

Federal-local immigration enforcement policies designed to reduce crime found to raise victimization among Latinos

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Efforts to understand the effects of immigration enforcement on crime have largely been informed by police crime statistics. In a new study,

researchers used longitudinal data from the U.S. National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) to assess the impact of federal immigration policies on local communities. They found that activation of two policies—the Secure Communities Program and 287(g) task force agreements—significantly increased the risk of violent victimization among Latinos.

The study, by researchers at Penn State University and the University of Maryland (UMD) at College Park, appears in *Criminology & Public Policy*

"Contrary to their purpose of enhancing [public safety](#), our results show that the measures enacted by the federal government have not reduced crime, but instead have eroded security in U.S. communities by increasing the likelihood that Latinos experience [violent victimization](#)," say Eric Baumer (professor of sociology and criminology at Penn State) and Min Xie (professor of criminology and [criminal justice](#) at UMD at College Park), who coauthored the study.

"And while the two specific immigration enforcement programs we studied have ended, federal-local efforts with similar aims remain in place, so policymakers need to understand the impact of such programs."

Recent immigration programs were designed to remove serious criminal immigrants from the United States, but they are controversial because most of the individuals affected are not serious criminals. As a result, many local jurisdictions no longer cooperate with federal authorities or have enacted sanctuary policies to limit the role of local officials in immigration enforcement.

Given the substantial investments in these programs—the budget of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was \$8.3 billion in 2021, the Secure Communities program totaled \$1.1 billion from 2008 to

2014, and the Section 287(g) program has cost an estimated \$500 million since 2006—it is important to assess whether they have boosted safety.

In this study, researchers examined NCVS data on exposure to crime from 2005 through 2014. Unlike information used in previous studies, the NCVS includes crimes unknown to police, is unaffected by changes in local law enforcement practices, and permits analyses for different racial and ethnic groups.

Researchers examined data from 2005 to 2014 to capture observations before and after activation of the Secure Communities program and to incorporate the first wave of 287(g) agreements. The use of these and additional data sources yielded a nationally representative sample of 354,000 U.S. residents ages 12 and older and a total of more than a million interviews, with information on county immigration enforcement policies and other data measured at the individual, census tract, and county levels.

In the interviews, researchers examined whether a respondent had experienced a violent victimization (e.g., rape, sexual assault, robbery, assault) in the six months before the interview. They then determined whether Secure Communities or 287(g) programs were active in the respondent's county, and whether the county had implemented policies limiting cooperation with ICE. The study also looked at individuals' and neighborhoods' risk factors for victimization, and county-level variables (e.g., labor market, immigration history, geographic region).

On average, about 7 in 1,000 people reported violent victimizations in the prior six months. About 43% of respondents were from counties with Secure Communities programs, and the 287(g) jail enforcement and task force programs affected about 11% and 3% of respondents, respectively. About 3% of respondents lived in counties that limited

cooperation with ICE.

The study confirmed previous findings of individual-level and neighborhood-related factors as major sources of variation in violent victimizations. For example, an individual's risk of victimization is significantly higher among males; youth; and divorced, separated, and other unmarried people, as well as among lower-income residents and residents who live in densely populated, central city, and disadvantaged areas.

Researchers also found a regional difference in victimization, with counties in the west United States at higher risk than those in the northeast.

Activation of the Secure Communities and 287(g) task force policies significantly increased the risk of violent victimization among Latinos: The probability of experiencing violent victimization rose an estimated 86% for Latinos in communities with Secure Communities programs, and an estimated 111% for Latinos in communities with a 287(g) task force. Activation of these programs was not significantly related to victimization risk for non-Latino White and Black respondents.

"Our findings provide evidence that intensified immigration enforcement policies not only fail to reduce violent victimization but increase violent victimization among Latinos," notes the authors. "Our results support the [federal government](#)'s ending of 287(g) task force agreements and its more recent move, in 2021, to end the Secure Communities program."

Because programs such as Secure Communities and 287(g) have ended before only to be reinstated a few years later or revised as part of different programs, the authors encourage policymakers to understand the public safety implications of continuing to use similar programs.

"While new iterations address some concerns, our findings make clear that there is no evidence that contemporary federal-local immigration partnerships have reduced Americans' exposure to crime and in fact may raise the risk of violent victimization among Latinos," say the authors.

More information: Eric P. Baumer et al, Federal–local partnerships on immigration law enforcement: Are the policies effective in reducing violent victimization?, *Criminology & Public Policy* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/1745-9133.12619](https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12619)

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