**Headline:** What Will It Take to End Trump’s ICE Raids?

**Teaser:** Our reliance on armed agents of the state has led to fascism. The only way out is to abolish policing and militarism.

By Sonali Kolhatkar

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**[Article Body:]**

Donald Trump is not the first president to unleash the terror of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers on immigrant communities across the United States. But he’s the most blatant in his use of a federal armed unit as a tool of terror, fulfilling multiple goals at once: to reinforce white supremacy, to undermine his political opponents, to uphold policing as a means of order, and to wield raw, unchecked power.

Before June 2025, analysts were warning against the slide into fascism. Now, full-blown fascism is here. And, it’s not only Trump’s doing, but also a result of our society’s constant reliance on armed agents of state power as a means of control. If we want to end ICE terror and reverse the fascist tide, we need to rethink policing altogether.

Today’s ICE raids aren’t about rounding up violent criminals as Trump and his supporters claim. People caught in the dragnet include a [Texas Army sergeant’s Latina wife](https://www.texastribune.org/2025/06/16/texas-army-sergeant-wife-deported-honduras-ice-undocumented/), who had started the paperwork to acquire citizenship, and several other [nonwhite U.S. citizens](https://ktla.com/news/local-news/hes-a-u-s-citizen-ice-seen-in-violent-arrest-of-l-a-county-man/). As of early June, more than [50,000 people](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c86p821p660o) were being held in various detention centers around the U.S. on immigration-related charges. Of those arrested in 2025 alone, at least three-quarters have no known [criminal convictions](https://www.cnn.com/2025/06/16/us/la-ice-raids-violent-criminals-records-invs). (And even if it were about crime, Trump is Exhibit A in [double](https://www.citizensforethics.org/reports-investigations/crew-reports/president-trump-staggering-record-of-uncharged-criminal-misconduct/) [standards](https://apnews.com/article/trump-trial-deliberations-jury-testimony-verdict-85558c6d08efb434d05b694364470aa0) on criminality.)

ICE raids are clearly targeting areas where low-income communities of color work and reside, such as the racially diverse area of [north Pasadena](https://pasadenanow.com/main/witnesses-say-ice-agents-detained-six-people-in-pasadena-wednesday-morning) where I live and where people are still reeling from the fallout of the Eaton Fire in January 2025. ICE forces raided a [swap meet](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jun/16/los-angeles-immigration-raids-montebello) in LA County’s Santa Fe Springs popular among Latinos, a [garment factory](https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-06-10/los-angeles-ambiance-apparel-workers-ice-raid) in downtown Los Angeles, and [Home Depot parking lots](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jun/16/home-depot-ice-raids-los-angeles?fbclid) where undocumented day laborers are known to congregate.

In spite of claims that immigration enforcement is about ensuring people [follow the law](https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/01/05/remarks-by-president-biden-on-border-security-and-enforcement/), the facts demonstrate it’s about preserving white domination. Under both Democratic and Republican administrations, Haitians, [Mexicans](https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/local/what-happen-to-mexican-nationals-once-they-are-detained-by-ice/3725846/), [Central Americans](https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/largest-joint-immigration-operation-florida-history-leads-1120-criminal-alien-arrests), [Venezuelans](https://www.texastribune.org/2025/06/04/texas-immigration-raid-hays-county-austin-venezuelan-gang/), [Chinese](https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/ice-arrests-84-people-louisiana-racetrack-122983913), and other nonwhite immigrants have been terrorized, arrested, detained, and deported. In contrast, white immigrants from [Ukraine](https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/29/us/ukrainians-us-mexico-border-cec) and [South Africa](https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2025/05/09/afrikaner-refugees-south-africa-white-trump/) have been welcomed, housed, and integrated.

If only past Democratic presidents had understood that immigration enforcement is about race, racial hierarchy, and the violent enforcement of white supremacy, and chosen the moral high ground. Instead, they laid the groundwork for Trump’s crusade.

Former President Barack Obama [leaned heavily](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/01/07/obama-immigration-enforcement/1815667/) on immigration policy, spending billions of tax dollars on rounding people up. According to a [Migration Policy Institute report](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigration-enforcement-united-states-rise-formidable-machinery) from 2013, under Obama, “enforcement first… *de facto*… [became] the nation’s singular policy response to illegal immigration.” Obama earned the moniker “[deporter-in-chief](https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/president-obama-the-legacy/obama-leaves-behind-mixed-legacy-immigration-n703656)” despite ushering in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.

Joe Biden left behind a similarly [complicated legacy](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/03/us/politics/biden-immigration-border-harris-trump.html) on immigration, undoing some of Trump’s most draconian first-term orders while continuing Trump’s [inflammatory border rhetoric](https://www.counterpunch.org/2024/08/30/election-years-are-dangerous-times-for-people-of-color/) and [extending his attacks](https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/10/01/biden-administration-doubles-down-harmful-asylum-rules) on asylum seekers. There was no greater indictment of Biden’s failure on the issue than the [shocking images](https://www.npr.org/2021/09/21/1039230310/u-s-border-agents-haiti-migrants-horses-photographer-del-rio) of Haitian migrants at the U.S.–Mexico border being violently rounded up by border patrol agents on horseback—a macabre modern-day reenactment of slave catchers.

Both Obama and Biden likely felt caught between strong pressure from pro-immigrant advocates in their party’s base and right-wing and anti-immigrant sentiments. This failure to link immigrant justice to racial justice and draw a line in the sand in defense of Black and Brown people, immigrants and non-immigrants, paved the way for Trump’s deployment of ICE as Gestapo today.

Now, Trump is aiming the same forces Obama and Biden relied on to attack the Democratic Party. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, during the now-infamous press conference on June 12 in Los Angeles that saw ICE agents violently arrested California Senator Alex Padilla, [said](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/sen-alex-padilla-forcibly-removed-dhs-sec-kristi-noems-press-conferenc-rcna212688), “We are staying here [in Los Angeles] to liberate this city from the socialist and the burdensome leadership that this governor and that this mayor have placed on this country.” She made it crystal clear: ICE raids were a form of political violence.

Days later, Trump echoed this logic, saying in a [Truth Social post](https://truthsocial.com/%40realDonaldTrump/posts/114690267066155731), “ICE Officers are herewith ordered, by notice of this TRUTH, to do all in their power to achieve the very important goal of delivering the single largest Mass Deportation Program in History.”

He added, “In order to achieve this, we must expand efforts to detain and deport Illegal Aliens in America’s largest Cities, such as Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York, where Millions upon Millions of Illegal Aliens reside. These, and other such Cities, are the core of the Democrat Power Center.”

In openly admitting that ICE raids are about attacking Democratic Party strongholds, Trump is abiding by the dictionary definition of fascism, which, according to [Merriam-Webster](https://www.merriam-webster.com/wordplay/fascism-meaning-and-history), “refers to a way of organizing society with an emphasis on autocratic government, dictatorial leadership, and the *suppression of opposition*.”

The ICE raids also allow Trump to bring the entire nation to its knees. This sort of raw, unchecked power is what he lives for. Think of the economic mayhem he unleashed with his [impulsive](https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2025/4/10/how-trump-flip-flopped-on-pausing-tariffs) “flip-flopping” on tariffs, forcing other governments, corporations, and Wall Street to wonder what he might do next. Or, his [back-and-forth](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/6/19/how-trumps-position-has-changed-on-iran-splitting-maga-base) on whether the U.S. would join Israel’s war on Iran, with him saying to reporters on June 19, “I may do it. I may not do it. I mean, nobody knows what I’m going to do.”

Trump’s moves have less to do with policy than power. And his use of ICE raids is the same. Newspapers [speculate](https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/17/us/politics/trump-conflicting-messages-workplace-raids.html) what his next step will be, whether he will throw the food system into a tailspin by targeting undocumented farmworkers or [not](https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/14/us/politics/trump-immigration-raids-workers.html). The chaos is the point. Having an entire nation hanging on his every word, on his ability to call off ICE raids one day and resume them the next, is what feeds his power. And, as president, the armed forces are his best weapon.

It has always been the job of enforcement agents of the state—whether it’s slave catchers, police, sheriffs, ICE agents, the Armed Forces, the National Guard, drug enforcement agents, or others—to enforce white supremacy in a nation built on white power. With a few exceptions, most of the armed forces have spent a majority of their energy targeting nonwhite bodies. It’s hardly surprising that the Los Angeles Police Department is currently working in parallel with ICE agents in rounding up and violently [arresting](https://www.cnn.com/us/live-news/la-protests-ice-raids-trump-06-10-25) pro-immigrant protesters and [attacking journalists](https://www.npr.org/2025/06/16/nx-s1-5434279/lapd-immigration-protests-journalists-rubber-bullets).

As I began writing this, my 17-year-old brown-skinned son biked to a friend’s house, just hours after ICE agents kidnapped six men from a bus stop about a mile from my home. I made him carry his U.S. passport and tracked his every move on my phone, breathing a sigh of relief when he reached his friend’s house. My white neighbors need not feel such fear—yet.

This is the same sort of fear a Black parent feels when their child leaves home late in the evening, praying they will remain out of the clutches of racist cops.

Or what Muslim Americans felt when the [Department of Homeland Security](https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/homeland-security-two-decades-terror-minorities) terrorized their people after the 9/11 attacks.

Or what people in [Afghanistan](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/11/15/icc-us-forces-may-have-used-torture-in-afghanistan) and [Iraq](https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/09/25/iraq-torture-survivors-await-us-redress-accountability) felt, in the early 2000s when U.S. soldiers raped and tortured them.

Or what starving Palestinians feel when they become [target practice](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qn97DgtjTb0) for U.S.-armed and trained Israeli soldiers at food distribution sites.

In this context, the call made by Black activists in 2020 to “[defund the police](https://m4bl.org/defund-the-police/)” appears as imminently reasonable as the current call to “[abolish ICE](https://www.thenation.com/article/politics/abolish-ice-brad-lander/),” and the long-standing demand by anti-war activists to ensure there is “[Money for Schools, Not for War](https://www.chicagotribune.com/2003/01/19/anti-war-roar-echoes-in-dc-across-nation/).” There is a unifying through line in these parallel yet linked movements that ought to be a minimum standard for justice.

Already, ICE has [spent billions](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/ice-dhs-budget-deportations-trump-b2770916.html) and is over budget in carrying out its terror in communities of color. And if Republicans have their way, they plan to set aside [nearly $1 trillion](https://www.cato.org/blog/deportations-add-almost-1-trillion-costs-gops-big-beautiful-bill) of our tax dollars for mass deportations. [Police budgets](https://www.vera.org/publications/what-policing-costs-in-americas-biggest-cities), in most cities, eat up between a quarter and a third of municipal budgets. The [U.S. military](https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/chinas-military-rise-comparative-military-spending-china-and-us) sucks up hundreds of billions of dollars a year—more than China, a much bigger nation.

Imagine all that money being freed up to actually keep people safe, to [reduce inequality](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-020-80897-8)—arguably the biggest driver of crime—to ensure free health care for all, to address educational disparities, including making higher education free, to provide a universal basic income, and to end the wars that drive migration.

Just as Trump’s use of ICE raids fulfills myriad purposes in his display of demagoguery, a rallying cry to defund and abolish all forms of military, paramilitary, police, and law enforcement forces can satisfy multiple aims: democracy, collective safety, and prosperity.