



Hundreds of immigrants arrested in sanctuary cities across US

The four-day raid, targeting people in cities including LA, San Francisco and New York, was criticized as vindictive against those resisting Trump's agenda

Sam Levin in San Francisco

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The Trump administration's immigration enforcement division arrested hundreds of people in raids across "sanctuary" cities in recent days, in an operation directly targeting communities that are resisting the president's aggressive deportation agenda.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (Ice) announced on Thursday that it had arrested 498 people in a four-day operation and that it was dedicating more resources to the liberal jurisdictions that limit police cooperation with federal agents. The raids, which hit major cities including Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Denver, New York and Philadelphia, sparked harsh criticisms from human rights campaigners who said the arrests were cruel and vindictive and would only hurt public safety by disrupting families and instilling fear in communities.

“Persecuting cities because they are following the constitution and making sure they don’t violate people’s rights takes it down to a new level of low,” said David Leopold, an immigration attorney and former president of the American Immigration Lawyers Association. “This makes communities less safe.”

Since he made anti-immigrant policies a cornerstone of his presidential campaign, Trump has repeatedly attacked sanctuary cities, which have regulations preventing local police from enforcing certain immigration laws and restricting law enforcement collaboration with Ice. Some progressive cities like San Francisco have sued the Trump administration over his efforts to withhold federal public safety grant money due as punishment for their sanctuary status.

Trump’s efforts to defund these cities have faced repeated roadblocks in federal courts, with judges across the country defending sanctuary rules. Studies have found that when police stay out of immigration enforcement, there are positive economic impacts and that undocumented people are more likely to report crimes and work with police.

Ice said its “Operation Safe City” arrests targeted people from 42 countries for various “federal immigration violations”, with a focus on regions that deny deportation officers access to jails and prisons or ignore requests to hold immigrants on behalf of Ice. The agency said it prioritized “aliens with criminal convictions, pending criminal charges, known gang members and affiliates, immigration fugitives and those who re-entered the US after deportation”.

Ice said that the arrests did not include Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (Daca) recipients, known as “Dreamers”, meaning immigrants brought into the country as children, who were protected by an Obama-era program that Trump recently revoked.



A Daca recipient protests in Los Angeles, California, against Trump’s decision to end the program. Photograph: Robyn Beck/AFP/Getty Images

According to Ice’s announcement, 317 of the nearly 500 people arrested had criminal convictions. The list included non-violent offenses such as drug charges, shoplifting, “illegal re-entry”, disorderly conduct and fraud. Ice also highlighted specific cases in its press release of immigrants it said had been convicted of serious crimes, including domestic violence and sexual abuse.

Ice added that 18 people arrested were “gang members or affiliates”. The gang designations that Ice has used for deportations under Trump and Obama have been condemned by human rights’ groups, who say they cast a wide net on communities of color with no due process and sometimes minimal evidence.

Acting director Tom Homan said in a statement that the sanctuary cities are “creating a magnet for illegal immigration”, adding: “As a result, Ice is forced to dedicate more resources to conduct at-large arrests in these communities.”

Research, however, suggests that cities with sanctuary policies have significantly lower crime rates than comparable municipalities. Studies have also found that undocumented immigrants are less likely to commit serious crimes than people born in the US.

“They are throwing out people who are playing by the rules, raising families and paying taxes,” said Leopold. “This is all about instilling fear in the immigrant community”

Jon Rodney, with the California Immigrant Policy Center, said in an email that the raids were part of a “longstanding pattern of scapegoating, criminalizing, and demonizing immigrants”, adding, “Making sure police and sheriffs do not act as deportation agents is the best way to protect communities from Trump’s deportation force, which simply cannot carry out its dirty work without enlisting thousands of local law enforcement agencies.”

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