

IMMIGRATION

Seven in 10 ICE arrests under Trump have criminal histories

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EXCLUSIVE — The large majority of **illegal immigrant** arrests by U.S. **Immigration and Customs Enforcement** are criminals who have been convicted or those with pending charges for criminal offenses, according to new data provided to the *Washington Examiner*.

The Trump administration arrested 595,000 illegal immigrants between Jan. 20 and Dec. 11, according to the [Department of Homeland Security](#). ICE, the federal agency tasked with interior immigration enforcement and deportations, revealed that 70%, or about 416,000, have “criminal convictions or pending criminal charges just in the U.S.,” an agency spokesperson said in a statement.

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Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrested Antonio Israel Lazo-Quintanilla, whose only crime in the United States is driving without a license, though he is wanted in El Salvador for aggravated homicide, extortion, possession of drugs, and a litany of other felonies. (ICE)

ICE stipulated that even noncriminals whom its officers arrest may still be public safety concerns.

“This statistic doesn’t account for those wanted for violent crimes in their home country or another country, INTERPOL notices, human rights abusers, gang members, terrorists, etc.,” the ICE spokesperson said. “The list goes on.”

For example, ICE arrested Antonio Israel Lazo-Quintanilla, whose only offense in the United States was driving without a license. However, he is wanted in El Salvador for aggravated homicide, extortion, possession of drugs, and other felonies.

In another example, ICE arrested a Uzbekistan citizen, Akhror Bozorov, for operating a commercial vehicle. Bozorov had no criminal record in the U.S., but was wanted in his home country for his involvement with a terrorist organization.

Despite the [Trump administration’s](#) prioritization of arresting the “worst of the worst,” Democrats and immigrant rights groups continue to criticize ICE for arresting illegal immigrants whose only known offense was illegally entering or residing in the country.

What Trump promised

On Jan. 20, Trump previewed in his inaugural address that he would “begin the process of returning millions and millions of criminal aliens back to the places from which they came.”

Trump and Vice President [JD Vance](#) have estimated that between 500,000 and 1 million criminal illegal immigrants are residing in the country.

In addition to criminals, the Trump administration also stated its desire to remove illegal immigrants who have already been ordered by a federal immigration judge to be deported, but whom ICE has not physically removed yet.

At last count, roughly 1.5 million people had been ordered deported but had yet to be removed from the U.S., according to a July [report](#) by the *New York Post*. The same report cited 425,000 criminal illegal immigrants still at large in the U.S. and under ICE's scope.

White House "border czar" [Tom Homan](#) warned in a conversation with the *Washington Examiner* in December 2024 of [collateral arrests](#), or detaining people found in vehicles, workplaces, or homes whom officers were not out to arrest.

ICE moved to ramp up arrests and deportations on Day One of the second Trump administration. When arrests were not soaring one month into Trump's term, the administration [pushed aside](#) acting ICE Director Caleb Vitello due to higher-ups' concerns that arrests and deportations had not occurred fast enough.

How ICE operates

ICE finds many of its leads on who to arrest based on information received from state and local police departments, which search federal databases and alert ICE that an illegal immigrant has been arrested locally. ICE has just 6,500 officers who arrest and remove illegal immigrants.

Because many U.S. cities do not comply with ICE by turning over those in custody upon their release, the agency must prioritize who it chooses to arrest, according to Andrew Arthur, a former **immigration** judge and now a resident fellow in law and policy for the Center of Immigration Studies in Washington.

“Most detainees come from state and local arrests,” Arthur said. “Traffic stops are the most common.”

As seen during a *Washington Examiner* ride-along with Florida Highway Patrol in southeast **Florida** in July, illegal immigrants who were discovered during traffic stops were turned over to federal immigration authorities.

While many were not the “worst of the worst” and did not have criminal histories, they will be counted in ICE’s arrests, but not because ICE sought out noncriminals.

What the data show

ICE’s data showed that between February and April, roughly 75% of those arrested had a criminal history, which includes those with convictions and those with pending charges. By May, just over 67% of illegal immigrants arrested had criminal histories.

In late spring, ICE was **instructed by** White House deputy chief of staff for policy **Stephen Miller** to target immigrants at courthouses, farms, Home Depots, and 7-Eleven stores — expanding arrests and, sometimes, the type of person arrested.

Kathleen Bush-Joseph, an attorney and policy analyst for the Migration Policy Institute in Washington, explained that encouraging ICE officers to go into places that they have not historically targeted to make arrests led to more arrests of people without criminal records.

“Where they’re arresting people is probably also really impacting these numbers because when you think about who is getting picked up at an ICE check-in or at immigration court, I would think that those would not necessarily be these criminal conviction or pending criminal charge people,” Bush-Joseph said. “On the contrary, they might be people who’ve been here and who were applying for asylum or other relief.”

Border Patrol agents from U.S. **Customs and Border Protection** were sent to Los Angeles to assist ICE and federal agents from the **Justice Department**. The operation received considerable blowback from some in the community and made national headlines for weeks — but it proved effective.

In early fall, the Trump administration sent ICE and CBP personnel into Washington and Chicago. Border agents and customs officers were meant to help ICE boost arrests and increase manpower as they went out into communities searching for specific people.

Now, more than 10 months since the deportation operation began, 70% of all illegal immigrants arrested are convicted criminals or facing criminal charges.

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David Bier, director of immigration studies at the libertarian **Cato Institute** think tank in Washington, has maintained that just 35% of all illegal immigrants booked into detention centers since the start of fiscal 2025 in October 2024 have a criminal conviction, according to his blog [post](#).

That would mean the other roughly one-third of arrests had pending criminal charges and were going through the justice system, but had not yet been found guilty. Bier suggested that criminal offenses in many cases were less serious crimes.