ICE Wants Local Police to Enforce Immigration Law. These Officers Signed Up.

Sheriff's deputies in Laramie County, Wyo., briefly detained a man from Venezuela after a traffic stop last month. The sheriff's department in the county has an agreement with the federal government to perform immigration arrests. Todd Heisler for The New York Times

By Allison McCann

The reporter joined a traffic enforcement operation conducted by Wyoming sheriff's deputies who have been certified as immigration officers.

June 12, 2026

Early on a Tuesday morning last month, the sky still black, a group of deputies from the Laramie County sheriff's office set out to patrol two major interstates that cross their corner of southeast Wyoming. Over the course of five hours, they made 41 traffic stops, issued 12 citations, made two criminal arrests and — through a new partnership with Immigration and Customs Enforcement — detained seven immigrants.

One person was asleep in the backseat of a silver pickup truck stopped for a too-dim rear license plate light. Two passengers in a minivan that had been going 12 miles per hour over the limit were also taken into custody. Four others were detained after their pickup, too, was stopped for speeding.

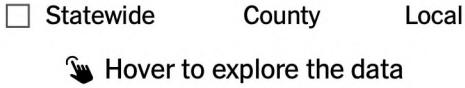
All were booked into the county jail to await transfer to an ICE detention facility. The deputies working the immigration operation earned a combined $1,325 in overtime courtesy of the federal government.

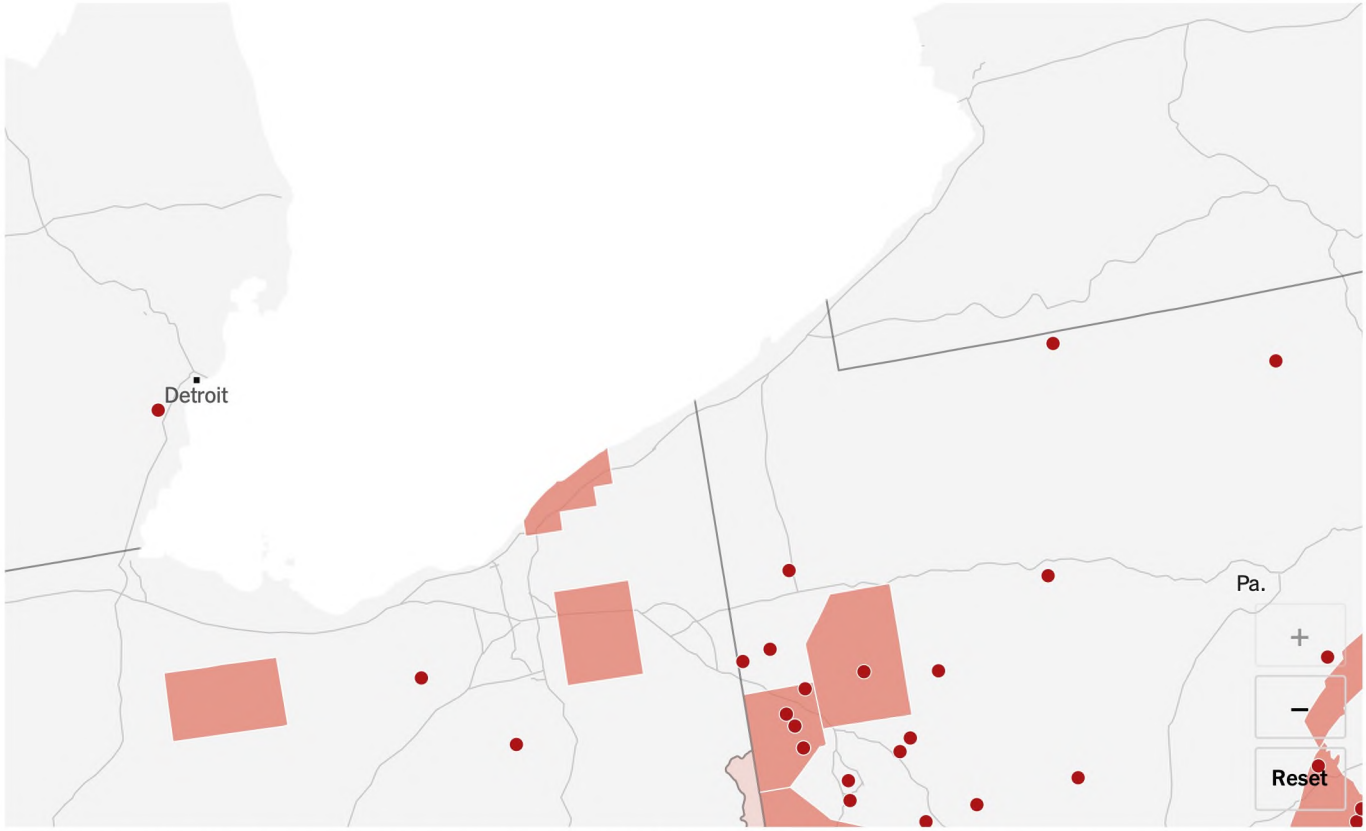
The Trump administration has enlisted hundreds of state and local law enforcement agencies in its mass deportation campaign by deputizing their officers as immigration agents, extending ICE's reach far beyond where the agency typically operates.

Living in the United States without authorization is a civil violation, not a criminal offense, and local police officers have no responsibility to enforce federal immigration law. But after completing a 40-hour virtual training, certified officers can inquire about the immigration status of people they encounter in the course of routine police work; call ICE if they suspect a person is undocumented; and, if given the go-ahead, take immigrants into custody.

Where state and local law enforcement work for ICE

Agencies that have signed agreements to participate in the federal 287(g) task force program.





Notes: There are no participating task force agencies in Hawaii or Alaska. Data is as of June 10. Source: Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Before President Trump returned to office, the program — named 287(g) for a section of federal immigration law — had largely consisted of agreements with local agencies to identify and process immigrants already held in jails. The Trump administration expanded the cooperation, and for the first time offered cash incentives to agencies to sign up and make arrests.

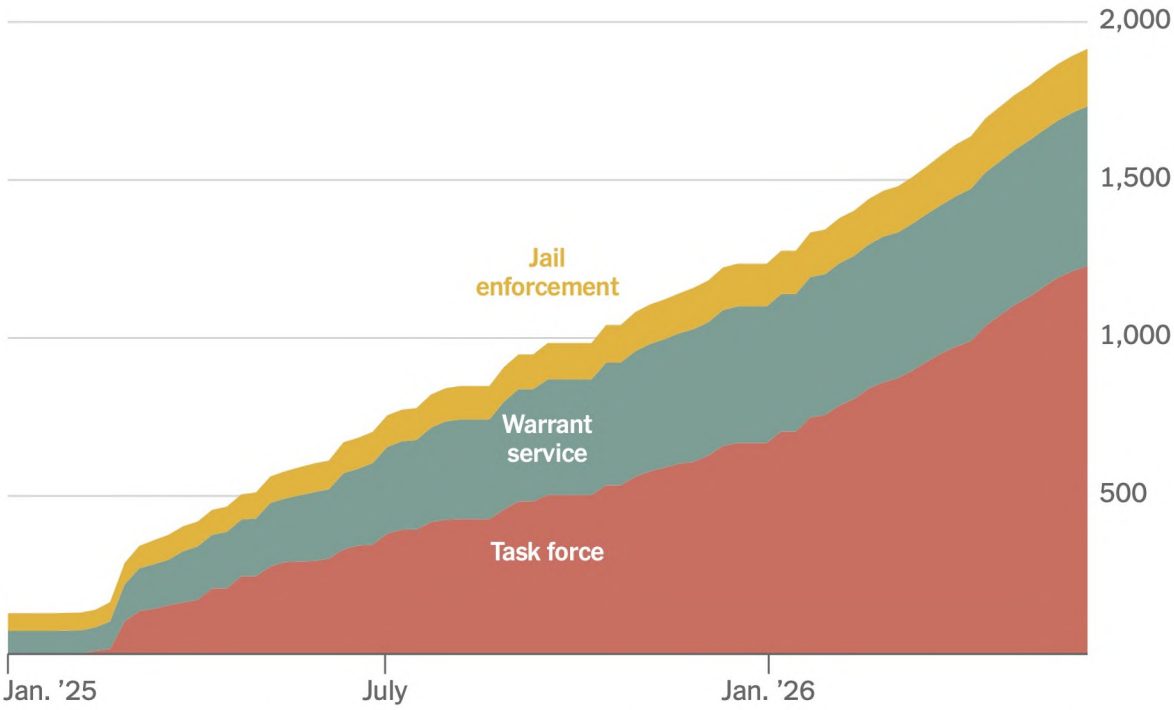
Participation has exploded, and de facto ICE officers are now on the ground in hundreds of cities and counties across 31 states. Several thousand officers have been credentialed — state troopers, sheriff's deputies, police officers, constables — on top of the 12,000 new officers and agents that ICE hired last year. The rush to sign up and cash in has included some unusual agencies, too, like Louisiana's State Fire Marshal and Florida's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Perhaps most significantly, the program has the potential to turn highways and roads into sites of immigration enforcement.

"ICE does not have that generalized patrol authority, so it's really great for ICE that they can use state and local police in this way," said Naureen Shah, the director of immigration policy at the American Civil Liberties Union, whose Wyoming office is suing Laramie County over its agreement with ICE.

Hundreds of law enforcement agencies have joined ICE's task force

287(g) partnerships by type of agreement. Agencies may sign more than one agreement with ICE.



Notes: Data reflects new active agreements signed and does not account for expired or canceled agreements. Data is as of June 7. Source: Andrew Thrasher.

Brian Kozak, the Laramie County sheriff, said the program allows his office to be more efficient and move detainees through his jail more quickly.

"If someone is undocumented, it's faster for our deputies to book them on an ICE hold and not even do the local charges. Then they don't have to sit in my jail waiting for those local charges to be adjudicated," he said, though he added that more serious felony offenses would still be charged.

Deputies in Laramie County, Wyo., detained seven immigrants on a single day last month. Sheriff Brian Kozak was elected in 2022 and supports the partnership with immigration officials. Todd Heisler for The New York Times

‘A tremendous asset’

Even though 1,200 local task force partners have signed on, the program is still ramping up. Fewer than 300 participating agencies had both credentialed at least one officer and received a payment for immigration enforcement work as of March, according to a payout ledger obtained by Ken Klippenstein, an independent journalist.

Researchers estimate that the share of people detained through any type of 287(g) program rose to about 10 percent in January, up from about 3 percent a year before. The Department of Homeland Security declined to answer detailed questions about the program or share more recent arrest or payment figures.

“The 287(g) program can be a tremendous asset to you and to the country,” Markwayne Mullin, the Homeland Security secretary, said this week at the National Sheriffs’ Association conference. “If we had the participation of all the county sheriffs that are in this building right now, think how much faster those arrests would move up.”

Over the course of a week in April, Laramie County was among the top arresting agencies in the country, alongside larger state authorities like the Florida Highway Patrol and the Oklahoma Department of Public Safety, according to snapshots of internal ICE data obtained by The New York Times. Together, the top five local partners made 162 immigration arrests that week; over a week in May, the top agencies made around 300 arrests.

Those are modest figures, considering ICE recorded about 7,000 arrests each week nationwide in recent months. The larger goal may be the perception of an ever more widespread immigration enforcement apparatus.

“The arrest numbers sometimes don’t matter to them if the message and rhetoric is strong enough — that any kind of day-to-day activity for an immigrant could lead to deportation,” said Nayna Gupta, the policy director for the American Immigration Council, a legal advocacy group that supports immigrants.

Immigrants were booked in the Laramie County Jail to await transfer to an ICE facility. Todd Heisler for The New York Times

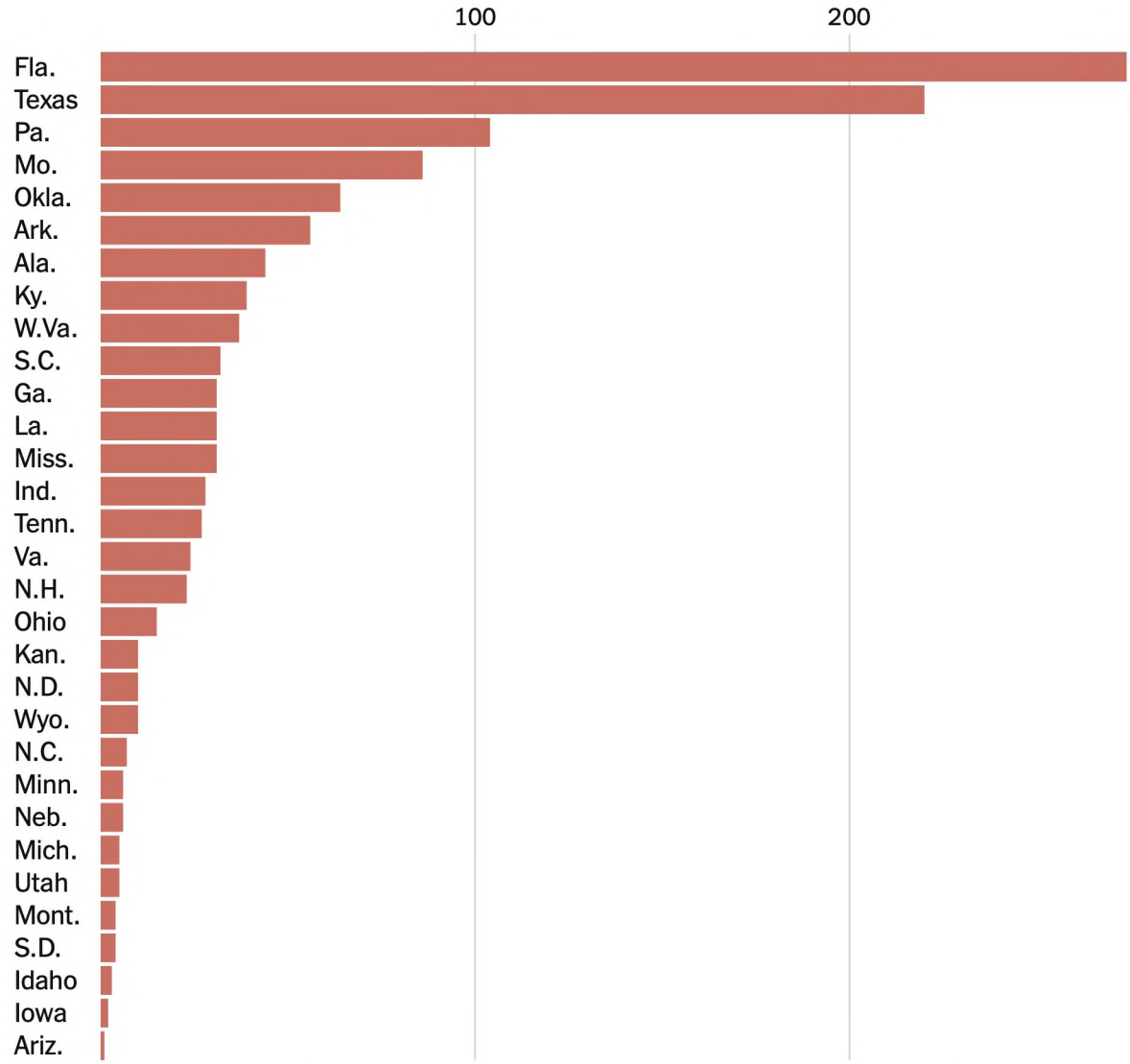
Financial incentives

For the local partners, the program comes with an enticing offer: a one-time payment of $100,000 for new vehicles and $7,500 in equipment funds per certified task force officer. ICE says it will pay the salary and benefits for officers who do immigration work full time, and overtime for up to 25 percent of an officer's salary.

Agreements are most common in states where Republican leaders back the president's immigration agenda. Last year, Florida became the first state to require local agencies' participation in the 287(g) program, followed by Texas this year. Elsewhere, participation is more scattered — and Democratic lawmakers seeking to rein in ICE have succeeded in banning the agreements altogether in 11 states, most recently in New York.

Local partnerships with ICE are most common in the South

287(g) task force agreements by state.



Notes: Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands are excluded. Data is as of June 10. Source: Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Laramie County now has 30 credentialed task force officers. Since October, they have made 412 immigration arrests and the sheriff's office has received about $300,000 for its participation.

Larger statewide agencies stand to be paid millions. Then there are the hundreds of smaller agencies with only a few task force officers, like the police department in Colebrook, N.H., which has three.

"It's a huge thing for a small department like us to get that stipend," said Chief Paul Rella, who said his department has made two ICE arrests since January and has received around $100,000. "But even if there wasn't a stipend, we would've done it anyway. To be able to have the authority to detain someone that may be here illegally, it all comes down to community safety."

Immigrant rights groups and critics of the program say it has the opposite effect: As more police officers work for ICE, immigrants may be discouraged from reporting crimes or avoid contact with local law

enforcement for fear of deportation.

“It’s a balancing act,” acknowledged Benjamin Cox, the police chief in Duncan, S.C., a town of about 5,000 with two task force officers. “I need the people in our town, no matter their immigration status, to feel comfortable calling me. That’s the most challenging part of 287(g).”

Opponents of the program also say that it can lead to racial profiling. In 2011 and 2012, the Justice Department found that participating agencies in Arizona and North Carolina had engaged in patterns of discriminatory policing, leading the Obama administration to discontinue the task force program.

Immigrants detained under 287(g) agreements are often found during routine traffic stops. Todd Heisler for The New York Times

Sheriff Kozak is familiar with those risks. He worked as a police officer for 20 years in Mesa, Ariz., when Sheriff Joe Arpaio set up random checkpoints and neighborhood sweeps that targeted Latinos, and he said he saw firsthand that the sheriff was “crossing the line.”

“Our policy requires lawful contact following a violation of state law,” he said. “We’re focused on traffic enforcement and traffic safety, and then a side thing is the immigration.”

A D.H.S. spokesperson said accusations that 287(g) agreements encourage racial profiling are false and that ICE’s local partners fairly enforce immigration law.

From commute to detention

By late morning, the Laramie County deputies were preparing to head back to the jail when they stopped the speeding minivan. Four workers with a drywall company headed to a job site were inside. The driver and

front-seat passenger had valid identification but told the deputies that the other passengers did not.

"We don't typically ask other passengers unless there's a reason, but nothing says you can't ask" for identification, Chance Walkama, a chief deputy, explained. "That's how things happen all the time." Passengers who have not broken a law may decline to speak with the police, but many immigrants are unaware of this right.

Mr. Walkama texted the passengers' information to his contact at the local ICE field office in Cheyenne. The ICE agent wrote back that one of their names matched someone with a criminal history and the same date of birth. After a few more questions, Mr. Walkama handcuffed the man, Christian Rodriguez, and loaded him into the deputies' car.

He is now being held at an ICE detention facility in Aurora, Colo. "I don't understand. I wasn't driving, I had my seatbelt on," Mr. Rodriguez said by phone from detention. "It's not fair."

Mr. Rodriguez, 29, arrived with his parents from Mexico as a minor and was about two years into the years-long process of applying for a green card. He is married to a U.S. citizen and has six children and step-children who are all U.S. citizens. He has no criminal convictions, records show; charges stemming from a domestic dispute with his ex-wife in 2020 were dropped.

Asked whether Mr. Rodriguez's arrest reflected the purpose of Laramie County's partnership with ICE, another chief deputy, Aaron Veldheer, said, "It weighs on me" — that a person who was riding in a car on his way to work is now separated from his family.

"Not that I wish somebody got hurt or there was a crime committed, but, yeah, it's collateral," Mr. Veldheer said. "But it's part of the job. We can't look the other way, either."

Notes: Local agencies marked on the map include cities, towns, villages, boroughs, townships and other municipalities, which are all shown as a single point. Participating agencies with jurisdiction at schools, airports, state and district attorneys' offices and some others are excluded, including agencies in Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands. New York banned 287(g) agreements in early June; not all agencies have terminated their agreements yet. Texas agencies in areas with more than 100,000 residents have until Dec. 1, 2026, to sign an agreement.

Sarah Cahalan contributing reporting.