



ICE's Brutality Shouldn't Surprise Us!

There have been protests taking place across America in recent weeks, demanding the permanent removal of ICE and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) from towns and cities across the US. These protests have involved tens of thousands of protestors, with business closures and clashes with federal agents escalating tensions.

The spike in ICE brutality is a topic that's being heavily discussed right now in light of the agency expanding their operations, reducing oversight and increasing the frequency in violent confrontations since Trump began his second term. His administration has massively increased their funding and more than doubled their workforce to over 20,000 agents. All of this is part of his campaign promise to target immigrants, and has led to a slew of "at-large" arrests in urban areas like Minneapolis.

Both he and his administration have continuously assured the public that their focus is to target the "worst of the worst always first." In August 2024, Trump said "I'm talking about, in particular, starting with the criminals. These are some of the worst people anywhere in the world."

But when Alex Pretti and Renee Good were fatally shot this year, anti-ICE sentiment began to increase. Trump and his administration initially tried to justify ICE's actions by saying that they were threats. They said that Alex was a gunman and labelled him a domestic terrorist and that Goode was trying to harm the ICE officer with her car. Though they have had to backtrack on both accounts after video evidence showed that neither was a threat.

So, the questions that come to mind are: Is ICE only targeting criminals? And are the agency's brutal tactics justified?

There are currently more than 65,000 immigrants in ICE detention as of November, a record number of detainees. Nearly half of all immigrants in ICE detention have neither a criminal conviction nor pending criminal charges. Of the immigrants with criminal convictions, 5 percent have been convicted of violent crime such as murder or rape, according to the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank.

So, this isn't just about going after the "worst of the worst." Nor is it only about targeting illegal immigrants.

Since January 2025, ICE has ramped up public arrests (e.g., outside stores like Home Depot) as part of a deportation push aiming for one million annually. While ICE agents lack authority to arrest U.S. citizens solely for immigration violations, they can briefly detain them if suspected of unlawful presence or involved in obstructing arrests. Reports document over 170 cases of citizens detained during Trump's second term, often due to misidentification during operations.

While its primary mandate focuses on enforcing immigration laws against undocumented individuals, it also detains people with legal status (like lawful permanent residents or visa holders) if they have certain criminal convictions or meet federal priorities for national security or public safety threats. But how careful will they be about sticking to these parameters when they are being backed by the President whose administration is intent on justifying their actions? The administration defended ICE after Pretti's shooting—even though he was unarmed before agents fired multiple shots (up to 10). Trump also backed ICE raids, claiming they "haven't gone far enough" and are necessary to deport criminals, despite public outcry.

While people may assume that ICE agents are taught to only use deadly force as a last resort, it's quite the opposite - Agents are taught not to put themselves at 'unnecessary risk' and that "the law requires officers to use objectively reasonable force, not the minimal force."

Officers are also taught to react with force to the threat of violence and not just violence itself. They also say that giving a warning or using minimal force or all other forms of force before shooting, could “create an unnecessary risk for the officer”.

Then there’s the fact that ICE agents, like all federal agents, also enjoy qualified immunity, a legal doctrine that protects them from the legal liability of these lawsuits.

“The law gives all law enforcement officers, including ICE, wide latitude to use force in carrying out their duties,” said Hernandez, the law professor at Ohio State University. “The reality is that it is exceedingly difficult to hold individual agents or the agency itself accountable in court.”

The lack of accountability is unnerving – but not surprising, and makes the actions of the agents that much clearer. If no one is able, or willing, to account them – giving them a broad mandate that’s used to justify their actions – why would they be careful?

When we look at the decision to target immigrants by Trump and his administration – this is a part of a larger trend that is currently unfolding across the world. Where countries are targeting immigrants, making citizenship laws more restrictive and actively pursuing avenues to monitor their populations. All of this is in an attempt to increase control, ensuring that the population doesn’t act in a way that is contrary to government policies and decisions – no matter how heinous they may be.

This increasingly authoritarian stance is not a show of strength – it shows a fear and an understanding that their system is failing and that they are in danger of losing control of their populations – who are questioning their decisions since Gaza.

This is something that we need to think about, as Muslims. The Quran and Sunnah are a reference point for every aspect of our lives. Both have told us numerous times not to trust the disbelievers – what is in their hearts is worse than what is on their tongues. And yet, we forgot. They told us numerous times not to allow them to govern over us, that it will not lead to our success – in this life or the next. And yet, we forgot.

We forgot, so the disbelievers became our friends and allies, and they have been allowed to rule over us. For decades, we didn’t see this as a problem. Their system seemed to function well – it seemed to give us stability and success in this life. We were able to live a good life, to provide for ourselves and our families, and live in a state of security. If a Muslim was persecuted by the disbelievers, it wasn’t because the disbeliever was wrong – it was because the Muslim was wrong. They didn’t obey the law; they were too extreme. If they had kept their heads down and accepted the law of the land, they would have been secure.

This was a belief that was easy for Muslims everywhere to hold onto – because the Capitalist system was working, and we didn’t see the cracks within it – or the fear that the disbelievers would feel when those cracks began to widen and the failures within the System began to rear their ugly head. But this is a belief that must be removed from our minds as we move into the future. The world is changing, and trying to hide from that truth will only harm us in this world and the next.

﴿وَلَا تُطِعُ الْكَافِرِينَ وَالْمُنَافِقِينَ وَذَعْ أَذَاهُمْ وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ وَكَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ وَكِيلًا﴾

“And obey not the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and harm them not (till you are ordered), and put your trust in Allah. And Sufficient is Allah as a Wakil (Trustee, Disposer of affairs).” [Surah Al-Ahzab 33:48]

Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by

Fatima Musab

Member of the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir