



[home](#) > [areas of expertise](#) > [institutions that manage violent conflict](#) > devolution of immigration enforcement

[Faculty Spotlight](#)

[Use of Force and Diplomacy](#)

[Ideas, Identities and Decisional Processes that Affect Security](#)

[Institutions that Manage Violent Conflict](#)

[Graduate Student Research](#)

Sanctuary and the Devolution of Immigration Enforcement after 9/11

Principal Investigator: Mathew Coleman

Since the 1970s, debate about immigration in the United States has been centered on the entry of illegal aliens across the border with Mexico. Up to 80 percent of U.S. spending on immigration is allocated for the U.S.-Mexico border.

Yet the most under-explored change to U.S. immigration policy in recent years has been the shift of control away from the borders to the country's interior. In this project, Coleman examines "boundary policing," or immigration enforcement that is:

- Away from state borders
- Involves local and federal authorities
- Relevant to both documented and undocumented aliens
- Encompasses a range of local and federal law enforcement issues.

Perhaps most remarkable, while some localities have embraced their new role in immigration enforcement, others have passed laws against this type of enforcement in their boundaries. Sometimes contradictory laws cover the same space, making these key sites of conflict in the immigration enforcement landscape.

Coleman argues that the trend toward immigration enforcement in non-border areas was cemented by a 2002 opinion from the Office of Legal Counsel that gave local police the authority to enforce the Immigration and Nationality Act. This ruling prompted the Department of Homeland Security to start a program that deputizes local officers, allowing them to detain immigration violators during the course of routine police work. So far 60 city, county and state police departments have asked to participate.

However, this trend also spurred a counter movement, as select cities, counties and states worried about the "securitization" of immigration, racial profiling, and the erosion of civil rights. Many of these locations passed laws of their own. San Francisco, for example, prohibited the use of city resources for federal immigration purposes and banned



Mathew Coleman
Assistant Professor of
Geography
The Ohio State University

employees from questioning city residents about immigration status.

The result is an uneven patchwork of incompatible immigration laws. In Los Angeles, for example, the county police have agreed to work with Homeland Security, while city law prevents city police from asking residents about immigration status.

In this project, Coleman will

- Focus on how local police became involved with immigration enforcement after 9/11
- Look at recent legal challenges to localized immigration enforcement
- Trace the emergence of sanctuary law in select cities
- Use a series of case studies to investigate points of conflict between the DHS program to work with local police and sanctuary laws
- Collect data on local immigration arrests
- Examine how U.S. localities are becoming sites of conflict over immigration policy amid confusion over the proper place to regulate immigration.

Case studies include Baltimore, Minneapolis, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Los Angeles. Through this project, Coleman hopes to demonstrate the movement of immigration enforcement to non-border areas, and the ways this translates into intensified regulation of immigrant life. His ultimate goal is to compare U.S. immigration enforcement to current research about the European Union, which has experienced a similar shift.

© 2006-09 Mershon Center for International Security Studies

1501 Neil Ave.

Columbus, OH 43201

Phone: 614.292.1681

Fax: 614.292.2407

Email: mershoncenter@osu.edu