

NOVEMBER 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 for the periods before and following escalations in federal immigration enforcement actions in California and Washington, D.C. The Center examined changes in the number of workers in California and the rest of the US, for the weeks of May 11, June 8, July 6, and August 10, 2025, and found that the greatest decrease in persons reporting private sector work coincided with peak escalations in federal immigration enforcement. In Washington, D.C., persons reporting private sector work decreased by 3.3% in August, similar to California's decrease of 3.1% from May to June 2025. Findings indicate the effect of escalated immigration enforcement actions on work is comparable with the Great Recession and 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 actions have had disruptive effects on California's economy. 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. Prior research indicates citizens comprised the majority of work decline during peak immigration enforcement escalations. This brief shows the lasting effects of decline were concentrated among noncitizens. From May to August 2025, 181,838 fewer noncitizens reported private sector work in California, while citizens experienced a slight increase (17,256) across the same period.

Washington, D.C. provides a comparative case. In D.C., private sector work declined by 3.3% (compared to its January-July average), similar to the previously reported figure of California's decrease of 3.1% from May to June 2025. The decline coincided with escalated immigration enforcement actions. In contrast, the US (excluding CA) experienced a minor overall increase between May and July (0.6%) and a minor decrease between May and August (-0.5%).

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 noncitizens 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 type of job to target immigrants (Fry and Olmos 2025). Yet, after agents used a rental truck for an immigration raid in Los Angeles, questions remain 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 had limited immigration enforcement actions in California, permitting federal agents to resume workplace operations and raids. Data collected during the week of August 10 therefore reflect conditions while the TRO was active, but before 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 nation’s largest immigrant population and one which has been the site of major public displays of enforcement. It also examines similar effects in Washington, D.C., amid increased enforcement in August. Since the federal administration’s efforts to enact the nation’s largest-ever deportation campaign has been met with questions about its impact 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, Washington D.C., and the rest of the US?”

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 the rapidly changing dynamics of work and employment among US residents, both citizens and noncitizens.

We utilized the CPS Basic Monthly survey from January to August 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 and before the US Supreme Court granted a stay on September 8 (allowing roving patrols to resume). We also include the case of Washington D.C., in which an August 11 executive order placed local police under federal control for thirty days—coinciding with escalated federal immigration enforcement and roving patrols.

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 a requirement for public sector employment, we expect the economic impact of immigration enforcement on noncitizen employment to be greatest in the private sector. In turn, our analysis of “workers” focused on private sector employment—including employment in the private, for-profit sector (PEIO1COW=4) and the 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 Table 1). In contrast, the number Californians reporting work declined over the same period. The week of May 11, California had 15,220,150 workers, but that figure declined by 464,970 (or -3.1%) the week of June 8 and by 742,492 (or -4.9%) by the week of July 6 (see Table 1). By the week of August 10, the number of Californians reporting work partly rebounded, increasing relative to July 6 but still down 164,582 (or -1.1%) from the week of May 11 (see Table 1). Meanwhile, the rest of the U.S. experienced a slight decline of 619,808 (or -0.5%) persons reporting work in the private sector by the week of August 10 (see Table 1).

Table 1. Number of private sector workers, California and rest of the US

	May	June	July	August	May to July		May to August	
					Change	% Change	Change	% Change
California	15,220,150	14,755,180	14,477,658	15,055,568	-742,492	-4.9%	-164,582	-1.1%
Rest of the US	116,356,877	116,919,828	117,032,005	115,737,070	675,128	0.6%	-619,808	-0.5%

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

Table 2. Mean hours worked, California and rest of the US

	May	June	July	August	May to July		May to August	
					Change	% Change	Change	% Change
California	37.6	37.5	37.9	37.7	0.3	0.7%	0.1	0.3%
Rest of the US	38.2	38.1	38.0	38.1	-0.3	-0.7%	-0.1	-0.2%

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

Table 3. Number of private sector workers, by citizenship, California and rest of the US

		May	June	July	August	May to July		May to August	
						Change	% Change	Change	% Change
California	Noncitizen	2,668,903	2,475,475	2,341,244	2,487,066	-327,660	-12.3%	-181,838	-6.8%
	Citizen	12,551,246	12,279,705	12,136,414	12,568,502	-414,832	-3.3%	17,256	0.1%
Rest of the US	Noncitizen	11,409,035	11,414,396	11,383,642	11,129,461	-25,393	-0.2%	-279,575	-2.5%
	Citizen	104,947,842	105,505,433	105,648,363	104,607,609	700,522	0.7%	-340,233	-0.3%

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

Table 4. Number of private sector workers, DC and rest of the US (excluding CA)

	Jan-Jul (avg)	August	Jan-July to August	
			Change	% Change
Washington DC	270,544	261,500	-9,044	-3.3%
Rest of the US	115,982,168	115,475,569	-506,598	-0.4%

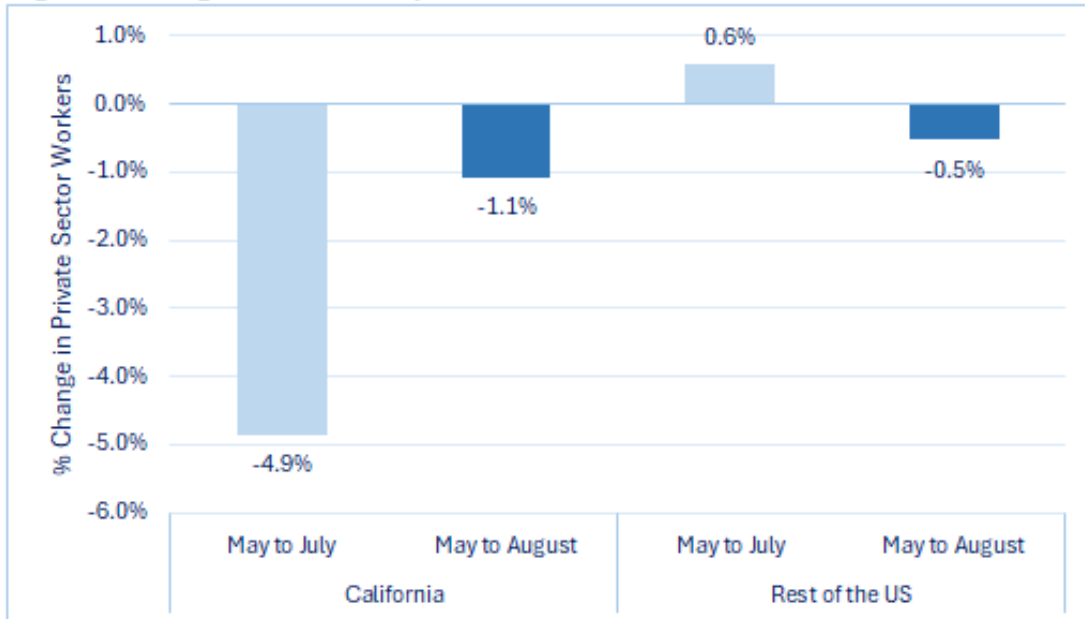
Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of US Census Bureau Current Population Survey Basic Monthly data, January-July and August 2025

Table 5. Mean hours worked, DC and rest of the US (excluding CA)

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

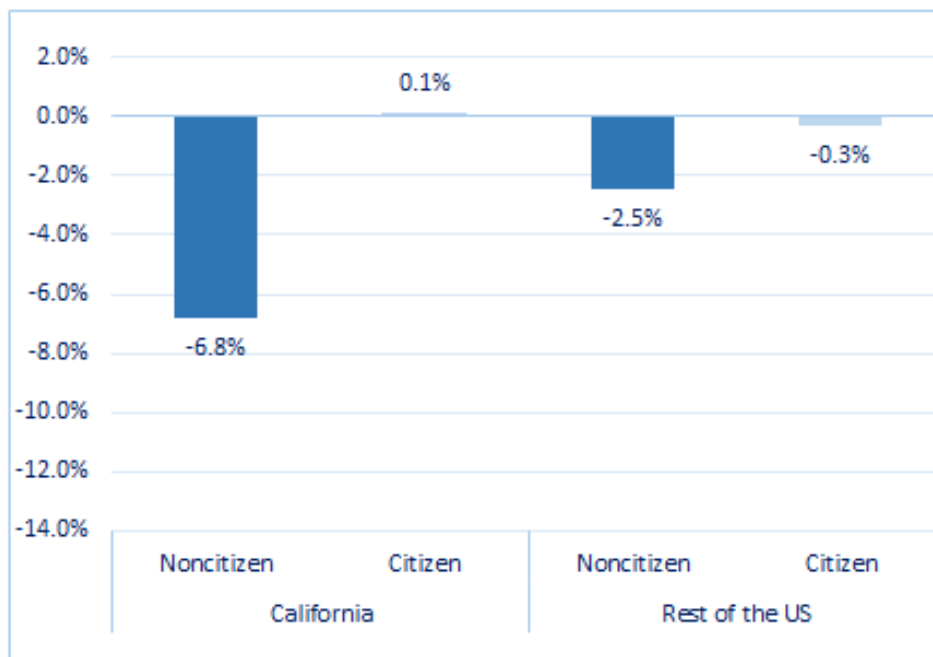
Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of US Census Bureau Current Population Survey Basic Monthly data, January-July and August 2025

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



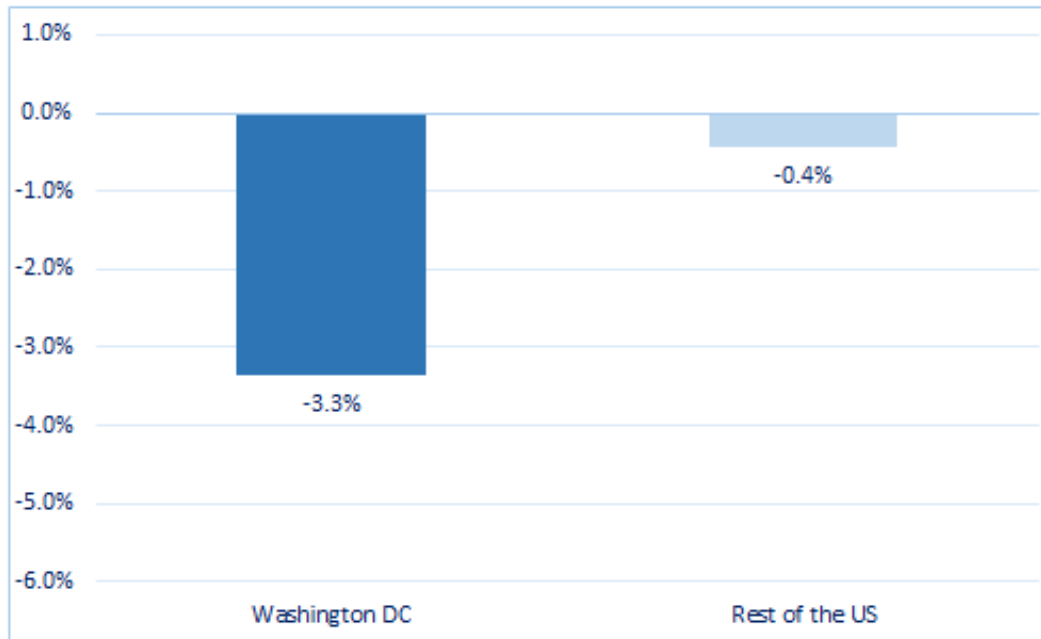
Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of US Census Bureau Current Population Survey Basic Monthly data, May, July and August 2025

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 August 2025

Figure 3. Change in number of private sector workers, Washington DC and rest of the US (excluding CA)



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

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 and 37.9 hours per week in July, an increase of 0.7% (see Table 2). In the rest of the US, workers averaged 38.2 hours of work per week in May and 38.0 hours per week in July, a decline of -0.7% (see Table 2). From May to August, changes were even smaller. The average number of hours worked in California’s private sector rose only 0.3%, while in the rest of the US average hours of work per week declined by -0.2% (see Table 2).

California’s Declining Citizen and Noncitizen Workers. California’s citizens accounted for the state’s greatest share of decline in private sector workers from May to July,

although lasting effects through August impacted noncitizens far more greatly.

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 Table 3). In contrast, Californian citizens reporting work declined from an estimated 12,551,246 to 12,136,414, a loss of 414,832 (or -3.3%), over the same period (see Table 3).

As a whole, the estimated number of workers in the rest of the US outside of California changed very little from May to July; US noncitizen workers decreased by 25,393 (or -0.2%), while 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%) (see Table 3). In August, both groups in California

experienced 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 contrast, the US (outside of California) had an estimated 11,129,461 noncitizen workers in the private sector in August, 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 (see Table 3).

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.

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 (see Table 4). In contrast, the US (excluding California) 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 to 506,598 (or -0.4%) (see Table 4). (Here we do not provide D.C.'s figures for citizens and noncitizens, given the small sample sizes for noncitizens and greater possibility of statistical error.)

Washington D.C.'s Hours Worked. The average number of hours worked in D.C.'s private sector fell slightly. Workers averaged 38.5 hours per week from January through July, dropping to 38.1 hours in August, a

1.0% decrease overall (see Table 5). In comparison, the US (excluding California) saw a slight increase from 38.0 to 38.1 hours per week, a 0.3% increase over the same period (see Table 5).

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).

Yet, by early August 2025, two major policy developments mitigated federal immigration enforcement actions in 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.

While California experienced a partial reversal in trends by August, the number of noncitizen workers remained below levels in May. Citizen work accounted for most of the rebound, while noncitizens continued to show an overall rate of decline. In the rest of the US, the number of citizen and noncitizen workers decreased only very slightly.

The federal administration's ongoing threats and efforts to escalate immigration enforcement actions—such as in Chicago, Portland, Memphis, San Francisco and other cities—have wide-ranging policy implications, such as negative and potentially lasting consequences for the economies of those localities.

Taking into account the seasonality of hiring, only two historical cases can compare with the loss of work that just 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 self-employed, 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).¹

The second comparable historical case is that of 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 further 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, however, the US Department of Homeland Security reported 2,792 detentions of immigrants in Los Angeles alone (Wilner and Uranga 2025).

While some recent policy developments might have suggested that we could have expected a reduction in federal immigration enforcement actions, broader trends indicate ongoing escalations. For example, 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 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). Furthermore, Congress recently allocated an unprecedented \$160 billion for immigration enforcement and deportation (PBS News Hour 2025). As a result, efforts to protect or enhance immigrant workers' rights may require policy innovation on behalf 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

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.

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; similarly, California lawmakers might consider extending access (on a much 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 for 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 downstream effects of 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, the persistence of job losses underscores the need for rapid state-level interventions.

REFERENCES

ACLU Southern California. 2025a. "United Farm Workers and Bakersfield Residents Sue Border Patrol for Unlawful Practices." Press Release. February 26, 2025. Accessed on July 13, 2025 from:

<https://www.aclusocal.org/en/press-releases/united-farm-workers-and-bakersfield-residents-sue-border-patrol-unlawful-practices>

ACLU Southern California. 2025b. "Court Prohibits Federal Government from Racial Profiling, Denying Access to Counsel in Immigration Raids." Press Release. July 11, 2025. Accessed on July 13, 2025 from:

<https://www.aclusocal.org/en/press-releases/breaking-court-prohibits-federal-government-racial-profiling-denying-access-counsel>

Alvarez, Alayna. 2024. "Trump pledges "largest deportation" in U.S. history, starting in Ohio and Colorado." Axios. September 13, 2024. Accessed on July 13, 2025 from: <https://www.axios.com/2024/09/13/trump-deportation-immigrants-springfield-ohio-aurora-colorado>

Chishti, Muzaffar and Kathleen Bush-Joseph. 2025. "In First 100 Days, Trump 2.0 Has Dramatically Reshaped the U.S. Immigration System, but Is Not Meeting Mass Deportation Aims." Policy Beat. Migration Policy Institute. Accessed on July 13, 2025 from:

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/trump-2-immigration-first-100-days?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=51cf34f0-7709-4662-a56e-c02c07c00fc0>

Fry, Wendy and Sergio Olmos. 2025. "Trump administration asks Supreme Court to lift temporary ban on roving immigration stops in L.A." CalMatters. August 7, 2025. Accessed on August 11, 2025 from: <https://calmatters.org/justice/2025/08/trump-appeals-ban-on-la-immigration-raids/>

Goldberg, Noah. 2025. "L.A. will provide cash assistance to immigrants affected by raids." *Los Angeles Times* July 11, 2025. Accessed on July 13, 2025 from: <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-07-11/l-a-will-provide-cash-assistance-to-immigrants>

Hernandez, Joe and Steve Futterman. 2025. "Protesters clash with law enforcement in Los Angeles as Trump sends National Guard." National Public Radio. June 8, 2025. Accessed on July 13, 2025 from: <https://www.npr.org/2025/06/08/nx-s1-5426679/national-guard-california-immigration-protests>

Hesson, Ted and Kristina Cooke. 2025. "ICE's tactics draw criticism as it triples daily arrest targets." *Reuters* June 10, 2025. Accessed on July 13, 2025 from: <https://www.calmatters.org/economy/2025/04/b>

Jarvie, Jenny and Gabrielle LaMarr LeMee. 2025. "Texas, Florida hit with far more ICE arrests than California. But that's not the whole story." *Los Angeles Times* August 10, 2025. Accessed on August 11, 2025 from: <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-08-10/california-was-center-stage-in-ice-raids-but-texas-and-florida-each-saw-more-immigration-arrests>

Olmos, Sergio and Wendy Fry. 2025. "Border Patrol said it targeted known criminals in Kern County. But it had no record on 77 of 78 arrestees." CalMatters. June 27, 2025. Accessed on July 13, 2025 from: <https://calmatters.org/economy/2025/04/border-patrol-records-kern-county/>

PBS News Hour. 2025. "GOP gives ICE massive budget increase to expand Trump's deportation effort." July 8, 2025. Accessed on July 13, 2025 from: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/gop-gives-ice-massive-budget-increase-to-expand-trumps-deportation-effort>

Solis, Nathan, Rachel Uranga, Brittany Mejia and David Zahniser. 2025. "Federal agents use Penske rental truck as 'Trojan Horse' to raid Los Angeles Home Depot." *Los Angeles Times* August 6, 2025. Accessed on August 11, 2025 from: <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-08-06/more-raids-home-depot-in-macarthur-park-raided>

United States Census Bureau. 2024. "Methodology." June 4, 2024. Accessed on July 13, 2025 from: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/technical-documentation/methodology.html>

Wick, Julia. 2025. "'It reminded me of COVID': Mayor Bass decries economic effect of immigration raids on L.A." *Los Angeles Times* June 16, 2025. Accessed on July 13, 2025 from: <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-06-16/mayor-bass-decries-economic-impact-of-immigration-raids-on-la>

Wilner, Michael and Rachel Uranga. 2025. "Federal arrests in L.A. approach 2,800 since raids began, DHS says." *Los Angeles Times* July 8, 2025. Accessed on July 13, 2025 from: <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2025-07-08/federal-arrests-in-la-are-accelerating-homeland-security>

American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California. 2025. "U.S. Supreme Court Grants Stay in L.A. Raids Case." September 8, 2025. Accessed on November 3, 2025 from: <https://www.aclusocal.org/en/pressreleases/us-supreme-court-grants-stay-la-raids-case>

Research brief prepared by Edward Orozco Flores, Quy Lam and Jennifer Elena Cossyleon.

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.