orders or re-entering the country after being removed. Under that approach, it would give less emphasis to removing illegal immigrants who are not a public safety or national security threat.

In August, the White House essentially ratified that approach, **announcing** that the Department of Homeland Security would, on a case-by-case basis, suspend deportation proceedings against people who posed no public safety threat. The policy shift has been criticized by some Republicans as a backdoor form of the so-called Dream Act — a bill, which has stalled in Congress, that would provide relief to illegal immigrants who were brought to the United States as children and who want to attend college or join the armed forces.

But Mr. Morton said Wednesday that there were far more illegal immigrants in the United States than the agency has the resources to remove. He said that the agency has been deporting about 390,000 people annually for the past several years, a record level, and that the question is who those people should be. In 2008, he said, about a third were criminal offenders, but this year about half have been, and the majority of the remainder have been flagrant violators of immigration law.