

FACT BRIEF • SUMMER 2026

Immigration and Enforcement

What is the ISSUE?

4

CONNECTED PARTS
IN ONE SYSTEM

Immigration is not one problem. It is a system with at least four connected parts: border security, undocumented immigrants already here, immigration court capacity, and legal pathways — all shaped by the debate over who should be able to join the U.S. community. ***A claim about one part is not a claim about the whole system.***

Know the Terms

Encounter — each time border officials stop or apprehend someone; the standard measure of border activity. Individuals may be encountered more than once.

Unauthorized immigrant — someone living in the U.S. without current legal permission.

Arrested vs. detained — two different populations: people ICE arrests over a period, versus people held in detention at a point in time.

Alternatives to Detention — monitoring outside detention: scheduled check-ins, ankle monitors.

Non-detained docket — people going through immigration court while living in the community, not in detention.

Temporary Protected Status (TPS) — temporary legal status for people from countries facing war or disaster.

What Are the Facts?

THE BORDER

SOUTHWEST BORDER

Southwest land border encounters are **down 82%**: 2,475,669 in FY 2023, about 2.1 million in FY 2024, and 443,671 in FY 2025. ^[2]

THE TREND

Crossings fell in two steps, each after a policy change. In June 2024 Border Patrol encounters fell 29% after asylum eligibility was suspended for most people entering away from official crossings. ^[19] By December 2024, these encounters were down to about **47,330** (81% below December 2023). ^[20] January 2025 brought a second round: a declared national emergency at the border, military support for border security, and the shutdown of the app that had let people book asylum appointments at official crossings. Monthly encounters have since run **under 10,000**. ^[1] Mexican enforcement also increased over this period. ^[21]

THE NORTHERN BORDER

Border Patrol apprehensions away from official crossings on the Canadian border rose from 6,618 in FY 2019 to **24,968** in FY 2024. By early 2025 the monthly rate was back to about FY 2023 levels, when the year's total was **10,906**. This counts only people caught away from official crossings — a narrower measure than the Southwest encounter totals above. ^[23]

IMMIGRATION AND ENFORCEMENT

What Are the Facts?

IMMIGRANTS LIVING IN THE U.S.

This section uses Migration Policy Institute estimates for mid-2023. Other sections use newer data; each fact gives its own date.

THE NUMBER

13.7 million unauthorized immigrants were living in the United States in mid-2023 — **26%** of everyone in the country who was born abroad. The rest, here legally: naturalized citizens (45%), green-card holders (24%), and temporary visa holders (5%). The immigrant population reached a record **50.2 million** in 2024, 14.8% of all U.S. residents. ^[22] ^[3]

LONG-SETTLED

About **80%** lived in the U.S. at least 5 years, and **45%** lived here 20 years or more. ^[3]

FAMILY TIES

4.2 million were married to a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident — about one-third of unauthorized immigrant adults. **6.3 million** children lived with an unauthorized parent, **5.3 million of them U.S. citizens.** ^[3]

WHERE PEOPLE COME FROM

About **10% of all U.S. immigrants** come from European countries, with most others from Latin America and Asia. ^[6]

CRIME, DETENTIONS & DEPORTATIONS

ARRESTED — THE 70% CLAIM

ICE *arrests* people over a stretch of time. In January 2026, DHS reported that about **70%** of those arrested had criminal **charges or convictions**. (A charge is an accusation, not a finding of guilt.) This counts arrests made over a period; it does not describe the people held in detention on any given day. ^[14] ^[13]

DETAINED — A DIFFERENT GROUP

On a single day in July 2026, ICE held **65,765** people. Of those, **46,436** — **about 70.6%** — **had no criminal conviction at all**. Among the roughly 29% who did have a conviction, most were for minor offenses such as traffic violations. ^[10] ^[13]

WHO MUST BE DETAINED

Federal law requires ICE to detain people convicted of certain crimes: an *aggravated felony*, any drug offense (except a single case of possessing under 30 grams of marijuana), a firearms offense, or two or more crimes of “moral turpitude.”^[18] ICE may also hold others it considers a flight or public-safety risk. About **5%** of people in detention had a conviction for a violent crime (November 2025). ^[9] ^[13]

THE PEAK — AND NOW

ICE detention peaked at a record **70,766 on January 24, 2026** — up from roughly 40,000 a year earlier. It fell to about 60,300 in April, then rose again to **65,765** as of July 11, 2026. ^[14] ^[10] ^[7]

BEYOND DETENTION

Another **~183,200** people were monitored through *Alternatives to Detention* (check-ins, ankle monitors) in July 2026 — about **2.8×** the number physically held. ^[10] ^[13]

HOW LONG

Average detention runs roughly 45–55 days but ranges from days to over a year awaiting court. ^[10]

IMMIGRATION AND ENFORCEMENT

What Are the Facts?

CRIME, DETENTIONS & DEPORTATIONS — continued**DEPORTED IN 2025**

More than **1 in 3** people deported from detention in 2025 had no criminal record; among those who did, about 64% had nothing worse than a misdemeanor. ^[11]

CRIME RATES

Immigrants are jailed or imprisoned at far lower rates than U.S.-born citizens. Per 100,000 people: **674** unauthorized immigrants and **303** lawful immigrants, compared with **1,195** U.S.-born citizens. *One example:* Texas is the only state that records immigration status in criminal cases. From 2013 to 2022 its homicide conviction rate per 100,000 was **2.2** for unauthorized immigrants and **1.2** for lawful immigrants, against **3.0** for U.S.-born citizens. ^{[17] [8]}

POLICY SHIFTS & THE BIGGER PICTURE**A 2025 POLICY SHIFT**

A 2025 policy directed agents to review people on the *non-detained docket* — including some attending their own check-ins and court dates — for detention. ^[11]

THIRD-COUNTRY REMOVALS

A June 2025 Supreme Court ruling let the U.S. deport people to countries that are not their own — South Sudan, Eswatini and Paraguay among them, sometimes under paid agreements. ^[12]

HOW OFTEN — AND WHERE

Third-country removals are a small share of deportations: the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) estimates about **15,000** of roughly 396,000 ICE deportations in 2025 — about **4%** — went to countries not the person's own, 13,000 of those to Mexico. Most other receiving countries took a few hundred at most. ^{[15] [12]}

THE SYSTEM**THE COURTS**

As of June 2026, about **600 immigration judges** share a backlog of **3.20 million cases** — roughly **5,300 cases each**. About **72%** of the backlog is asylum applications already filed and waiting for a hearing. ^[4]

LAWYERS

In June 2026, only about **1 in 5** people (21.5%) had a lawyer when a removal order was issued — down from 27.7% a month earlier. ^[4]

PROTECTED STATUS (TPS)

Temporary Protected Status (TPS) covered about **1.3 million** people in March 2025 — its high point. Termination has since been ordered or announced for more than **1 million** of these people: a June 2026 Supreme Court ruling let the Haiti and Syria terminations proceed. As of July 2026, **four** countries still hold TPS: El Salvador, Lebanon, Sudan and Ukraine; courts have paused seven more. ^{[16] [5]}

IMMIGRATION AND ENFORCEMENT

Go Deeper

When you hear a claim about immigration, ask:

- ? What is being counted?
- ? What time-period and location does it cover?
- ? How many — and what percent — have criminal or violent convictions?
- ? Are these recent arrivals or long-settled residents?
- ? Does this focus on the whole system or a part of it?
- ? Crime rates? Compared to U.S. citizens?

Use these questions with any statistic, headline, or story about immigration before you decide what to think or share.

WHAT DO THE FACTS SAY?

- ✓ Border crossings have fallen sharply — down **82%** from FY 2023 to FY 2025, the lowest in more than 50 years. They can still rise or fall. [\[1\]\[3\]](#)
- ✓ Most undocumented immigrants are long-term U.S. residents. [\[3\]](#)
- ✓ Detention remains near historic highs, and most people held have no criminal conviction. [\[10\]](#)
- ✓ Many deported in 2025 had no criminal record — including some who were following the court process. [\[11\]](#)
- ✓ “Arrested” and “detained” count different things. The ~70% figure for arrests includes people only *charged*, not convicted. Among people actually *held* in detention, about 70% had no conviction at all. [\[10\]\[13\]\[14\]](#)
- ✓ Immigrants are far less likely to be jailed or imprisoned than U.S.-born citizens, including for homicide. [\[8\]\[17\]](#)

Stay Current

- **TRAC Immigration** — nonpartisan, government-data-based tracking of detention, deportations, immigration courts, and enforcement trends. tracreports.org/immigration

Sources and Links • verified August 13, 2026

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IMMIGRATION AND ENFORCEMENT

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IMMIGRATION AND ENFORCEMENT

Our Research Process

Every Fact Brief follows the same discipline — so you can trust what's on these pages, and check it yourself.

- 1 Identify issues voters care about.
- 2 Do independent, nonpartisan research using primary documents and verifiable, most up-to-date data.
- 3 Human-defined and directed throughout: we set the questions and the scope, redirect the research as fact patterns emerge, and verify every source. Three or more AI tools assist with searching, organizing and drafting.
- 4 Cross-check for accuracy and fairness.
- 5 Produce a concise Fact Brief.
- 6 Verify that each key factual claim is backed by a directly relevant, credible source.
- 7 Present the facts on contested points; note where credible sources disagree.
- 8 Use sources across the political spectrum, chosen for reliability — not for the conclusions they reach.

Get the Facts <> Share the Facts