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Program Tracks Arrests in Group of Immigrants

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Immigrants who were identified under a federal fingerprinting program as possibly being here illegally but who were not detained by [immigration](#) authorities were arrested again on more than 1,800 serious offenses, according to [a report by the Congressional Research Service](#). The charges included 19 murders, 3 attempted murders and 142 sex crimes.

The report, released Tuesday by the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives, analyzed arrests of immigrants whose fingerprints generated matches with federal databases under an Obama administration program called [Secure Communities](#). The researchers focused on 159,286 immigrants who were arrested by state or local police, were not taken into custody by federal [Immigration and Customs Enforcement](#) agents and then were arrested again by the police.

Among those immigrants, the report identified 7,283 who were likely to have been in the country illegally at the time of the first arrest. They were arrested again on a total of 16,226 charges. While the majority were not for serious crimes, there were 1,105 charges for violent or major crimes, including the murder and sex charges, as well as 682 crimes described as burglary or theft and 48 firearms charges, according to the report. There were also 1,420 suspected drug violations.

The report covers arrests during almost three years, from October 2008, when Secure Communities was begun under the administration of President George W. Bush, through July 2011. Obama administration officials have vigorously defended the program and have expanded it so far across 48 states, with plans to cover the entire country by 2013.

The Congressional Research Service is a nonpartisan agency that conducts research at the request of lawmakers. The report drew clashing interpretations from Obama administration officials and Republican lawmakers and seemed certain to fuel new arguments in the months before the November elections over immigration enforcement.

[Representative Lamar Smith](#) of Texas, the Republican chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, who ordered the report from the research service, said it showed that President Obama's policies had allowed dangerous criminals to go free after they were identified in fingerprint checks, to commit crimes that could have been avoided.

“Rather than protect the American people he was elected to serve, President Obama has imposed a policy that allows thousands of illegal immigrants to be released into our communities,” Mr.

Smith said. He called the policy a “reckless amnesty agenda that is dangerous and deadly for Americans.”

[John Morton](#), the director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, also known as ICE, challenged Mr. Smith’s view, calling it “a misleading picture of the facts and a disservice to our actual efforts.”

Administration officials said they have pushed to expand Secure Communities in order to enhance their ability to detect and deport serious criminals. They noted that the report covered arrests from several years before the program was widely in place and before they established priorities that focus deportations on immigrants with criminal records. Under Secure Communities, fingerprints of anyone arrested by the police are checked against federal criminal databases and also against Department of Homeland Security immigration records.

As a result of the priorities, some illegal immigrants who did not have criminal convictions have been released after being flagged through Secure Communities. But of more than 396,000 immigrants deported last year, officials said, about 55 percent were convicted criminals, an 89 percent increase in the number of criminals deported compared with the last year of the Bush administration.

“We have removed more criminal offenders than any administration,” Mr. Morton said. He said his agency had not found any case of an immigrant released after a fingerprint match who was later convicted of murder.

According to the report, ICE could probably not have detained about 70 percent of the immigrants who were released after fingerprint checks, generally because they were legal immigrants not yet convicted of any crime. The report also found 48,660 cases of immigrants who were released after Secure Communities matches because they were United States citizens.

The report is based on criminal charges, not convictions. Many immigrants were arrested on more than one offense — including one immigrant who was arrested more than 50 times.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/01/us/repeated-arrests-found-of-immigrants-flagged-by-fingerprint-checks.html>