

Immigration

How ICE is arresting soaring numbers of immigrants with no criminal record

Federal immigration officers are shifting their targets and tactics to increase arrests. More than half of those detained last month did not have a criminal record.

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By [David Nakamura](#) and [Emmanuel Martinez](#)

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is detaining more immigrants who do not have a criminal record than at any other point since President Donald Trump returned to the White House last year, according to newly released government data.

Trump officials have consistently stated that their goal is to keep Americans safe by targeting enforcement against “the worst of the worst” — undocumented immigrants who have committed violent crimes or repeated offenses. The new data, however, shows that more than half of all the people ICE arrested in July did not have a criminal record, the highest single-month total since January 2025.

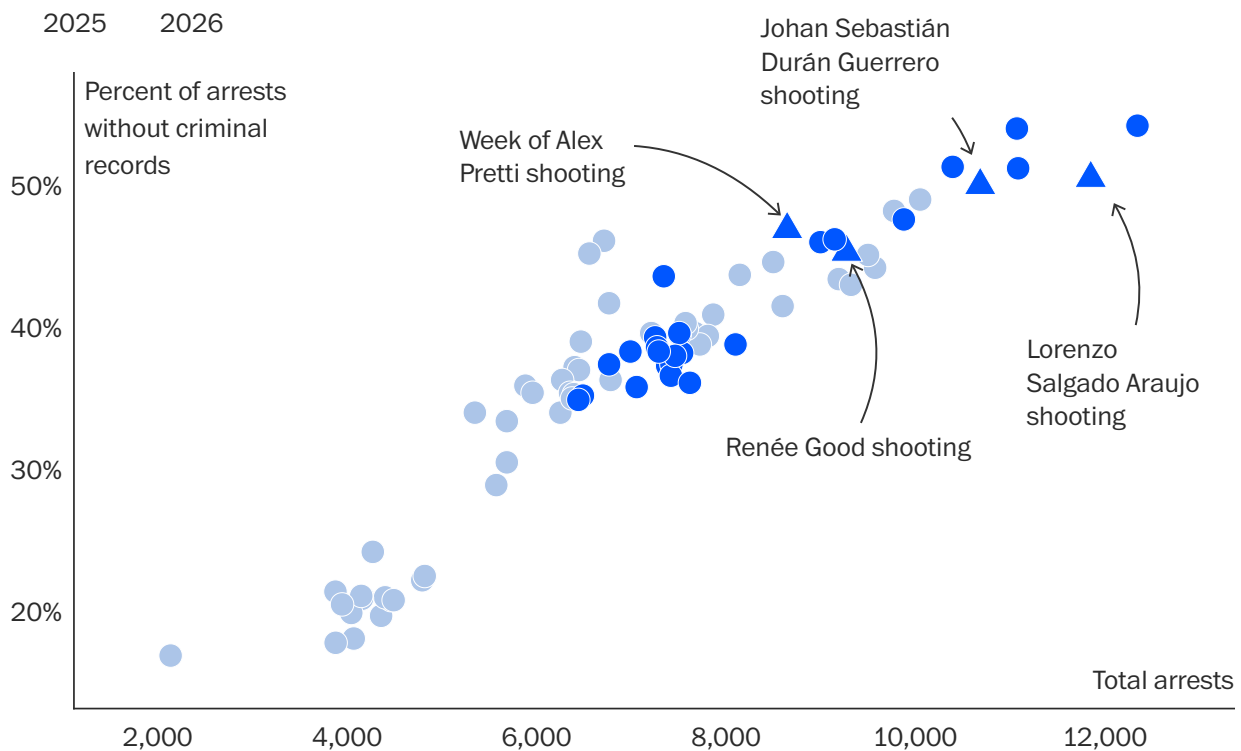
The shift toward targeting more people with civil immigration violations but no criminal charges has helped ICE achieve record numbers of overall arrests. In all, federal authorities detained more than 49,000 migrants in July, the highest total during Trump's second administration, according to a Washington Post analysis of government data. The ICE arrest data was made public by the Deportation Data Project, an outside group that obtained the material through a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit.

Immigration lawyers and analysts said the numbers reflect the Department of Homeland Security's evolving approach as officials rush to fulfill Trump's goals for the mass deportation campaign and more people lose protections shielding them from removal. The administration has canceled temporary protected status for hundreds of thousands of immigrants who fled dangerous countries and also arrested people with pending asylum claims and green-card applications who were not previously a target for enforcement.

“There is pressure on ICE to arrest more people and that leads them to stop trying to go after the worst of the worst and arrest the person who is easiest to locate on any given day,” said Julia Gelatt, an analyst at the Migration Policy Institute. “When Americans think of who they’d like to see ICE focus on, they think bad guys — murders and others serious criminals. They do not think about people who broke immigration laws and are otherwise law-abiding.”

ICE targets those without criminal records

ICE has detained a higher share of people with no criminal record as it increases the total number of arrests.



Data as of Aug 1. Each dot represents a week during the Trump administration.

Source: Immigration Customs and Enforcement

In an email response to questions from The Post, a DHS spokesperson said the information used for this story has “not been reviewed, audited or given context” and said it is being used to “peddle a false narrative.” The spokesperson claimed that nearly 70 percent of the people ICE has arrested have criminal convictions or pending criminal charges, a figure the agency has cited repeatedly since last year.

“Every single one of these individuals committed a crime when they came into this country illegally,” the spokesperson said.

In fact, many of those detained entered the country legally, for example, on a visa that has since expired. Those individuals are generally facing civil immigration violations, not criminal charges, and they have increasingly become a focus of enforcement operations.

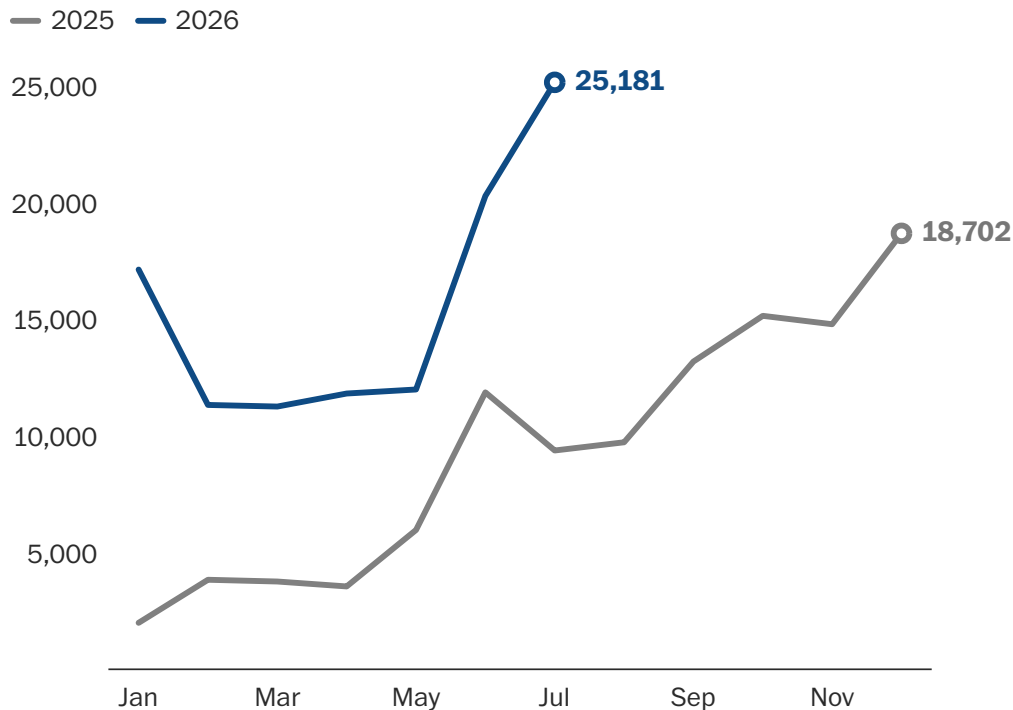
ICE has steadily ramped up detentions since arrests dropped below 30,000 in February amid public outrage over the killings the previous month of two American citizens, Renée Good and Alex Pretti, by immigration officers in Minneapolis.

Since then, the number of people being detained has risen each month, climbing to more than 42,500 in June and increasing again in July, the federal data shows.

The jump coincides with a major expansion of DHS’s enforcement capabilities made possible after Congress last year approved more than \$170 billion in additional funding. The administration has hired thousands of additional ICE and Border Patrol officers, purchased new surveillance technology and added more immigrant detention facilities.

ICE has arrested more people with no criminal record this year

ICE has arrested more people with no criminal record in the first seven months of this year than it did in all of 2025.



4,000 people without criminal records arrested between Aug. 1 and 6.

Source: Immigration Customs and Enforcement

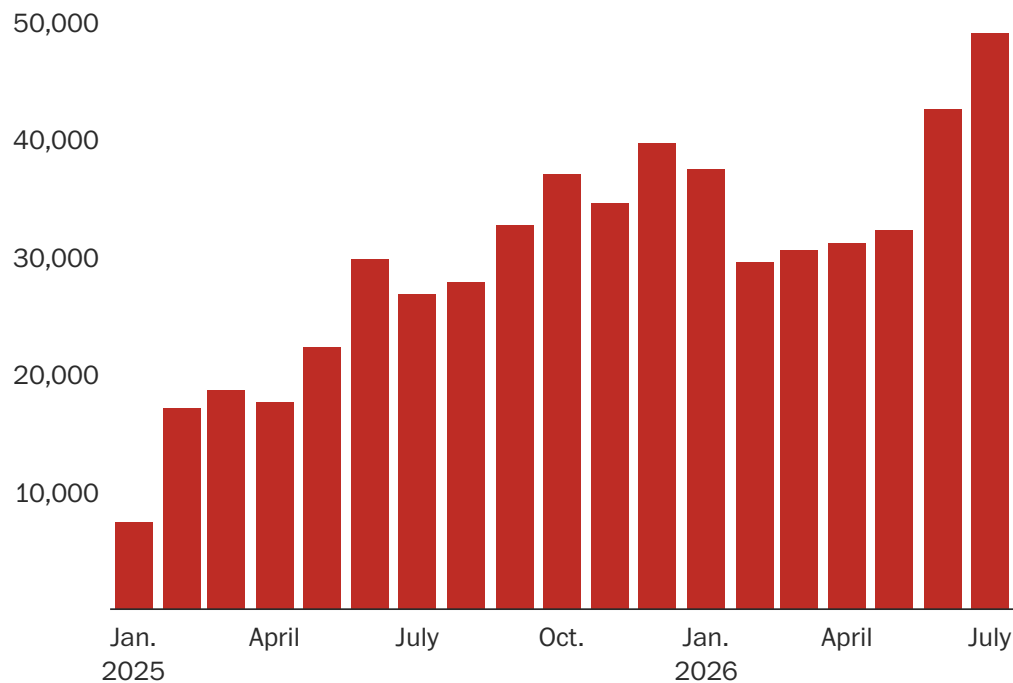
The administration has also been expanding where and how it makes arrests. New partnerships with scores of local law enforcement agencies, many in conservative areas of the country, have allowed ICE to deputize officers and assist them in making immigration arrests.

“The spikes are happening at airports and everywhere they can,” said Margy O’Herron, an expert on national security and immigration law at the Brennan Center for Justice. “They are canceling visas for people who apply for asylum, folks who had some protection from deportation before — people who the government knows who they are and knows where they live.”

ICE has arrested more than half a million people since Trump returned to office, and nearly 40 percent do not have a criminal record. As of Aug. 6, ICE had detained more people without a criminal record this year than in all of 2025. The administration has also already exceeded the number of people ICE detained during all of President Joe Biden’s presidency, as well as Trump’s first term and President Barack Obama’s last.

Monthly arrests by ICE during Trump's second administration

ICE has arrested more than 500,000 people since Trump returned to the White House.



Data as of Aug 6.

Source: Immigration Customs and Enforcement

Art Arthur, a fellow at the Center for Immigration Studies, which advocates for stricter immigration controls, said the added resources at DHS have led to more arrests. He noted that Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin has increased efforts to persuade undocumented immigrants to voluntarily leave the country, including through cash stipends of \$2,600.

Immigrants would not be willing to take that offer if there was no legitimate threat of being arrested and deported, Arthur said.

“You’re not going to get noncriminal aliens who have been here three years to leave unless there is a threat of enforcement,” he said.

The killings of Good and Pretti in Minneapolis led to a sharp drop in public support for Trump’s deportation agenda. The backlash contributed to the president’s decision to install Mullin as Homeland Security secretary. He replaced Kristi L. Noem, whose leadership was marked by a spate of officer-involved shootings and large-scale ICE and Border Patrol raids in U.S. cities.

Mullin has pursued what he characterized as a quieter approach that is focused less on showy displays of force.

The White House has pressed DHS to arrest at least 2,000 migrants a day, a target ICE achieved on four days over the summer. On July 13, an ICE officer fatally shot Johan Sebastián Durán Guerrero, a 25-year-old Colombian immigrant, during a traffic stop in Biddeford, Maine.

ICE has maintained a high pace of arrests since then, averaging nearly 1,500 detentions a day, the data shows.

Democrats have assailed the administration's approach, saying federal officers have terrorized immigrant communities, including children and the elderly. Maryland Gov. Wes Moore (D) said Tuesday that "a mere fraction" of more than 1,300 people detained by ICE in the past two weeks have criminal records.

Moore said his state would work with the federal government to apprehend violent offenders. But he said the broad targeting of immigrants has undermined the economy and frayed trust between immigrant communities and law enforcement.

"It does not make us safer," Moore said in a statement.

In six states, arrests of immigrants without criminal records have more than doubled thus far in 2026 compared to all of last year. The largest jump has come in Maine, where ICE arrested 125 people in 2025 and already has detained about 330 this year. Arrests in Alabama, Wyoming, Idaho, Mississippi and Missouri also more than doubled.

Arrests decreased in more than 20 states, with the largest decline coming in the District of Columbia. ICE surged operations in the nation's capital last year and, all told, arrested 1,200 people without criminal records in 2025. This year, ICE has thus far arrested 72 such immigrants in the city.

What readers are saying

The comments reflect a heated debate on immigration enforcement under the Trump administration, with many expressing concern over the arrest and deportation of immigrants without criminal records. Some commenters argue that illegal entry itself is a crime warranting deportation,... [Show more](#)

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