



DECEMBER 2025

The Effects of Recent Federal Immigration Enforcement on Private Sector Employment in California and Washington, D.C.

SUMMARY

The UC Merced Community and Labor Center analyzed Current Population Survey data before and following escalations in federal immigration enforcement actions in California and Washington, D.C. The Center examined changes in the number of workers for the weeks of May 11, June 8, July 6, August 10, and September 7, 2025, and found that the greatest decrease in persons reporting private sector work coincided with peak escalations in federal immigration enforcement. In California, between May and September, there was a -2.9% decrease in private sector employment.

In Washington, D.C., following the end of an executive order that placed local police under federal control, the number of persons reporting private sector work bounced back to a level similar before the executive order. The effect of escalated immigration enforcement actions on work is comparable with the Great Recession and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ongoing escalated immigration enforcement actions suggest the need for policy interventions to mitigate negative economic consequences.

KEY FINDINGS

Findings indicate federal immigration enforcement has had disruptive effects on California and Washington D.C.'s economies. Fewer Californians reported private sector work during the week of escalated enforcement actions on June 8 than on the preceding reference week of May 11, 2025 and even fewer reported work the week of July 6. After a short bounceback in August, California private sector work was at a -2.9% decline in September (compared with May) as roving patrols were again allowed. The latest (September) data indicate an impact on private sector employment among California's citizens (-1.5%), as well as lasting effects among noncitizens (-9.7%), when compared with levels observed in May.

Findings also suggest that Washington, D.C. continues to provide a comparative case. In D.C., private sector work decreased -3.3% between the baseline January-July period and August, before a 0.5% increase (from the baseline) coincided with the end of federal control of local police in September. In contrast, the US (excluding CA) experienced little change from May to June (0.5%), July (0.6%), August (-0.5%), and September (0.1%).

BACKGROUND

The second Trump administration has been marked by escalated immigration enforcement actions, with profound implications for civil rights and the American economy. In September 2024, while on the campaign trail, Trump claimed that if he were elected "We're going to have the largest deportation [initiative] in the history of our country" (Alvarez 2024). On January 7, 2025—one day after Trump's election was certified by the US Congress—the US Customs and Border Patrol initiated "Operation Return to Sender," arresting 78 people at worksite raids in Kern County, of which only one had a criminal record (Olmos and Fry 2025).

Operation Return to Sender drew a complaint from the ACLU (with the United Farm Workers of America as a plaintiff) requesting a court order to prevent unconstitutional targeting of farmworkers and day laborers on the basis of race (ACLU Southern California 2025a). Nonetheless, by April 30, President Trump was on track to deport half a million persons in 2025—merely half of the Trump administration's stated goal, and substantially fewer than the 685,000 that the Biden Administration had deported in the final year of his presidency (Chishti and Bush-Joseph 2025).

In response to pressure to increase immigrant deportations, on June 6, 2025, the federal administration escalated enforcement by ordering US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers to carry out indiscriminate workplace raids and arrests in Los Angeles (Hesson and Cooke 2025). The raids were immediately met by largely peaceful protests. On June 7, however, President Trump ordered the deployment of 2,000 National Guard troops

to quell the protests (Hernandez and Futterman 2025). As a result of the enforcement actions and military force, many avoided work, school, and other public spaces, leading to declines in consumption, business, work, and employment (Wick 2025). By July 11, a federal judge granted a temporary restraining order (TRO) against the federal government's use of "roving patrols" or profiling based on race, language, location, and job to target immigrants (Fry and Olmos 2025). Yet, after agents used a rental truck for an immigration raid in Los Angeles, questions remained about compliance with the order (Solis et al. 2025).

The TRO remained in effect from July 11 until September 8, 2025, when the U.S. Supreme Court granted a stay, effectively suspending the order (ACLU Southern California 2025b). The decision lifted the temporary protections that for a short time had limited immigration enforcement actions in California, permitting federal agents to resume workplace operations and raids. Data collected during the week of September 7 therefore reflect conditions after the TRO was lifted and enforcement intensified again in mid-September.

This brief offers an examination of the effects of ongoing immigration enforcement actions on the economy of California—the state with the largest immigrant population and a site of major displays of enforcement—and Washington, D.C. Since the federal administration's efforts to enact the nation's largest-ever deportation campaign has been met with questions about its effects on the economy, we examine local impacts that recent enforcement efforts appear to have had. We ask, "Since

escalated federal immigration enforcement actions began, how has employment changed among citizen and noncitizen workers in California and Washington D.C.?"

DATA AND METHODS

This brief utilizes the US Census Bureau-Current Population Survey (CPS) Basic Monthly survey. The CPS Basic Monthly is a representative survey with responses from roughly 40,000 American households, of which roughly one of thirteen are from California (United States Census Bureau 2024). While the American Community Survey is the largest survey on American social and economic life, it is not available until more than a year after data is gathered. The CPS Basic Monthly survey is the largest dataset that provides insight into rapidly changing dynamics of work and employment among US residents, both citizens and noncitizens.

We utilized the CPS Basic Monthly survey from January to September 2025. The survey is collected the week of the month on which the 19th falls and asks about the week of the 12th. In May 2025, the reference week was the week of May 11; in June, it was the week of June 8 (when escalated, immigration enforcement actions had just begun in Los Angeles), and in July it was the week starting July 6 (just before the announcement of the TRO on July 11). In August, the reference week began on August 10, when the TRO remained in effect. Starting on August 11 in Washington, D.C., an executive order placed local police under federal control for thirty days- coinciding with escalated federal immigration enforcement. In September, the reference week began the week of the 7th, when the US Supreme Court allowed roving patrols to resume and D.C. police stopped being under federal control.

Our analysis included those currently employed (PREMPNOT=1), who reported working one or more hours at one or more jobs (PEHRACTT>0). Since citizenship is often required for public sector employment, we expect the economic impact of immigration enforcement on noncitizen employment to be greatest in the private sector. Our analysis of "workers" focused on private sector employment—including employment in the private, for-profit sector (PEIO1COW=4) and private, non-profit sector (PEIO1COW=5)as well as self-employed workers, not incorporated (PEIO1COW=7), such as those not formally registering a business as a separate legal entity from their own labor. We analyzed these trends among workers (GESTFIPS=6), for citizens and noncitizens (PRCITSHP=5). We weighted data with the CPS' final weight (PWSSWGT/10,000).

FINDINGS

California's Worker Decline. The US (outside of California) had an estimated 116,356,877 private sector workers the week of May 11, 2025, which slightly increased by 675,128 (or 0.6%) to 117,032,005 by the week of July 6 (see Tables 1.1 and 1.2.) In contrast, the Californians reporting number declined over the same period. The week of May 11, California had 15,220,150 workers, but declined by 464,970 workers (or-3.1%) the week of June 8 and by 742,492 (or -4.9%) by the week of July 6 (see Tables 1.1 and 1.2 and Figure 1). The week of August 10, the number of Californias reporting work partly rebounded, increasing relative to July 6 but still down 164,582 (or -1.1%) from the week of May 11. By the week of September 7, trends returned to those observed at the outset of escalated enforcement in June, as work decreased -2.9% or -446,955 compared with May (see Tables 1.1, 1.2 and Figure 1).

Table 1.1 Number of private sector workers, California and rest of the US

_	May	June	July	August	September
California	15,220,150	14,755,180	14,477,658	15,055,568	14,773,195
Rest of the US	116,356,877	116,919,828	117,032,005	115,737,070	116,478,547

Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of US Census Bureau Current Population Survey Basic Monthly data, May-September 2025

Table 1.2 Change (from May) in private sector workers, California and rest of the US

	May t	o June	May t	May to July May to August May to		May to August		o September	
	Change	% Change	Change	% Change	Change	% Change	Change	% Change	
California	-464,969	-3.1%	-742,492	-4.9%	-164,582	-1.1%	-446,955	-2.9%	
Rest of the US	562,951	0.5%	675,128	0.6%	-619,808	-0.5%	121,670	0.1%	

Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of US Census Bureau Current Population Survey Basic Monthly data, May-September 2025

Table 2.1 Mean hours worked, California and rest of the US

_	May	June	July	August	September
California	37.6	37.5	37.9	37.7	37.8
Rest of the US	38.2	38.1	38.0	38.1	38.5

Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of US Census Bureau Current Population Survey Basic Monthly data, May-September 2025

Table 2.2 Change (from May) in mean hours worked, California and rest of the US

	May to	June	May to July May		May to August		May to September	
	Change %	Change	Change %	Change	Change %	Change	Change	% Change
California	-0.1	-0.2%	0.3	0.7%	0.1	0.3%	0.2	0.6%
Rest of the US	-0.1	-0.2%	-0.3	-0.7%	-0.1	-0.2%	0.3	0.8%

Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of US Census Bureau Current Population Survey Basic Monthly data, May-September 2025

Figure 1. Change in number of private sector workers, California and rest of the US



Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of US Census Bureau Current Population Survey Basic Monthly data, April-September 2025

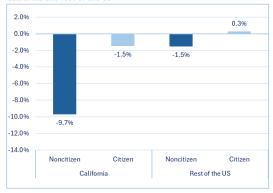
Meanwhile, rates in the rest of the U.S. changed little from May to: June (0.5%), July (0.6%), August (-0.5%), and September (0.1%).

Californians' Hours Worked. The average number of hours worked in the private sector remained nearly identical during the months observed. In California, workers averaged 37.6 hours of work per week in May, 37.5 hours in June, 37.9 hours in July, 37.7 hours in August, and 37.8 hours in September, a slight increase of 0.6% (see Tables 2.1 and 2.2). In the rest of the US, workers averaged 38.2 hours of work per week in May, 38.1 hours in June, 38.0 hours in July, 38.1 hours in August, and 38.5 hours in September, a slight increase of 0.8% (see Tables 2.1 and 2.2).

California's Persisting Decline among Noncitizen Workers. California's citizens accounted for the state's greatest share of decline in private sector workers from May to July (or -414,832), although lasting effects through August and subsequent decline in September impacted noncitizens far more.

California had an estimated 2,668,903 noncitizen workers in May, but only 2,341,244 by July, a decline of 327,660 workers (or -12.3%) (see Tables 3.1 and 3.2).

Figure 2. Change in number of private sector workers, by citizenship, California and rest of the US



Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of US Census Bureau Current Population Survey Basic Monthly data, May and September 2025

Across the same period, Californian citizens reporting work declined from an estimated 12,551,246 in May to 12,136,414 in July, a loss of 414,832 (or -3.3%).

In August, citizens and noncitizens in California experienced some increases. The number of noncitizen workers rose to 2,487,066, reducing the overall decline to 181,838 (or -6.8%), while citizen workers increased to 12,568,502, an increase of 17,256 (or 0.1%) from the week of May 11.

In September, California citizens and noncitizens experienced decreases in employment. The number of noncitizen workers decreased to 2,409,520 with an overall decline of -259,383 (or -9.7%). The number of citizen workers decreased to 12,363,675 (or -1.5%) compared with May (see Figure 2).

As a whole, the estimated number of workers in the rest of the U.S. (excluding CA) has remained somewhat constant (See Table 3.2). From May to July, US noncitizen workers decreased by 25,393 (or -0.2%), and the number of US citizen workers changed from 104,947,842 to 105,648,363, an increase of 700,522 persons working (or 0.7%). In August, the US (excluding CA) had an estimated 11,129,461 noncitizen workers

Table 3.1 Number of private sector workers, by citizenship, California and rest of the US

	_	May	June	July	August	September
California	Noncitizen	2,668,903	2,475,475	2,341,244	2,487,066	2,409,520
	Citizen	12,551,246	12,279,705	12,136,414	12,568,502	12,363,675
Rest of the US	Noncitizen	11,409,035	11,414,396	11,383,642	11,129,461	11,233,965
	Citizen	104,947,842	105,505,433	105,648,363	104,607,609	105,244,581

Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of US Census Bureau Current Population Survey Basic Monthly data, May-September 2025

Table 3.2 Change (from May) in private sector workers, by citizenship, California and rest of the US

		May to June		May to July		May to August		May to September	
		Change %	Change	Change %	Change	Change	% Change	Change	% Change
California	Noncitizen	-193,428	-7.2%	-327,660	-12.3%	-181,838	-6.8%	-259,383	-9.7%
	Citizen	-271,541	-2.2%	-414,832	-3.3%	17,256	0.1%	-187,571	-1.5%
Rest of the US	Noncitizen	5,360	0.0%	-25,393	-0.2%	-279,575	-2.5%	-175,070	-1.5%
	Citizen	557,591	0.5%	700,522	0.7%	-340,233	-0.3%	296,739	0.3%

Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of US Census Bureau Current Population Survey Basic Monthly data, May-September 2025

in the private sector, a decline of 279,575 (or -2.5%) compared with May. US citizen workers also declined by 340,233 (or -0.3%) over the same period. In September, the estimated number of workers in the rest of the U.S. (excluding CA) increased by 296,739 or 0.3% to 105,244,581 compared to May (see Tables 3.1 and 3.2).

Washington D.C.'s Worker Decline. Washington D.C. similarly experienced a decline in persons reporting private sector work, coinciding with a period of escalated federal immigration enforcement actions. We pooled data between the January-to-July period (to reduce the probability of Washington D.C.'s smaller sample size leading to error) and compared it with the period of escalated immigration enforcement actions in August and September.

On average, Washington D.C. had 270,544 workers from January through July, declining to 261,500 (or -3.3%) by the week of August 10 and slightly back up to 271,918 by the week of September 7 or 0.5% (see Table 4.1). (Note: We do not provide estimates for employment among Washington D.C.'s citizens and noncitizens, given the small sample sizes and greater possibility of statistical error.)

In contrast, the US (excluding CA) remained largely stable, with a slight decrease, from an average of 115,982,168 workers from January to July to 115,475,569 in August, declining by 506,598 (or -0.4%) and increasing by 224,461 (or 0.2%) by September (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Number of private sector workers, DC and rest of the US (excluding CA)

				Jan-Jul	y to Aug	Jan-Jul	y to Sep
	Jan-Jul (avg)	August	September	Change	% Change	Change	% Change
Washington DC	270,544	261,500	271,918	-9,044	-3.3%	1,374	0.5%
Rest of the US	115,982,168	115,475,569	116,206,629	-506,598	-0.4%	224,461	0.2%

Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of US Census Bureau
Current Population Survey Basic Monthly data, January-July, August and September 2025

Table 5.1 Mean hours worked, DC and rest of the US (excluding CA)

				Jan-July to Aug		Jan-July to Sep	
	Jan-Jul (avg)	August	September	Change	% Change	Change	% Change
Washington DC	38.5	38.1	39.5	-0.4	-1.0%	1.0	2.5%
Rest of the US	38.0	38.1	38.1	0.1	0.3%	0.1	0.2%

Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of US Census Bureau Current Population Survey Basic Monthly data, January-July, August and September 2025

Washington D.C.'s Hours Worked. The average number of hours worked in D.C.'s private sector dipped slightly then increased. Workers averaged 38.5 hours per week from January through July, dropping to 38.1 hours in August, a 1.0% decrease, and then increasing to 39.5 in September (or 2.5% increase) (see Table 5.1). Comparatively, the US (excluding CA) remained largely stable from 38.0 to 38.1 hours per week in August (or 0.3%), and remained at 38.1 in September (or 0.2%) (see Table 5.1).

CONCLUSION

Our analysis of CPS data suggests that escalated federal immigration enforcement actions are associated with declines in private sector work. In California, private sector work decreased by 3.1% during the first week of escalated actions in the state in

June (compared with the week of May 11), and then further declined by 4.9% by the week of July 6. Similarly, during Washington D.C.'s first month of escalations, in August, private sector work declined by 3.3% (compared with the January to July period).

By early August 2025, two major policy developments mitigated federal enforcement immigration actions California and were associated with reversals of declining private sector work. In July 2025, a temporary restraining order (TRO) limited certain ICE enforcement actions in Los Angeles, and, in addition, thousands of National Guard troops were withdrawn from Los Angeles. However, while the number of private sector workers in California increased by the week of August 10, the number of such workers remained 1.1% below pre-escalation levels in May.

Both in August and September the number of noncitizen California workers remained below levels in May. Citizen work accounted for most of the temporary rebound in August, while noncitizens continued to show an overall rate of decline. In the rest of the US, the number of noncitizen workers has consistently been lower since July in comparison to May.

Taking into account the seasonality of hiring, only two historical cases can compare with the loss of work that occurred over recent months in California and in Washington D.C.: the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 1983, when the CPS began to collect data on private sector and selfemployed, not incorporated workers, only during the COVID-19 pandemic did the US experience a greater month-to-month decline in private sector work (a decline of 3.4% from February to March 2020, and a decline of 19.7% from March to April 2020). The second comparable historical case is the Great Recession, when the US' decline was 3.2% in the first year. California's decline of 3.1% of fewer persons reporting private sector work in June, and Washington D.C.'s decline of 3.3% in August, occurred in the first month of escalated immigration enforcement actions, compared to the US' 3.2% decline in private sector work during the Great Recession's first year.

We have reason to suspect immigration enforcement will continue to escalate in

California and the rest of the US. First, California experienced 8,460 ICE arrests from the beginning of Trump's second inauguration to June 26 (Jarvie and LeMee 2025). From the beginning of escalated federal actions in Los Angeles on June 6 to June 22, the US Department of Homeland Security reported 2,792 detentions of immigrants in Los Angeles alone (Wilner and Uranga 2025).

investment in and expansion of As enforcement endures. we anticipate continuing to see the effects of enforcement actions on the economy. Congress recently allocated an unprecedented \$160 billion for immigration enforcement and deportation (PBS News Hour 2025). On September 5, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) published a final rule expanding the immigration and law enforcement activities of US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), including but not limited to detaining, issuing warrants for arrest and removal, arresting people who help with immigrant entries deemed unlawful, pursuits initiating vehicle apprehensions, carrying firearms, and using "non-deadly and deadly force, when necessary." Before this change, USCIS was primarily an administrative body dealing primarily with screening applications for immigration benefits. The new rule did not take effect until October 6 and therefore not yet reflected in the data.

To date, neither federal legislators nor the Supreme Court have passed policies mitigating the presidential administration's efforts to advance mass, indiscriminate immigration enforcement actions. While a court order prohibited ICE from the tactics of

¹ Analysis (not shown) finds that in January 1996 the US had private sector decline in work of 3.6%, and in January 1991 it was 3.3%. These were the only other months with figures above 3%. However, they are statistically not different from the figures in this report given the typical margin of error of US (.1%) and California (.6%) CPS estimates in this range. In addition, the January 1991 and 1996 figures are not seasonally adjusted. The month of January typically sheds the most jobs in any given year.

racial profiling and denying access to counsel in immigration raids that were seen in Los Angeles the week of June 8, the U.S. Supreme Court granted a stay—effectively suspending the order (ACLU Southern California 2025b). As a result, efforts to protect or enhance immigrant workers' rights may require the policy innovation of states, municipalities, and employers.

Given that the Great Recession and COVID-19 pandemic are the most comparable examples of massive loss of work, state policymakers should consider how the current moment may require significant action on behalf of the state. In the cases of the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic, lawmakers invested public resources for one-time stimulus or disaster relief spending. Similarly, during escalations in immigration enforcement policymakers might consider how to simultaneously protect those workers who must shelter in place while infusing cash into the economy.

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass previously announced a privately funded plan to support undocumented immigrants affected by federal enforcement actions (Ellis 2025). While coordination with philanthropy to provide cards with a "couple hundred" dollars is a start, the need for economic support extends much further. California lawmakers might consider extending access (on a wider scale) to the economic safety net to those affected (directly or indirectly) by immigration enforcement. The state might, for example, create a state-funded unemployment benefit system undocumented workers, which would have a domino effect stimulating the local economies of the communities most affected by escalated immigration enforcement and its associated economic downturns.

The recent workplace raids in California reveal how the state currently lacks an adequate economic safety net system for undocumented immigrant workers, and the effects of downstream escalated immigration enforcement on citizens' employment. Given the historic magnitude of the effects of recent federal actions on California's private sector employment, state lawmakers should begin planning and developing a major economic stimulus and disaster package for all workers. Although there were early signs of rebound in August, September data shows the persistence of job losses underscoring the need for rapid state-level interventions.

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Research brief prepared by Edward Orozco Flores, Jennifer Elena Cossyleon and Keila Luna Monterrey.
MISSION STATEMENT
The UC Merced Community and Labor Center conducts research and education on issues of community, labor and the environment, in the San Joaquin Valley and beyond.