

Raiding the Genome: How the United States Government Is Abusing Its Immigration Powers to Amass DNA for Future Policing

The U.S. government has a message to immigrant communities: we're watching you, at the genetic level.

In 2024, we published *Raiding the Genome: How the United States Government Is Abusing Its Immigration Powers to Amass DNA for Future Policing*. This report was the first in-depth analysis of the drastic expansion of a massive Department of Homeland Security program to take DNA from thousands of people every day. DHS's program operates with essentially no oversight, and the DNA they take is used for criminal policing and prosecution.

* JULY 2025 UPDATE *

In July 2025, we shared updates from our ongoing research about this DNA collection program. The updated information confirms that the database is still growing, at a pace even faster than we anticipated. **Download the July 2025 update. (PDF).**

Download full report (PDF): Raiding the Genome: How the United States Government Is Abusing Its Immigration Powers to Amass DNA for Future Policing

Download just the executive summary (PDF).

Descargue el informe completo (PDF): Asalto Al Genoma: Cómo El Gobierno De Los Estados Unidos Abusa De Sus Facultades En Materia De Inmigración Para Acumular ADN Para Futuras Acciones Policiales

Under a Trump-era Department of Justice rule, DHS can compel DNA samples from anyone the agency “detains.” While limiting DHS DNA collection to only those the agency detains might seem like a serious limitation, our report finds that it is nothing of the sort. The term “detained” in the immigration context is both broad and vague, so as a practical matter almost nobody is categorically excluded from DNA collection by the requirement that they first be “detained.” Once DHS collects DNA, it sends the samples to the FBI, where the FBI adds profiles created from the samples to the nation’s criminal policing DNA database, CODIS, and stores the samples themselves indefinitely. Once in CODIS, the profiles become accessible to police at the local, state, federal, and international levels for use in criminal investigations.

The following is a summary of our findings:

DHS increased the number of “detainee” DNA profiles in CODIS by 5000% in just three years. As of April 2025, DHS had contributed more than 2.6 million people’s profiles.

DHS misleads and intimidates people to collect their DNA. Very few people have refused having their DNA taken.

People of color represent 70% of the people from whom Customs and Border Protection has collected DNA.

CBP has taken DNA from children, teenagers, and elderly people – including at least one four-year-old.

This massive expansion of federal DNA-collecting power is the result of several low-profile administrative sleights of hand — not open democratic debate.

The government is exploiting its immigration powers to collect genetic material at a pace that would not be possible using criminal policing powers.

DHS’s DNA collection program rampantly violates the Fourth Amendment rights of those who are subject to it.

The government keeps DNA samples indefinitely. This is extremely risky, given rapid advances in DNA technology, the lack of strong legal limits on what the government can do with those samples, and increasing political instability in the U.S.

Our political leaders must put an immediate stop to this program. We hope that the information uncovered in this report will aid organizers and advocates working to resist government biometric collection and surveillance practices. Together, we must stop DHS from raiding the genome.