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COMMENTARY

ICE expansion has outpaced accountability. What are the remedies?

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- Many cities have seen ICE surges, including Washington, DC, and Minneapolis.
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- A push to double the ICE workforce, concurrent with much reduced training for recruits, raises concerns about the qualifications of quickly deployed new agents.
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- As ICE continues to face allegations over its methods, there are practical measures that can be implemented immediately to safeguard both national security and human rights.
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ICE has [deported ↗](#) roughly 540,000 people since Trump took office for his second presidential term in January 2025.

On January 7, 2026, an ICE agent killed an American citizen. Renee Nicole Good, a 37-year-old mother living in Minneapolis, was [shot to death in her vehicle ↗](#) by ICE agent Jonathan Ross. Good's death is now ruled a [homicide ↗](#) by the Hennepin County Medical Examiner. Since an ICE agent committed the killing, the U.S. Attorney's Office [claimed ↗](#) exclusive federal jurisdiction and blocked Minnesota state officials from obtaining evidence.

On January 24, 2026, another American citizen was killed during an ICE operation. Alex Pretti, a 37-year-old intensive care nurse also from Minneapolis, was shot to death in the street by a yet-unnamed agent. Federal authorities have described the shooting as an act of self-defense, but [multiple videos of the encounter appear to conflict with that account ↗](#), showing Pretti unarmed and being subdued at the time he

was shot. This analysis is being published in the aftermath of the incident, while much about it is under investigation and still unknown.

Some people may call it ironic that the city where George Floyd was murdered is the same one where two white citizens were killed during protests against what others refer to as a hostile military [government takeover](#) ↗. We call it, unfortunately, predictable. Many cities have seen ICE surges, including Washington, DC, Memphis, Nashville, Atlanta, Charlotte, New Orleans, Brownsville, TX, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Newark, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Indianapolis, and Minneapolis.

In several of these places, there are reports of ICE using excessive force, such as in the case of [Julio Sosa-Celis](#) ↗, and of U.S. citizens being arrested or detained based on their [accent or appearance](#) ↗, including [Native Americans](#) ↗. This is also unfortunately predictable, as [work from Brookings has identified how racial profiling by ICE would impact US citizens \(https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-impact-of-deportation-policy-changes-on-latino-immigrant-communities/\)](#) who are perceived to be immigrants from particular countries. The arrests of [Ramon Menera](#) ↗ and [Chong Ly Thao](#) ↗ are emblematic of this pattern.

On January 20, a [5-year-old](#) ↗ with a pending asylum case was apprehended by ICE as he arrived home from preschool. School officials say he was used “as bait” to attempt to arrest other family members and members of his community.

Despite the Trump administration claiming they are targeting criminals, [one-third](#) ↗ of people arrested do not have a criminal record. In over 50 cases, ICE has allegedly [busted out car windows](#) ↗ to justify arrests. Overall, [32 people died \(https://www.brookings.edu/articles/what-will-2026-bring-for-us-migration-policy/\)](#) while in ICE custody in 2025.

In response to ICE operations, Minneapolis and other cities have seen tens of thousands of protesters descend into the streets.

Absolute immunity, federal power, and echoes of the Civil Rights era

The Trump administration has argued for “[absolute immunity](#) ↗” for ICE officers, which would lead to lawsuits being dismissed without the investigative discovery phase. The public feels differently: 60% of Americans believe [ICE uses excessive force](#) ↗.

Absolute immunity, compared to qualified immunity, protects agents regardless of whether they knowingly violate “clearly established” laws regarding excessive force or probable cause.

Sociologists and political scientists situate ICE’s actions as representing a [crisis of legitimacy and a structural violence regime ↗](#) infiltrating the criminal justice system. What that means is that American streets have felt dystopian in ways that mirror less politically-stable countries. Police have taken a back seat in the headlines, though incidents of excessive force from law enforcement continue to occur ([police ↗](#) killed over 1,300 people in 2025, despite local reforms to counter police violence and bias—a number that is higher than any year over the past decade, except for 2024).

We are also seeing Trump “federalize” the National Guard to support federal law enforcement operations as logistical support. This approach has been critiqued by some who view the Trump administration as being in violation of the [Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 ↗](#), which prohibits the use of the military as domestic law enforcement. In December 2025, the Supreme Court ruled that the federal government cannot use the National Guard for normal enforcement. Violence against National Guard members involved in domestic operations has also occurred, as in the case of [Sarah Beckstrom ↗](#), a member of the West Virginia National Guard, who was killed the day before Thanksgiving by Rahmanullah Lakanwal, an Afghan national who also shot [Staff Sergeant Andrew Wolfe ↗](#) in the head. Sgt. Wolfe recently started breathing on his own and standing with assistance.

Collectively, today’s images of law enforcement interactions with people living in the U.S. are reminiscent of an unstable Civil Rights movement period. But at that time, the National Guard and local police were doing the enforcement, not ICE. This is an important distinction that makes the current phase feel much different than prior eras of civil unrest. Sanchez, an author of this piece who has studied immigration and politics for decades, argues that the actions of ICE officers and statements from the Trump administration have radically shifted societal norms in ways that will have lasting consequences.

How ICE agents are being recruited today

ICE was formed in 2003 as part of a reorganization following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. ICE is housed in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Different from local police, who report to mayors and county executives (or governors,

in the case of state agencies), and the National Guard, who mostly report to governors as a military force, ICE is part of a federal agency where the president has more influence. While previous presidents have primarily deployed Border Patrol to enforce immigration violations at the border and used Homeland Security to investigate more severe criminal cases related to drug and human trafficking, President Trump has been much more likely to deploy the [Enforcement and Removal Operations \(ERO\) Division](#) within ICE to actively seek out people whom agents suspect of being illegal.

What makes this wave of ICE action different is how agents are being recruited and trained. With about \$170 billion going to immigration enforcement and border security from Trump's "[One Big Beautiful Bill Act](#)," ICE has significantly [expanded hiring](#). The agency is giving \$50,000 signing bonuses and providing student loan forgiveness with the goal of doubling its workforce and meeting the president's benchmark of deporting one million people annually. In doing so, ICE has [lowered](#) the age limit of its recruits from 21 to 18 and waived the 37-year-old hiring cap; these age boundaries apply to most federal law enforcement agencies to ensure the agents' physical fitness. Since Trump retook office, ICE has [hired](#) over 12,000 new agents and expanded its headcount to over 22,000. However, there are reports of a decrease in rigor for selection: Investigative journalist [Laura Jadeed](#) reported attending an ICE career expo and being hired after six minutes without completing any background paperwork.

In her forthcoming book *Cutting the Government: The Right Way and the Wrong Way*, Brookings Senior Fellow Elaine Kamarck argues that ICE's hiring and personnel protocols are further complicated by its heavy reliance on other agencies to carry out immigration enforcement. She notes a [Cato Institute](#) study finding that ICE receives assistance from nearly 17,000 non-ERO personnel (including roughly 14,500 federal criminal-law-enforcement officers), highlighting how immigration enforcement is diffused across multiple agencies. FBI agents are moved to assist ICE, which means that other functions, such as counterterrorism, have to be carried out with fewer people and resources. Agents in the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) have also been transferred to assist with deportations. The Trump administration has also shifted roughly 600 Department of Defense lawyers (with only two weeks of training) to address the massive immigration backlog from [DHS](#).

Lower training standards

In addition to questionable hiring practices and leaving potential gaps in the nation's other law enforcement needs, shortened training is problematic. The ICE Academy has been reduced from 22 weeks to 8 weeks or [47 days ↗](#) (a number supposedly chosen because Trump is the 47th president). The previously required 5 weeks of Spanish language training were removed, and agents are being told to rely on mobile apps for translation. Instead of a focus on understanding the Immigration and Nationality Act, trainees are engaging in more tactical and operational drills. Instead of a 4-week in-person training, police officers being deputized to work with ICE are now only required to do a 40-hour online course.

This watering down of hiring and training standards is concerning. Ray, the co-author of this article, has served on Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST) commissions to help psychologists better evaluate police applicants for bias. One common trend over the past few years was that short-staffed police departments increasingly accepted applicants who would have been rejected in years prior. These hiring challenges raise, then, an urgent question: who are the new ICE recruits, and are their qualifications sufficient if they are receiving less training than before and yet being quickly deployed into U.S. communities? Ray has researched law enforcement for over 15 years, trained police officers, helped develop a virtual reality training program for law enforcement, and testified before Congress on policing. Simply put, training *cannot* be rushed and often should be increased.

The lack of training leads to mistakes. In law enforcement, mistakes get people killed.

Steps to reduce violence immediately

Accordingly, there are a series of measures that can be implemented immediately to reduce the use of force and improve decision-making.

First, hiring standards should be improved. ICE agents' files should be cross-checked with state-level misconduct files. This aligns with Texas's [Wandering Officer Law ↗](#) to prevent people who were fired or resigned due to misconduct from working in law enforcement.

Second, training should be enhanced. De-escalation training, such as [Jigsaw's virtual reality training ↗](#), can improve communication and decision-making in high-stakes situations. This training is mobile and can be easily deployed in various settings.

Third, Duty to Intervene should be mandated. Law enforcement agents, regardless of agency, should prevent a fellow officer or agent from using excessive force. This recommendation aligns with the Minneapolis Police Department's cross-agency intervention policy.

Fourth, transparency must improve. Agents should use body-worn cameras and official vehicles with insignia, and masks that cover the faces of agents should not be allowed. This recommendation aligns with laws requiring that agents "[unmask ↗](#)" or "de-mask," with the assumption that more transparency will lead to reduced use of force.

Fifth, absolute immunity should be removed, and investigations into instances of wrongdoing by federal agents should be pursued.

There are other proposals and decisions of note that are aiming to address actions by ICE:

- Lawmakers are already discussing [reforms ↗](#) that include some of the recommendations mentioned above, such as requiring agents to provide first aid (when Good was killed, ICE agents did not allow a physician at the scene to render aid) or [prohibiting ↗](#) provisional hiring without a complete background check.
- A Minnesota federal judge restricted ICE's use of [retaliation ↗](#) against peaceful protesters. Some readers may be thinking: *Isn't this already the law?* Well, this is the point. The legal and cultural norms that most Americans assumed were cemented into our democratic culture have been so upended that judges have to restate the basics of constitutional protest rights.
- [Maryland is discussing measures ↗](#) to prohibit people who join ICE from obtaining law enforcement jobs in the state. Critics argue that employees working for the federal government cannot be discriminated against when pursuing employment.
- Finally, the [DHS appropriation bill ↗](#) that Congress aims to pass by the end of January would require DHS to spend \$20 million on body cameras for immigration enforcement agents and direct the department to expand training on conflict de-escalation during public interactions. In the aftermath of Pretti's killing, a growing number of Democratic senators [have announced ↗](#) that they will not support the bill, increasing the chances of another government shutdown.

Altogether, as ICE continues to face allegations over its methods, fostering a system built on fairness and respect for human rights becomes paramount. By addressing these concerns, the U.S. can strive toward a more just approach to immigration enforcement.

Ultimately, the goal should be to safeguard two things at the same time: national security, and the dignity and rights of every individual within our borders.

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