

Immigration Enforcement Fuels Spike In U.S. Cases

The New York Times

December 22, 2009 Tuesday, Late Edition - Final

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Section: Section A; Column 0; National Desk; Pg. 16

Length: 561 words

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Body

Federal prosecutions reached a record high in the 2009 fiscal year, with the surge driven by a sharp increase in **cases** filed against **immigration** violators.

The 169,612 federal prosecutions were a jump of nearly 9 percent from the previous year, according to Department of Justice data analyzed by a research center at Syracuse University in a new report. **Immigration** prosecutions were up nearly 16 percent, and made up more than half of all criminal **cases** brought by the federal government, the report said.

Much of the **spike, immigration** experts say, arises from Bush administration efforts to increase **immigration enforcement** and to speed prosecutions. The administration greatly increased the number of Border Patrol agents and prosecutors, and also introduced a program known as Operation Streamline that relied on large-scale processing of plea deals in immigrant **cases** in some parts of the country.

The relatively simple **cases** have become the low-hanging fruit of the federal legal system: **Immigration** prosecutions, from inception to court disposal, are lightning quick, according to the report. While white-collar prosecutions take an average of 460 days and narcotics **cases** take 333, the **immigration cases** are typically disposed of in 2 days.

And while federal prosecutors decline to prosecute about half of the white-collar **cases** that are referred to them by law **enforcement** agencies, they prosecute 97 percent of the **immigration cases**, according to the Syracuse group.

The speed-up in federal **immigration** prosecutions, however, has run afoul of the federal courts presiding over Arizona, which processed more than 22,000 **immigration cases** in the fiscal year, nearly a quarter of those cited in the report. This month, a panel of the **United States** Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled that the process of mass pleadings violates the federal rule that protects the accused from being forced into a guilty plea.

Michael A. Olivas, an **immigration** expert at the University of Houston Law Center, said he was not surprised to find **immigration** prosecutions "No. 1 with a bullet" on the Syracuse list. "I would have been astounded if it wasn't one or two," Mr. Olivas said. "We're simply pushing the cattle through the chutes."

The fact that **immigration** prosecutions remained high "shows that this administration is serious about **enforcement** to some degree," said Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for **Immigration** Studies, a policy group in Washington that favors restricting **immigration**. "This administration understands that it needs to appear tough on **enforcement** if it's going to make a credible **case** for legalization," or amnesty programs, he said.

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David Burnham, who is co-director of the Syracuse research group, known as the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, said that for whatever reason, "the policy of Bush appears, from the data, to have continued and maybe accelerated."

The rise in federal **immigration enforcement** figures has occurred as crime has dropped over all. According to new statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, also released Monday, violent crimes reported to the bureau's Uniform Crime Program dropped 4.4 percent over the previous year, the third straight decline. Murder was down 10 percent, and property crimes dropped by 6.1 percent, according to the report.

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Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: **IMMIGRATION** (93%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (91%); LAW **ENFORCEMENT** (90%); **IMMIGRATION** LAW (90%); PUBLIC PROSECUTORS (90%); RESEARCH INSTITUTES (89%); APPEALS (78%); PLEA AGREEMENTS (78%); GUILTY PLEAS (78%); SPECIAL INVESTIGATIVE FORCES (78%); APPELLATE DECISIONS (77%); JUSTICE DEPARTMENTS (77%); LAW SCHOOLS (76%); TERRITORIAL & NATIONAL BORDERS (73%); AMNESTY (73%); BORDER CONTROL (70%); DECISIONS & RULINGS (68%); APPEALS COURTS (67%); EXECUTIVES (60%)

Organization: SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY (58%)

Industry: LAW SCHOOLS (76%)

Geographic: SYRACUSE, NY, USA (88%); **UNITED STATES** (93%)

Load-Date: December 22, 2009