



Interior Immigration Enforcement Decline Under Biden: State and Local Statistics

By [Jessica M. Vaughan](#) on December 8, 2022

Jessica Vaughan is the director of policy studies at the Center for Immigration Studies. She would like to thank Karen Zeigler for her assistance with data analysis on this report.

Immigration enforcement in the interior of the country has dropped dramatically under President Biden's policies. These policies have exempted nearly all but the most serious criminal aliens from arrest and removal and have imposed cumbersome new procedures and paperwork for ICE officers to complete cases.¹ According to ICE records, the number of removals nationwide declined from 186,000 in FY 2020 to 59,000 in FY 2021.² Although Biden officials say that the policies were established in order to prioritize the removal of the most serious deportable criminal offenders, in fact the result has been a decline in the removal of criminal aliens as well as other types of cases. For example, the number of removals of convicted felons nationwide dropped from 36,000 in FY 2020 to 27,000 in FY 2021.³

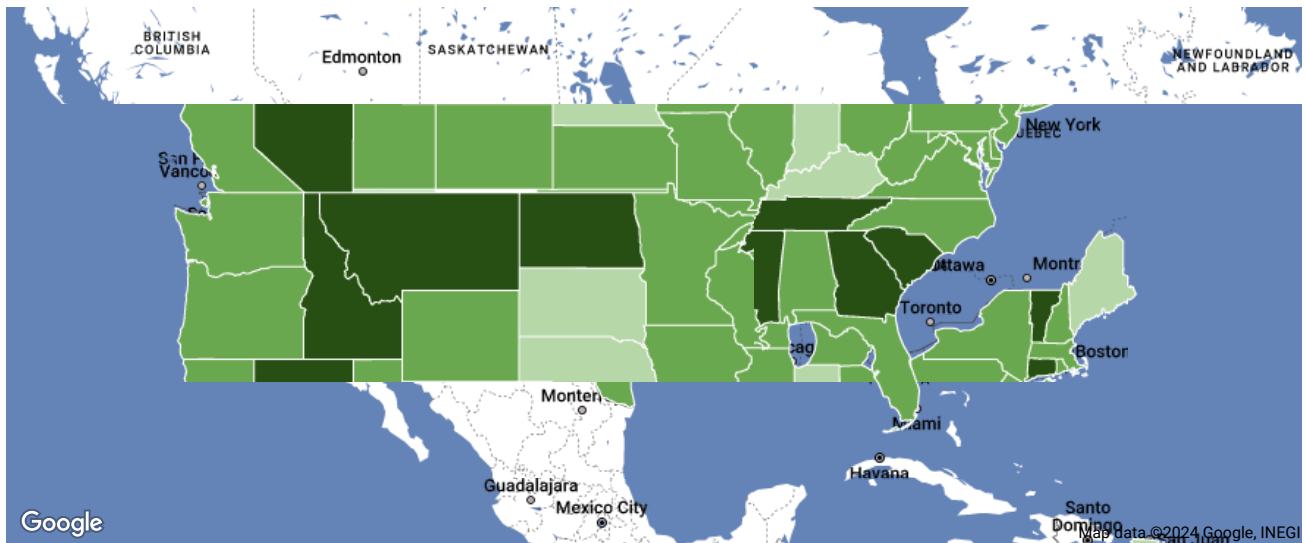
This report presents new information on the decline in ICE enforcement at the state and local level. Using records obtained through a FOIA request, we examine trends in removals of aliens who were identified by ICE under the Secure Communities program. These are removal cases that originate because the alien has been arrested locally for a crime. They do not include border cases, fugitives, worksite arrestees, or other categories of ICE removals. They are a good measure of interior enforcement involving the public-safety-oriented cases that should be a high priority for ICE.

Key Findings:

- Under Biden enforcement priorities, there was a 71 percent decline in removals of deportable aliens who came to ICE's attention due to a local criminal arrest.
- Ten states experienced an extreme decline in enforcement of greater than 80 percent under Biden policies (Connecticut, Georgia, Idaho, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Vermont).
- Of the 50 U.S. counties that typically have the most criminal alien removals, 14 experienced extreme declines (greater than 80 percent) under Biden policies. About one-third of these high-volume counties are in Texas.
- The high-volume counties with the steepest decline in removals of locally arrested criminals were Gwinnett County, Ga.; Plymouth County, Mass.; Bergen County, N.J.; and Kankakee County, Ill. Criminal removals dropped by more than 90 percent in these jurisdictions.
- There were 50 counties, parishes, or territories with a minimal baseline volume of enforcement where the number of criminal removals dropped by 90 percent or more. Eight of these were in Georgia.
- In one representative county, Howard County, Texas, under Biden policies just half the number of criminals convicted of homicides were removed than before, and there also were steep drops in removals of criminals convicted of assault, burglary, drugs, larceny, and sex offenses.

Decline in ICE Removals of Criminal Aliens by State: 2019-2021





About the Data. The records obtained by the Center itemize all aliens removed by ICE in fiscal years (October 1 – September 30) 2019 through 2021 in which the alien was identified by ICE as a result of a biometric match generated under the Secure Communities program.⁴ Using fingerprint matching, this program flags cases of aliens who are arrested by local law enforcement agencies for local crimes, and enables ICE to take action once the alien is held to account for the local crimes. These cases are tracked by ICE in a separate, unique data system that includes information on the state and county or territory where the alien was arrested (this locality information is not available in ICE's main enforcement records system). The data fields also include the alien's country of citizenship, criminal history, and other information on the alien's immigration charges and case disposition, including the date of the alien's removal from the United States.

For this analysis, we selected records of removals for the time period of January to September in 2019 and 2021, to correspond approximately to the first nine months of the Biden administration and a comparable time period during the Trump administration before the pandemic lockdowns of 2020.

Removals of Locally Arrested Criminal Aliens Dropped 71 Percent. In the time period covering the first nine months of the Biden administration, ICE removed 16,351 locally arrested criminal aliens, down from 55,870 such removals that occurred during the same period in 2019, under Trump administration policies — a drop of 71 percent. As shown in Table 1, 10 states and one territory (Guam) experienced extreme declines of greater than 80 percent. Thirty-three states saw declines of 60-80 percent. Only Alaska and New Mexico experienced less extreme declines (of about 25 percent) in criminal removals.

Enforcement in High Volume Counties Plummeted. More than half of all Secure Communities program removals from FY 2019 to FY 2021 occurred in just 50 counties, shown in Table 2. Seventeen, and four out of the top five, of these counties are in Texas, with El Paso, Harris, Hidalgo, and Dallas counties at the top of the list.

Four high-volume counties had extreme (90 percent-plus) declines under Biden in removals of locally-arrested aliens: Gwinnett County, Ga.; Plymouth County, Mass.; Bergen County, N.J.; and Kankakee County, Ill.

Two high-volume jurisdictions — Nueces County, Texas (which includes Corpus Christi), and Dona Ana County, New Mexico (located on the U.S.-Mexico border), — bucked the national trend and experienced increases in the number of removals of locally arrested aliens.

51 Jurisdictions Had Extreme Drops in Criminal Removals. A number of local jurisdictions experienced acute declines in Secure Communities removals of more than 90 percent. We identified 51 jurisdictions (listed in Table 3) that typically generated at least one criminal removal per month in 2019, but which were often ignored by ICE in the first nine months of 2021.

Chelan County, located in central Washington state, has the dubious distinction of being the county in this category with the most extreme decline in Secure Communities removals, going from 30 in the first nine months of 2019 to zero in the first nine months of 2021. Similarly, Berkeley County in South Carolina, which includes part of the most populated area in the state, near Charleston, went from 71 removals of locally arrested criminals in the 2019 period to just two in the same period in 2021.

Top Counties for Decline in ICE Criminal Alien Removals: 2019-2021





Howard County, Texas: A Representative Snapshot of Public Safety Implications. To explore the public safety implications of the Biden enforcement policies, we examined the details of the criminal histories of aliens removed from one county where the decline in enforcement matched the national rate of 71 percent — Howard County, Texas, population 35,000, located near the city of Midland.

From January through September 2019, ICE removed 655 aliens who were identified through the Secure Communities program after a local arrest. As shown in Table 4, the largest number of these (196) were arrested for drug offenses, of which the largest number (69) were for drug trafficking. The second largest crime category was immigration crimes (185), of which 97 were for illegal re-entry after prior deportation and 60 were for human smuggling. In addition, more than 90 aliens were removed after arrest for violent crimes including assault, homicide, sexual assault, and more.

In contrast, during the same period of time in 2021, when Biden administration policies were in effect ICE removed only 189 aliens identified under the Secure Communities program. Again, the largest number (86) were for drug crimes, of which the largest number (36) were for drug trafficking. Only 28 aliens were removed after local arrest because of immigration crimes, of which eight were for illegal re-entry after deportation and 20 were for human smuggling. Fewer than 30 aliens convicted of violent crimes were removed.

It is reasonable to conclude from these statistics that under the Biden policies, ICE is knowingly taking a pass on removing most deportable criminal aliens who have come to their attention after arrest in Howard County, and even knowingly taking a pass on some of the deportable criminal aliens who were convicted of serious or violent crimes in Howard County. As a result, Howard County likely is experiencing some degree of repeated crime from those criminal aliens who continue to offend and victimize community members after ICE declined to take action to remove them.

Conclusion. The public safety consequences of the Biden interior enforcement policies that are being experienced in Howard County, Texas, undoubtedly are happening in hundreds of other U.S. jurisdictions. State and local authorities should keep track of cases of criminal aliens who are not removed by ICE and bring these cases to the attention of ICE leadership, members of Congress, and the public. In addition, through appropriations or otherwise, the new Congress should clarify its expectations with respect to immigration enforcement in the interior, particularly involving criminal aliens, certain of whom are subject to mandatory arrest and detention under the Immigration and Nationality Act.⁵ The Biden administration’s application of this law is currently under review by the Supreme Court following a challenge to the Biden policies brought by the states of Texas and Louisiana.⁶

For more information on the statistics for specific counties or states, contact the author at jmv@cis.org.

Table 1. Decline in ICE Removals of Locally Arrested Criminal Aliens by State/Territory, Jan. - Sept. 2019 and 2021

State	Jan. - Sept. 2019	Jan. - Sept. 2021	Pct. Decline Under Biden
Alabama	801	173	78%
Alaska	4	3	25%
Arizona	3,491	1,485	57%
Arkansas	364	93	74%
California	6,868	1,765	74%
Colorado	896	229	74%
Connecticut	194	36	81%
Delaware	85	29	66%

District of Columbia	92	26	72%
Florida	3,517	950	73%
Georgia	2,503	447	82%
Guam	24	2	92%
Hawaii	62	13	79%
Idaho	271	51	81%
Illinois	981	222	77%
Indiana	505	267	47%
Iowa	315	83	74%
Kansas	482	175	64%
Kentucky	382	172	55%
Louisiana	740	166	78%
Maine	16	7	56%
Maryland	360	108	70%
Massachusetts	796	180	77%
Michigan	448	110	75%
Minnesota	527	176	67%
Mississippi	580	94	84%
Missouri	341	133	61%
Montana	21	3	86%
Nebraska	334	139	58%
Nevada	906	156	83%
New Hampshire	50	15	70%
New Jersey	943	321	66%
New Mexico	332	257	23%
New York	1,564	379	76%
North Carolina	1,013	267	74%
North Dakota	44	2	95%
Ohio	497	158	68%
Oklahoma	546	184	66%
Oregon	284	101	64%
Pennsylvania	771	302	61%
Puerto Rico	152	79	48%
Rhode Island	74	24	68%
South Carolina	917	153	83%
South Dakota	65	28	57%
Tennessee	1,036	139	87%
Texas	18,086	5,670	69%
Utah	538	179	67%
Vermont	6	1	83%
Virgin Islands	4	2	50%
Virginia	950	291	69%
Washington	697	175	75%
West Virginia	79	29	63%

Wisconsin	250	83	67%
Wyoming	66	19	71%

Table 2. Top 50 Counties for ICE
Removals After Local Arrest, FY 2019 – FY 2021

County	Total Removals	Removals	Removals	Pct.
	2019-2021	Jan. - Sept. 2019	Jan. - Sept. 2021	Change
1 El Paso, Texas	10,809	4,724	669	-86%
2 Harris, Texas	5,707	2,054	477	-77%
3 Maricopa, Ariz.	5,350	1,878	452	-76%
4 Hidalgo, Texas	4,116	1,232	837	-32%
5 Dallas, Texas	3,957	1,365	354	-74%
6 Los Angeles, Calif.	3,424	1,218	350	-71%
7 Pima, Ariz.	2,923	852	756	-11%
8 Reeves, Texas	2,229	816	172	-79%
9 Orange, Calif.	2,213	955	127	-87%
10 Miami-Dade, Fla.	2,058	685	204	-70%
11 Travis, Texas	2,049	705	123	-83%
12 Garza, Texas	2,023	816	155	-81%
13 New York, N.Y.	1,958	684	212	-69%
14 Clark, Nev.	1,898	783	132	-83%
15 San Diego, Calif.	1,872	688	224	-67%
16 Cameron, Texas	1,807	530	354	-33%
17 Kern, Calif.	1,806	859	104	-88%
18 Howard, Texas	1,765	655	189	-71%
19 Tarrant, Texas	1,702	587	145	-75%
20 Webb, Texas	1,360	394	300	-24%
21 Bexar, Texas	1,291	424	123	-71%
22 Gwinnett, Ga.	1,232	522	53	-90%
23 San Bernardino, Calif.	1,162	429	145	-66%
24 Salt Lake, Utah	1,125	388	136	-65%
25 Palm Beach, Fla.	1,019	341	70	-79%
26 Imperial, Calif.	987	364	145	-60%
27 Plymouth, Mass.	970	314	27	-91%
28 Walker, Texas	961	299	133	-56%
29 Nueces, Texas	888	136	496	265%
30 Santa Cruz, Ariz.	887	399	58	-85%
31 Collier, Fla.	880	341	71	-79%
32 Cook, Ill.	842	298	100	-66%
33 Bergen, N.J.	839	417	39	-91%

34	Montgomery, Texas	811	305	62	-80%
35	Kankakee, Ill.	791	314	28	-91%
36	Oklahoma, Okla.	781	216	71	-67%
37	Broward, Fla.	764	210	111	-47%
38	Fresno, Calif.	736	235	120	-49%
39	Cobb, Ga.	728	279	47	-83%
40	Davidson, Tenn.	684	282	48	-83%
41	Riverside, Calif.	673	254	52	-80%
42	Hillsborough, Fla.	662	232	63	-73%
43	Marion, Ind.	656	182	133	-27%
44	Adams, Miss.	611	315	38	-88%
45	Sacramento, Calif.	599	223	66	-70%
46	Dona Ana, N.M.	599	127	215	69%
47	Denton, Texas	585	191	50	-74%
48	Fairfax, Va.	561	193	57	-70%
49	Prince William, Va.	541	191	43	-77%
50	Collin, Texas	526	167	54	-68%
	Total	85,417	31,068	9,190	-70%

Table 3. Counties with the Most Extreme Decline in ICE Removals of Locally Arrested Criminal Aliens, 2019 to 2021

County	Pct. Decline	Jan. - Sept. 2019	Jan. - Sept. 2021	Removals FYs 2019-2021
Chelan County, Wash.	100%	30	0	55
Berkeley, S.C.	97%	71	2	169
Hamblen, Tenn.	97%	31	1	75
Skagit, Wash.	97%	29	1	75
Saint Mary, La.	96%	25	1	50
Gordon, Ga.	95%	21	1	49
Ouachita, La.	95%	20	1	49
Cooke, Texas	95%	21	1	44
Loudon, Tenn.	95%	20	1	43
Bartow, Ga.	94%	32	2	68
Kerr, Texas	94%	18	1	55
Barrow, Ga.	94%	17	1	39
Stark, Ohio	94%	18	1	37
Navajo, Ariz.	94%	16	1	33
Brunswick, N.C.	94%	17	1	25
Sonoma, Calif.	93%	56	4	135
Sevier, Tenn.	93%	42	3	116

Bossier, La.	93%	40	3	77
Boulder, Colo.	93%	30	2	63
Albany, N.Y.	92%	148	12	301
Dutchess, N.Y.	92%	37	3	74
Anne Arundel, Md.	92%	24	2	67
Guam	92%	24	2	53
Hunt, Texas	92%	12	1	47
Saint Johns, Fla.	92%	24	2	46
Wharton, Texas	92%	12	1	39
Harnett, N.C.	92%	12	1	33
Atascosa, Texas	92%	12	1	30
Shasta, Calif.	92%	12	1	24
Plymouth, Mass.	91%	317	28	978
Bergen, N.J.	91%	417	39	839
Kankakee, Ill.	91%	314	28	791
Chatham, Ga.	91%	35	3	100
Lea, N.M.	91%	32	3	74
Santa Fe, N.M.	91%	23	2	62
Putnam, Tenn.	91%	11	1	33
Titus, Texas	91%	11	1	32
Cibola, N.M.	91%	11	1	27
Cowlitz, Wash.	91%	11	1	27
Gwinnett, Ga.	90%	522	53	1232
Whitfield, Ga.	90%	90	9	200
Florence, S.C.	90%	49	5	103
Saint Tammany, La.	90%	40	4	77
Coweta, Ga.	90%	29	3	72
Woodbury, Iowa	90%	29	3	67
Henry, Ga.	90%	21	2	52
Twin Falls, Idaho	90%	20	2	50
Pottawattamie, Iowa	90%	10	1	31
Gallatin, Mont.	90%	10	1	28
Iredell, N.C.	90%	10	1	28
Deschutes, Ore.	90%	10	1	23

Note: This list includes counties with declines of 90 percent to 100 percent, and that also had at least 20 removals of locally arrested criminal aliens during the time period FY 2019 – FY 2021.

Table 4. Decline in Removals by Criminal Charge Category: Howard County, Texas

Most Serious Criminal Charge Category	Jan.-Sept. 2019	Jan.-Sept. 2021	Pct. Decline
Arson	1	0	100%
Assault	65	18	72%
Burglary	21	3	86%
Commercialized Sexual Offenses	2	0	100%
Dangerous Drugs	196	86	56%
Family Offenses	1	3	
Flight / Escape	8	3	63%
Forgery	10	1	90%
Fraudulent Activities	12	1	92%
General Crimes	5	0	100%
Homicide	7	3	57%
Immigration	185	28	85%
Invasion of Privacy	1	0	100%
Kidnapping	4	1	75%
Larceny	10	1	90%
Obscenity	1	0	100%
Obstructing Judiciary, Congress, Legislature, Etc.	9	1	89%
Obstructing the Police	9	1	89%
Public Peace	1	0	100%
Robbery	12	6	50%
Sex Offenses (Not Involving Assault or Commercialized Sex)	11	1	91%
Sexual Assault	15	6	60%
Smuggling	0	2	
Stolen Property	2	0	100%
Stolen Vehicle	5	2	60%
Traffic Offenses	32	1	97%
Weapon Offenses	30	20	33%
No Criminal Conviction	0	1	
Grand Total	655	189	71%

End Notes

¹ The most recent iteration of the policies is [here](#). For a discussion of the various iterations, implementation, and litigation surrounding the policies, see Andrew R. Arthur, “[Federal Judge Vacates Biden Administration’s Latest Immigration Non-Enforcement Memo](#)”, Center for Immigration Studies, June 15, 2022. The Supreme Court is currently considering a legal challenging these policies, brought by Texas and Louisiana; arguments were held on November 29, 2022.

² See a comparison of ICE enforcement metrics in Jessica M. Vaughan, “[New ICE Report Touts Improved Enforcement – Until Compared to Last Year](#)”, Center for Immigration Studies, March 15, 2022; and “[Deportations Plummet Under Biden Enforcement Policies](#)”, Center for Immigration Studies, December 6, 2021.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ See the Secure Communities [program page](#).

⁵ For example, [section 236\(c\) of the INA](#) says that ICE “shall take into custody” illegal aliens who are released from criminal custody if they have committed certain serious crimes, including drug crimes.

⁶ Amy Howe, “[In U.S. v. Texas, broad questions over immigration enforcement and states’ ability to challenge federal policies](#)”, SCOTUSblog, November 28, 2022.

