

Counties that provided 'sanctuary' to undocumented immigrants saw falling crime rates, study finds

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Gabriel C. Pérez / KUT

Demonstrators hold a banner and chant during a protest of Senate Bill 4 at the governor's office in 2017. The legislation penalizes cities that protect residents who are undocumented.

Counties that adopted certain sanctuary policies related to undocumented immigrants around 2014 saw a drop in both property and violent crime, according to a new study from a researcher at UT Austin.

In 2013, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement implemented a “[Secure Communities](#)” tool to notify ICE's Law Enforcement Support Center when anyone

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fingerprinted by local law enforcement matched the biometric information of someone who could be deported.

Counties that didn't cooperate with ICE's requests to detain undocumented immigrants or notify the agency upon their release from custody were considered "sanctuary counties" in a [paper](#) by Marta Ascherio, who received a PhD in sociology from UT Austin.

Ascherio analyzed crime and demographic data from 2013 to 2016 across 3,105 U.S. counties. That's about 99% of all U.S. counties excluding those in Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico. Her [study](#) was published in the journal *Social Science Research*.

The number of sanctuary counties went from two in 2013 to 123 in 2016. She said none were in Texas. (The state would later pass a law that penalized jurisdictions that didn't comply with ICE requests to detain undocumented immigrants.)

In addition to a drop in crime in sanctuary counties compared to ones without these policies, Ascherio's research also found a correlation between property crime and the demographics of the county.

Communities with a higher proportion of foreign-born Latinos had lower crime rates compared to non-sanctuary counties. The same was true in communities with a high proportion of native-born Latinos.



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policies spill over to people who are not immigrants," Ascherio said.

While others studies have shown punitive immigration policies have a negative impact on people who are not immigrants, she said her research shows immigrant-friendly policies can affect non-immigrants in a positive way — something not usually included in discussions on immigration policy.

Ascherio said she suspects sanctuary practices help decrease crime by dismantling racialized systems that marginalize immigrants and people of color, though she does not have the data to prove this.

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