

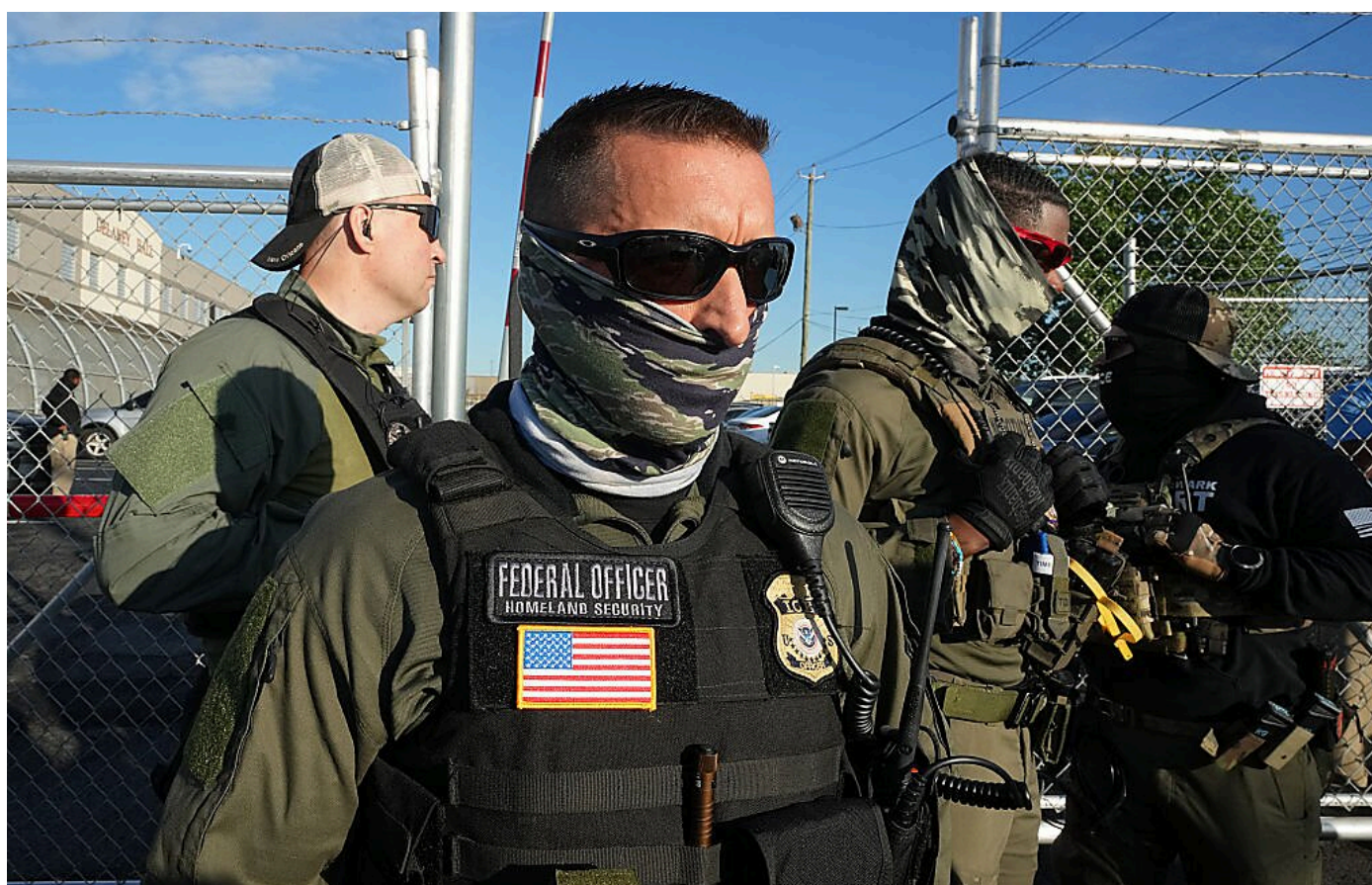
ICE Has Diverted Over 25,000 Officers from Their Jobs

cato.org/blog/ice-has-diverted-over-25000-officers-their-jobs

By David J. Bier

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Shortly after this post was published, I received a [new disclosure from ICE](#) on the number of total personnel (agents and non-agents) who were diverted to ICE in August, which I have added below. DHS also [deleted a post](#) that I cited below without explanation.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is diverting criminal law enforcement agents away from their investigations and enforcement responsibilities to conduct civil immigration enforcement operations on a massive scale. New data highlight how widespread this misuse of government personnel and resources is. Congress should prevent this diversion of appropriated funds in the next government spending bill.

According to [ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations \(ERO\) records](#) given by ERO to someone outside the agency who shared it with Cato, ICE is receiving assistance from nearly 17,000 non-ERO agents, including 14,500 federal criminal law enforcement officers. Separately, the DHS

[revealed](#) in a [now-deleted post](#) yesterday that ICE has already trained and unleashed 8,501 state and local police as 287(g) Task Force Officers who can independently conduct ICE arrests. It states that it has over 2,000 more in training.

This diversion is not a small part of many of these agencies. It includes one in five [US marshals](#) (650 of 3,892), one in five [FBI agents](#) (2,840 of 13,700), half of [DEA agents](#) (2,181 of 4,620), over two-thirds of [the ATF](#) (1,778 of 2,572), and nearly 90 percent of [Homeland Security Investigations](#) (6,198 of 7,100).

For comparison, there are only [6,100 ICE ERO officers](#), meaning that ICE ERO has diverted four times the size of its agency into the deportation effort. Only one in five of the officials engaged in mass deportation are actually ICE ERO removal officers. These numbers actually understate the degree of diversion because they only include Border Patrol agents insofar as they are directly working with ICE. In reality, the Border Patrol is conducting arrests under its own authority and direction far into the interior of the United States.

Shortly after this post was published, I received a [new disclosure from ICE](#) that shows the number of total personnel (agents and non-agents) diverted to help ERO from August 5 to August 28. These numbers are even more staggering: 42,153 people, including 28,390 from federal law enforcement agencies. This diversion has significantly curtailed the government's capacity to address criminal activity in the United States.

Diversion Within the Department of Homeland Security

On his first day in office, President Trump signed [an executive order](#) mandating that every component of the DHS prioritize noncriminal civil violations of immigration law over its criminal law responsibilities.

Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) is suspending investigations into human trafficking, child exploitation, cybercrime, weapons export controls, intellectual property theft, drugs, and terrorism to focus on arresting immigrants. Former-HSI supervisory agent Chris Cappannelli [told](#) local media that HSI agents “were afraid this was going to happen,” adding that “this is going to be a total train wreck.” Another former-HSI official [argued](#) that because of HSI's focus on child exploitation and making thousands of arrests each year, “There's a good argument that these changes will lead to some child victims continuing to be exploited.”

Border Patrol agents [are being reassigned](#) away from the border to conduct workplace raids inside the United States. Border Patrol is arresting hundreds of immigrants in the interior in [every border state](#): [California](#), [Maine](#), [Idaho](#), [Montana](#), [Vermont](#), [upstate New York](#), [Florida](#), [Washington](#), [Arizona](#), [Mississippi](#), and [Louisiana](#). In 1986, Congress attempted to restrict Border Patrol's

operations on farms near the border by [requiring warrants](#). Border Patrol has already arrested and detained a US citizen. Again, the table above does not include most of the agents involved in these arrests.

US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)—which is supposed to adjudicate requests for benefits and is [legally prohibited](#) from enforcement has [pressured staff](#), including refugee officers whose programs have been terminated, to be detailed to ICE raids, and [hundreds](#) have agreed. It is also issuing [Notices to Appear](#) in immigration court for removal proceedings. From February to June 2025, they [referred 26,700](#) applicants to removal proceedings, [allowing](#) ICE access to all of its data to identify potential targets. USCIS is also reporting applicants directly to ICE and staging [benefits](#) interviews as a ruse to set up immigrants, like [this spouse of a US citizen](#), for an ICE arrest, and it is [reporting applicants](#) to ICE.

Diversion of Other Federal Law Enforcement

Since the inauguration, ICE has co-opted almost every federal law enforcement agency to conduct immigration enforcement. As a result, four times as many non-ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations (ICE-ERO) officers are involved in removal operations as ICE-ERO officers.

Deputization of non-immigration law enforcement: On January 22, 2025, Acting DHS Secretary Emil Bove [deputized](#) DOJ law enforcement entities to conduct immigration enforcement. This allowed these officers to begin making civil immigration arrests immediately, despite zero training in immigration law or policy. It also meant they would be diverted from their primary *criminal* law enforcement duties.

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) [had shifted](#) about a quarter of its personnel (2,500) and, according to the recent disclosure, nearly half of its agents to deportation efforts (2,200). Special Agent in Charge Brian Clark [admitted](#), “That is new to DEA. We’ve always only done drugs and narcotics.” According to TRAC, the number of criminal referrals from the DEA [had fallen](#) 10 percent from January to June 2025.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has transferred “[thousands](#)” of its employees to immigration enforcement, including “special agents, intel analysts, linguists, and professional staff.” In February, the [Wall Street Journal](#) reported: “One agent who investigates child exploitation was recently directed to help the Department of Homeland Security with immigration work. A supervisor in counterintelligence received similar orders.” According to [NBC News](#), FBI agents “warned about a new requirement that FBI employees across the country, including some who specialize in national security, spend significant amounts of time helping” ICE. ICE returned some terrorism investigators to the FBI [in June](#) after a terrorist attack, effectively admitting they had compromised national security.

Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives [had moved](#) about 80 percent of its workforce into immigration enforcement as of March 2025, so the current total of about 70 percent shows that perhaps the agency has slightly reevaluated the importance of its work. According to TRAC, the

number of criminal referrals from ATF [had fallen](#) 14 percent from January to June 2025.

The US Marshals Service was deputized by the same Bove memo. According to the most recent numbers, about one in five agents were diverted from the US Marshals. According to TRAC, the number of criminal referrals from the Marshals Service [had fallen](#) 13 percent from January to June 2025.

The Internal Revenue Service deputized agents in response to [a February request](#) from DHS Secretary Kristi Noem. The acting IRS commissioner [resigned](#) in April over an ICE-IRS data sharing agreement, but the use of agents goes beyond that. IRS is even [issuing press releases](#) about prosecuting people for illegal entry cases with no tax connection whatsoever, which it is participating in because of “Operation Take Back America.”

The US State Department Security Service started performing immigration enforcement after a [February memo](#) from DHS Secretary Kristi Noem deputized up to 600 agents responsible for protecting diplomats and consular personnel.

US Postal Service Inspection Service police [began](#) sharing data with ICE in April to help track the location of intended targets, and they are now participating in arrests. The USPS Inspection Service [has](#) 450 police officers and 1,250 inspectors whose usual jobs are keeping out child pornography and drugs from the mail. “We want to play well,” [said](#) a USPS official, indicating they were being dragged into this. For some reason, USPS is not listed in the data given to my source outside the agency.

The Department of Justice (DOJ) criminal division was mandated by [a memorandum](#) issued by the acting deputy attorney general on January 21 to “pursue charges relating to criminal immigration-related violations when such violations are presented,” regardless of how minor they are or what other cases are presented. Unlike other agency shifts, this one was mandated by President Trump in his January 20 executive order.

US Bureau of Prisons personnel [were](#) deputized by DHS in January. Federal prisons [are being](#) used to house an unreported number of immigrant detainees. According to the Associated Press, the Bureau of Prisons was already understaffed and facing serious internal problems.

National Guard: In June, President Trump [authorized](#) the National Guard to assist ICE operations and detain individuals.

State and Local Law Enforcement Diversion

States and localities unwilling to cooperate: President Trump is attempting to coerce state and local law enforcement in so-called “sanctuary jurisdictions.” Although the case [was dismissed](#), the Justice Department sued Chicago for allegedly failing to follow federal law. In an identical effort, it [has sued](#) Los Angeles and is attempting to withhold funding from other cities that refuse to fully cooperate with ICE. The funding order has [been blocked](#).

States and localities willing to cooperate: Since January, the number of state and local agencies participating in 287(g) has [increased](#) sevenfold, growing by nearly 100 each month. As of September, there [were](#) nearly 1,000 287(g) agreements. For the first time in 15 years, state and local officers at hundreds of agencies can now arrest individuals solely based on their purported removability under the task force model. As of September, there [were](#) 8,501 “Task Force Officers” who can conduct immigration arrests without coordinating with ICE. There were over 2,000 more in training.

The Task Force agreement contrasts with arrests or detentions at the explicit request of ICE. This was the model that was largely discontinued after the Justice Department found [repeated evidence](#) of racial profiling by those officers. But now the Justice Department is actively promoting racial profiling. We already have proof that Florida police [are engaged in racial profiling](#) under 287(g), using [pretextual stops](#) to interrogate Hispanics, and [arresting US citizens](#).

The resource diversion from ICE to other agencies explains the extreme rise in the number of ICE arrests. Although Trump’s team continues to claim that the rise in arrests is because the Biden administration supported “open borders,” the reality is that ICE arrests are up in large part because the Trump administration has simply taken agents and appropriations from other agencies to carry out these arrests.

Some of these federal agents have jobs of dubious importance, but Congress appropriated funds for those purposes, so agencies should use those funds to enforce the laws within their jurisdiction in a way that best protects the public. Moreover, it is impossible to fathom why the federal government would prioritize civil immigration offenses by non-criminal immigrants—[65 percent of whom have no criminal convictions of any kind](#)—over people suspected of or convicted of serious criminal conduct.

All federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies should prioritize protecting individuals from threats to their rights. Diverting law enforcement away from their duties investigating terrorist threats, child trafficking, and violent crimes to arrest people for minor violations of civil law makes Americans less safe.