

Sanctuary Policies in Local Jurisdictions: Decision Making in Law Enforcement

By Naomi Klinge

The term sanctuary has developed through the years, starting as a religious movement to protect refugees and eventually applying to policies jurisdictions enact that protect immigrants. During the 2016 presidential election, the topic of immigration and sanctuary policies re-entered the national spotlight during debates, dividing local policy makers on the best practices for protecting their communities. Since then, President Donald Trump's presidency has been known for the mass use of social media to call out cities for policy his administration disagrees with.

But there is no legal definition of a "sanctuary" jurisdiction. Several nongovernmental organizations have made lists and maps of counties, cities and states that have enacted what they consider sanctuary jurisdictions, but leaders in some of those jurisdictions have fought to have their names removed. While the Center for Immigration Studies named five Kansas counties as sanctuary jurisdictions, three of them have since been removed from the list. Local media sources have cited some of these sheriffs specifically saying their jurisdictions cooperate fully with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, and that they do not consider their county a sanctuary jurisdiction. One of these sheriffs comes from a county with immigrants making up over 20 percent of its population.

For this reason, this research looks into the decisions sheriffs like these make in order to most effectively protect their communities. Through surveys and interviews with sheriffs and police chiefs, this research examines how the needs of the community and national political discussion about immigration and sanctuary policies influence the decision making of local law enforcement agencies in regards to policies that could be considered "sanctuary."