

RESISTING AUTHORITARIANISM:

**OUR COLLECTIVE STRUGGLE AGAINST TRUMP'S ESCALATING
ATTACKS ON IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES**

APRIL 2025



“Who has the right to have rights? It is certainly not the humans crowded into the cells here. It isn’t the Senegalese man I met who has been deprived of his liberty for a year, his legal situation in limbo and his family an ocean away. It isn’t the 21-year-old detainee I met, who stepped foot in this country at age nine, only to be deported without so much as a hearing...Justice escapes the contours of this nation’s immigration facilities.”

Mahmoud Khalil, [Letter from a Palestinian Political Prisoner in Louisiana](#) (March 18, 2025)

In his first few weeks in office, Donald Trump rolled out many anti-immigrant executive orders and policy shifts, including attacks on birthright citizenship, expansion of ICE-police collaborations and immigration detention, and the termination of protected status for multiple groups. Following this initial flood of actions, the Trump administration escalated its targeting of immigrant communities in an increasingly lawless manner, signaling creeping authoritarianism. From the brazen abduction and detention of university students and professors under the guise of inapplicable Cold War-era foreign policy authority to using wartime authorities to unlawfully send Venezuelan and Salvadoran immigrants to a mega prison in El Salvador, the Trump administration’s war on immigrants has reached new and profound heights.

The administration is using the immigration, criminal legal, and national security systems to target the maximum number of people

for deportation, in every area of public life. Allegations of criminality have always been deployed to justify state violence, from the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 to modern day examples of people being killed by police during traffic stops or other altercations. However, the word “criminal” is a [rhetorical trap](#). Every person deserves dignity. Every person has the right to due process and safety, and no human being should be sent to a torture camp. When we began to carve out some people as deserving of incarceration and deportation we opened a door that has now been blown wide open by the administration. It will soon be permanently removed from the hinges and fewer will be free of being targeted. And the manner in which this administration is conducting this purge, with no checks or accountability, signals a dismantling of democracy itself.

Tracking all the tactics this administration is deploying to target immigrants is overwhelming. In this document, we attempt to summarize some of the key ways the Trump administration is shifting policies and practices to surveil, arrest, detain, deport, and silence immigrants and the people who support them. We do not name every shift; rather, we focus on the weaponization of the criminal legal system, the increasingly authoritarian approach, and the role of the federal budget, which are key tools of the Trump administration’s brutality and also vital sites of advocacy needed to stem the tide.

USING THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM TO TURBOCHARGE THE IMMIGRATION DRAGNET

Racial profiling has been systemically built into policing in the United States for centuries, and the merging of the criminal legal and immigration systems has only furthered discriminatory racial profiling. The criminal legal system is not only used to identify and detain more people but also leveraged to make more people “deportable” who were not already deportable, turbocharging the immigration dragnet.

The exponential expansion of 287(g): For years, the immigrant rights movement has called for the termination of immigration [enforcement programs like 287\(g\)](#), which enmesh immigration enforcement with local policing. Involving local police in immigration enforcement further encourages racial profiling and subjects people of color to unconstitutional police stops, arrests and detention. Programs like 287(g) funnel individuals into the arrest-to-deportation pipeline and help fuel Trump’s mass deportation agenda. In the first months of the Trump administration, the 287(g) program has been [exponentially expanded](#), and states like Texas and Florida [require localities to participate in 287\(g\)](#). In January 2018, 59 jurisdictions had 287(g) agreements; as of April of 2025, there are 456 existing 287(g) agreements in 38 states. The massive growth of 287(g) will change how immigrant communities and all communities of color experience

policing as it gives a further license, directly from the president, to racially profile.

Using the cruel tactic of registration as an enforcement tool: The Trump administration has set into place plans to [implement a registration](#) process whereby most members of immigrant communities will be required to “register” with the federal government, under threat of criminal prosecution. The process is a blatant tactic for immigration enforcement and racial profiling on a massive scale. The recently announced process harkens back to the last time registration was used in 2002 for the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS), an infamous and discredited racial profiling program. Over 80,000 men - who were mainly Muslim and Arab - underwent registration under NSEERS, wasting tremendous resources and [leading to no tangible benefit](#). As a result, many community members were detained and deported while others lived in fear of further targeting. Rather than keep such a harmful program in the history books, Trump has revived registration to fuel the mass deportation agenda.

Prioritizing punitive federal immigration prosecutions: Trump has called for [prioritizing prosecutions](#) of individuals for immigration violations. [Laws that criminally punish migration](#) itself were first championed by [Coleman Blease, an unrepentant white supremacist](#) who favored lynching and once said “to hell with the Constitution.” As he intended, these prosecutions now [fuel racial profiling](#) and subject individuals to punitive

**USING AUTHORITARIAN TACTICS
TO ABDUCT, DETAIN, DEPORT AND
CREATE FEAR**

federal criminal prison sentences, in addition to civil immigration detention and deportation. These prosecutions were the centerpiece of the first Trump administration's [family separation policy](#), systematically violate due process protections, are a leading contributor to the U.S. mass incarceration crisis, and are inhumane. In addition, the [administration has directed the Department of Justice](#) to divert much of its staff and resources and has mandated prosecuting immigrants for acts such as failing to register or carry immigration paperwork; prosecuting people who assist immigrants for "harboring" or "transporting" their neighbors and loved ones; and prosecuting local public officials for "obstruction" for trying to protect their immigrant residents.

Expanding Mandatory Detention: The first bill Trump signed this year, the Laken Riley Act, compels ICE to arrest and detain - without bond - a broad range of immigrants charged or arrested for certain crimes. This is an escalation of the mandatory detention [laws passed in 1996](#) and invites racially targeted policing. An arrest can result in months or years in immigration detention while a person is fighting an immigration case. This law will drastically expand the number of people in ICE detention, and will cost [states hundreds of millions](#) to hold people in pre-trial detention.

This administration's apparent goal is to act outside of the reach of the law to the extent it can and plunder every dollar possible from important government functions like health, education and fighting climate catastrophe, in order to take away people's lawful immigration status or prevent them from obtaining such status. These authoritarian tactics are intended to make every person - immigrant and citizen - afraid to criticize the administration's actions and exercise their rights to free speech, under threat of criminal charges, deportation or defunding their organization or city.

Offshoring detention and deportation: By design, offshoring detention and deportation evades accountability, disappears people ("out of sight, out of mind"), and invokes racist tropes associated with the "war on drugs" and "war on terror" campaigns that dehumanize immigrants and rationalize systemic human rights violations and abuses. This includes:

- **Invoking a 1798 wartime act to indefinitely incarcerate people in a notorious Salvadoran prison:** The administration deported over 250 people and paid to have a self-proclaimed dictator indefinitely incarcerate them in a notorious prison in El Salvador. It did this under the pretext of labeling them as Venezuelan or Salvadoran "gang members," including by falsely [invoking the Alien Enemies](#)

[Act for the first time since WWII](#) and in violation of a federal judge's order. "Gang labeling" by [cities](#), [states](#) and the federal government is rife with arbitrary and racist factors: for example, the [administration's criteria](#) on labeling people as gang members was largely focused on sports clothing and [common tattoos](#) celebrating everything from [soccer](#) teams to autism acceptance to roses. At least one person, [Kilmar Abrego Garcia](#), was deported because of an admitted "administrative error." These abduction-deportations have been called [human trafficking](#) given the prison's reputation for torture and forced labor. In addition, the administration has also expressed its desire to create a penal colony in El Salvador for [U.S. citizens](#) with criminal convictions. The government is asserting a right to stash away residents of this country in foreign prisons without the semblance of due process that is the foundation of our constitutional order. Further, it claims that because it has rid itself of custody, that there is [nothing that can be done](#). This should be shocking not only to judges, but to the idea of liberty Americans claim to hold dear.

- **Expanding Guantánamo Bay:** The Trump administration began the unprecedented practice of transferring migrants from U.S. soil to detain them at [Guantánamo Bay](#), a site of horrific abuse and torture ranging from the [mass detention of Haitian refugees in 1991](#) to the war crimes inflicted on [Muslim men and boys targeted](#) by the "War on Terror."

The administration proposed detaining up to 30,000 people at Guantánamo Bay, which alone could nearly double the current total detention capacity.

Targeting dissent and protest: By targeting people who exercise their right to free speech and protest, the Trump administration has sent a chilling message that anyone or any institution disagreeing with the administration will be persecuted. Those targeted include:

- **Students and professors** who have dared to express their support for a ceasefire of Israel's bombing of Gaza or change in U.S. foreign policy and advocated against the starvation, destruction and genocide of Palestinians. Masked ICE officers in plainclothes have abducted [students and professors](#) with [green cards](#) and [student visas](#) from their apartment buildings and communities, and moved them to [far away immigration detention centers](#).
- **Long time immigrant justice leaders**, who have spoken out against the government's unfair immigration policies and in favor of immigration reform. Like many others, they have been taken from their [workplaces](#), their [cars](#), and while [checking in](#) to scheduled ICE appointments.
- **Sanctuary cities**, which have been [threatened](#) with civil and criminal prosecution of elected officials as well as funding cuts. These threats attempt to coerce localities to participate in mass detention and deportation, precisely because [sanctuary policies](#) have been

effective.

- **Legal sector and institutions that are challenging the administration** such as [immigration lawyers who are representing their clients](#), advocates who educate communities about their Constitutional rights, [law firms](#), and [judges](#).

Targeting people everywhere: By conducting ICE raids near or in safe spaces that have traditionally been exempt from immigration enforcement, the administration is making every area of public life unsafe. For example, ICE rescinded a [long-standing policy](#) that protects sensitive areas like schools and houses of worship from ICE actions. CBP has [attempted](#) to access elementary school children under the pretexts of “wellness checks.” News of immigration presence at such places has spread, resulting in parents being afraid to send kids to school or to pray at their churches, mosques and temples. ICE and CBP have once again begun raiding [workplaces](#) and [parking lots](#), picking up multiple people at a time, sometimes [US citizens](#). In addition, there is heightened danger in places of travel, airports, and borders where people are subjected to higher scrutiny, resulting in more people being funneled into the immigration detention system. The Trump administration has also expressed its [intention to reinstitute a “Muslim Ban,”](#) preventing people from a number of countries - widely expected to be Muslim-majority countries or countries that do not make it easy for the United States to subject their nationals to unfair deportations.

FUNDING MASS DETENTION AND ENFORCEMENT AT THE EXPENSE OF COMMUNITIES

The United States operates the largest [immigration detention](#) apparatus in the world and spends more public funds on [immigration enforcement](#) than ever before. This is a relatively new phenomenon, and a product of bipartisan lawmaking and policies over the years shifting massive federal resources towards racialized policing, surveillance of immigrant communities and intensified border militarization. ICE’s overall annual budget swelled from \$3.4 billion in 2004, to nearly \$10 billion today. CBP’s budget grew over the same time from \$4.9 billion to over \$16 billion. The increase in funding for enforcement has built up the infrastructure for mass detention, sweeping and targeted arrests, and large-scale removals. And further expansion - including more of the alarming actions documented here - is expected to be funded at the expense of basic services and programs for all Americans.

Perverse financial incentives for mass detention and deportation: The primary beneficiaries of this bloated enforcement regime are the private prison, military and security contractors. The border enforcement industry was estimated at \$48 billion in 2022 and [projected to grow by \\$81 billion by 2030](#). The enforcement complex includes a [revolving door system](#) where officials cash in on mass incarceration. Companies [spend millions](#) every year lobbying Congress, including those with ties to cabinet-level officials. Trump’s [Attorney](#)

[General Pam Bondi](#) is a former lobbyist for the private prison company [GEO Group](#), which donated [over a million dollars to Trump's reelection](#). The CEO of the other major private prison company CoreCivic says they expect the “[most significant growth](#)” in his company's history over the next several years. With the Trump administration lifting the Biden-era [ban on private prison](#) contracts, these companies are looking to cash in on both new privately operated prisons as well as new ICE detention contracts. The Trump administration has already entered into new contracts, including for [family detention](#), guards to unlawfully detain people at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, [deportation flights](#), and is seeking to expand to [military bases](#). ICE also issued a solicitation for “[Emergency Detention and Related Services](#),” which could spend up to \$45 billion over two years for new ICE jails and related services, and posted a [notice for new contracts](#) awarded - sidestepping the federal competitive bidding process.

Budget process as a critical point of intervention: The [House](#) and [Senate](#) have both passed budget resolutions as part of the [reconciliation process](#), proposing funneling hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars to supercharge mass deportations, extending tax cuts for billionaires, while defunding programs like Medicaid. Once they come to an agreement, Congress will seek to pass a bill that requires only a simple majority of votes to pass both the House and Senate. Congress must hear from the public that supercharging the administration's authoritarian agenda,

paid for by cutting vital services for families, is unacceptable.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Demand your local members of Congress to block funds for mass detention and deportation and speak in bold, unwavering support of immigrant communities. Members of Congress must be urged to [speak out](#) against the budget reconciliation proposal and urge their colleagues to vote no on any bill that risks access to Medicaid and food for children to provide loopholes for Trump's billionaire donor class. With Fiscal Year 2025 government funding settled through September 2025, members of Congress must focus on Fiscal Year 2026 funding proposals, and use the appropriations process to protect vital services and oppose the increasingly lawless agenda of the TrumpWhite House. [Use this petition](#) and this [action to reach out to members of Congress](#) to call on them to oppose funding the Trump administration's assault on immigrant communities.

Get involved in your own community. Use the [Communities Not Cages toolkit](#) to fight against detention and deportation, start or join an [ICE watch program](#), or volunteer at your local immigrant justice organization. Support people who are being targeted for detention and deportation by donating to community organizations, joining a visitation program, and writing to people in detention.

Follow [Detention Watch Network](#), [Immigrant Defense Project](#), [Immigrant](#)

[Legal Resource Center](#), and [National Immigrant Justice Center](#) for updates and additional ways to take action.



DETENTION
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IMMIGRANT
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PROJECT



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