

Despite budget surge, ICE fails to make US safer

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ANALYSIS

President Trump ran for reelection in 2024, vowing to “carry out the largest deportation operation in American history”. To do so, the administration has tasked immigration and law enforcement agencies with arresting at least 3,000 immigrants a day inside the country — not counting those apprehended at the border. This figure is more than seven times the daily number of interior arrests during Trump’s first term, which averaged just above 400 per day. Trump has repeatedly and falsely portrayed immigrants as violent criminals, and senior administration officials have asserted that they are arresting “the worst of the worst” — those who threaten national security or public safety. But that is not true. While immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than native-born Americans, the administration is not focused on arresting those who do. As the head of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) admitted, the agency has “opened up the whole aperture”. ICE is now arresting broad swaths of immigrants — in some cases, only on the basis of their accent, apparent ethnicity, or work — including people in the United States lawfully. Many immigrants, regardless of status, have been arrested while attending their immigration hearings or during a routine check-in with ICE. In fact, despite an influx of money from Congress that has trans-



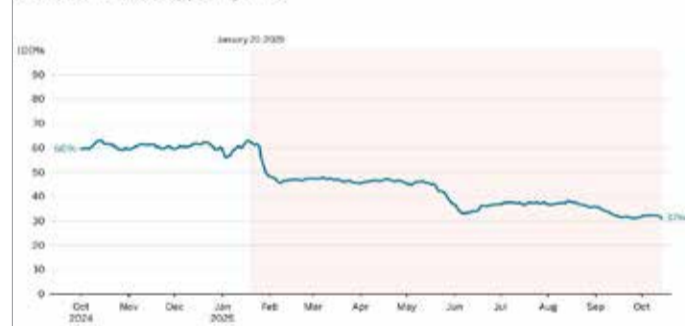
Handcuffed detainees are led into a van by federal agents on South Michigan Avenue as protesters demonstrate on June 4, 2025, outside an ISAP office run by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in the South Loop. **BRIAN CASSELLA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

tion costs the government approximately \$152 per day per person, 38 times the \$4 per day it costs to release someone who doesn’t pose a public safety risk from detention and assign them a case worker to ensure that they show up for key appointments and comply with

land Security Investigations (HSI) agents — almost the subagency’s entire contingent of law enforcement officers — at the expense of their stated mission of combating transnational crimes, such as drug and weapons smuggling, child exploitation, and human trafficking. The result of all these law enforcement personnel being redirected? Arrests have soared, but a diminishing share of those arrested have criminal records. And remarkably, despite ICE tripling its budget since 2024 and more than doubling the number of its officers and agents, the total number of individuals with a criminal history it arrests and detains each day is flat or dropping.

According to data provided by ICE to the Deportation Data Project in response to a Freedom of Information Act request and analyzed by the Brennan Center, the share of immigrants arrested and detained

Since Inauguration Day, the share of arrested and detained immigrants who have convictions has dropped by half.



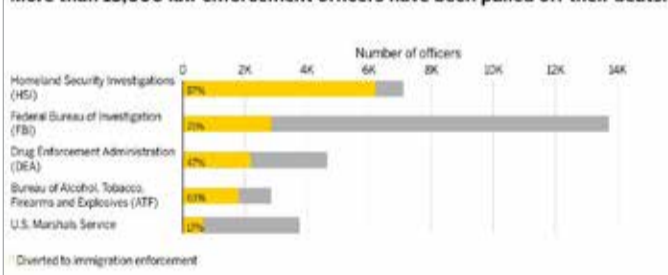
DEPORTATION DATA PROJECT

by ICE with a criminal conviction has fallen dramatically since the start of the Trump administration. In the first two weeks of October 2025, just 31 percent of new detainees had a criminal conviction, compared with 63 percent in the two weeks preceding President Trump’s inauguration.

DHS categorizes people with only misdemeanor or administrative offenses — such as driving with-

out a license — as “convicted criminals,” implying that they are dangerous even if they only have a traffic ticket. Nevertheless, in the most recent data, fewer than one in three immigrants in ICE custody were classified as “convicted criminals” under DHS’s broad definition. And ICE is arresting and detaining those with administrative, misdemeanor, and nonviolent offenses (defined narrowly, consistent with

More than 13,000 law enforcement officers have been pulled off their beats.



DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

formed ICE into the country’s largest law enforcement agency, arrests of immigrants with criminal convictions — particularly for violent crimes — have flatlined. The reason for ICE’s failure to boost arrests of violent criminals is the administration’s singular focus on meeting quotas for total immigrant apprehensions. To boost its numbers, the administration has reassigned law enforcement officers across the federal government from conducting targeted investigations to arresting and detaining people who might pose a threat to the community. Instead, officers are increasingly picking up easy-to-find people with no criminal record because officers suspect they are immigrants.

In past administrations, ICE prioritized arrest and deportation of immigrants who posed a public safety or national security threat for arrest; now, it insists on locking up nearly everyone officers think may be an immigrant while their legal status is assessed. Keeping them in jail during the weeks or months it takes to resolve their cases leaves taxpayers on the hook for millions of dollars a day to imprison non-criminals. Incarceration

Failure to arrest more criminals

To meet the administration’s ambitious quotas, law enforcement agencies across the federal government have diverted agents from criminal investigations to help the 6,000 ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations officers tasked with arresting immigrants. That includes nearly 3,000 FBI agents — nearly one in every five — who have been reassigned to arrest immigrants instead of conducting complex criminal investigations of corruption, espionage, terrorism, cyberattacks, and transnational gangs. It also includes around one in every two Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) agents; two in three Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) agents; and one in five US marshals, based on the most recent available staffing numbers. From within ICE, it also includes 6,000 Home-



Frilei Brás embraces his wife while his children comfort one another on the sofa in the family’s living room in Stoughton, Massachusetts, United States, as he says his goodbyes. Facing the possibility of arrest despite having no criminal record, the undocumented native of Brazil chose to self-deport. **JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF**



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