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Trump Team Focuses Deportations On Immigration Numbers, Not Criminals

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Trump officials concede generating large numbers of deportations, not apprehending criminals, is the administration's chief immigration goal. During his presidential campaign, Donald Trump said on several occasions the primary reason his administration would deport undocumented immigrants was to prevent them from harming Americans. However, a minority of undocumented immigrants have committed serious crimes, and most people without lawful status have lived in the United States for more than 10 years and have jobs and families. By setting arrest quotas for federal agents, Trump officials acknowledge the administration does not intend to prioritize deporting dangerous criminals.

Immigration Agents Given Arrest Quotas

Only days after Donald Trump became president, his deportation policy devolved into assigning arrest quotas, a bureaucratic feature analysts expected. According to [Washington Post](#) reporters Nick Miroff and Maria Sacchetti, "U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials have been directed by Trump officials to aggressively ramp up the number of people they arrest, from a few hundred per day to at least 1,200 to

1,500, because the president has been disappointed with the results of his mass deportation campaign so far, according to four people with knowledge of the briefings.”

Trump administration leadership told senior ICE officials that “each of the agency’s field offices should make 75 arrests per day and managers would be held accountable for missing those targets,” reported the *Washington Post*. “The orders significantly increase the chance that officers will engage in more indiscriminate enforcement tactics or face accusations of civil rights violations as they strain to meet quotas, according to current and former ICE officials.”

This emphasis on numbers over criminals was predicted in an [earlier article](#): “A top priority for U.S. officials involved in the Trump administration’s deportation efforts will likely be to generate large numbers. Analysts expect efforts at targeting criminals or convicting a business owner in a workplace raid will be secondary to the bureaucratic goal of driving up deportation numbers.” (Stuart Anderson, *Forbes*, January 20, 2025)

Trump officials emphasized bureaucratic quotas in his first term. Shaul Schwarz, a filmmaker on the six-part Netflix documentary *Immigration Nation*, had unprecedented access to Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents during the Trump administration. “I think we repeatedly saw a desire to get numbers,” he said in [an interview](#) in 2020. “I think anybody who works in ICE knows it because it was kind of everywhere we went. . . . We definitely saw a lot of agents wanting to hit numbers.”

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Trump Says Immigration Priority Is Criminals Despite The Evidence

After recent raids in Chicago, Donald Trump said. “It’s going very well. We’re getting the bad, hard criminals out.” The *Washington Post* added, “Without evidence, he said: ‘These are murderers. These are people that have been as bad as you get. As bad as anybody you’ve seen. We’re taking them out first.’”

Given that Trump, in and out of office, has highlighted serious crimes by undocumented immigrants, it appears unlikely that hundreds of cases of such individuals committing murders, particularly in one major city, would have escaped the attention of politicians and the media.

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Immigration Arrest Quotas Part Of The Nature Of Bureaucracies

As discussed in a [previous article](#), “Given the nature of bureaucracies, officials will assign a top priority to generating large numbers of arrests without concern for collateral impacts.” When China instituted its one-child policy nationally, agents and bureaucrats at the local level carried it out by enforcing quotas and other numerical targets, according to Tyrene White, author of *China’s Longest Campaign*. The Trump administration’s immigration deportation campaign is following the same bureaucratic pattern.

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