

SPECIAL REPORT

Mass Deportation: Devastating Costs to America, Its Budget and Economy



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Introduction and Executive Summary

In recent months, leading politicians and policymakers have renewed calls for mass deportations of immigrants from the United States. While similar promises have been made in the past without coming to fruition¹ mass deportation now occupies a standing role in the rhetoric of leading immigration hawks. To cite just one example, former U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) director Tom Homan has promised “a historic deportation operation” should a hawkish administration return to power.² While some plans have envisioned a one-time, massive operation designed to round up, detain, and deport the undocumented population en masse,³ others have envisioned starting from a baseline of one million deportations per year.⁴

Given that in the modern immigration enforcement era the United States has never deported more than half a million immigrants per year—and many of those have been migrants apprehended trying to enter the U.S., not just those already living here—any mass deportation proposal raises obvious questions: how, exactly, would the United States possibly carry out the largest law enforcement operation in world history? And at what cost?⁵

Using data from the American Community Survey (ACS) along with publicly-available data about the current costs of immigration enforcement, this report aims to provide an estimation of what the fiscal and economic cost to the United States would be should the government deport a population of roughly 11 million people who as of 2022 lacked permanent legal status and faced the possibility of removal. We consider this both

in terms of the direct budgetary costs—the expenses associated with arrest, detention, legal processing, and removal—that the federal government would have to pay, and in terms of the impact on the United States economy and tax base should these people be removed from the labor force and consumer market.

In terms of fiscal costs, we also include an estimate of the impact of deporting an additional 2.3 million people who have crossed the U.S. southern border without legal immigration status and were released by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) from January 2023 through April 2024. We consider these fiscal costs separately because we do not have more recent ACS data necessary to estimate the total net changes in the undocumented population past 2022, or the larger impact on the economy and tax base of removing those people, an impact that is therefore not reflected in this report.

In total, we find that the cost of a one-time mass deportation operation aimed at both those populations—an estimated total of 13.3 million immigrants without legal status—is at least **\$315 billion**. We wish to emphasize that this figure is a highly conservative estimate. It does not take into account the long-term costs of a sustained mass deportation operation or the incalculable additional costs necessary to acquire the institutional capacity to remove over 13 million people in a short period of time—incalculable because there is simply no reality in which such a singular operation is possible. For one thing, there would be no way to accomplish this mission without mass detention as an interim step. To put the scale of detaining over 13 million

undocumented immigrants into context, the entire U.S. prison and jail population in 2022, comprising every person held in local, county, state, and federal prisons and jails, was 1.9 million people.⁶

In order to estimate the costs of a longer-term mass deportation operation, we calculated the cost of a program aiming to arrest, detain, process, and deport one million people per year—paralleling the more conservative proposals made by mass-deportation proponents. Even assuming that 20 percent of the undocumented population would “self-deport” under a yearslong mass-deportation regime, we estimate the ultimate cost of such a longer operation would average out to **\$88 billion annually**, for a total cost of **\$967.9 billion over the course of more than a decade**. This is a much higher sum than the one-time estimate, given the long-term costs of establishing and maintaining detention facilities and temporary camps to eventually be able to detain one million people at a time—costs that could not be modeled in a short-term analysis. This would require the United States to build and maintain 24 times more ICE detention capacity than currently exists. The government would also be required to establish and maintain over 1,000 new immigration courtrooms to process people at such a rate.

Even this estimate is likely quite conservative, as we were unable to estimate the additional hiring costs for the tens of thousands of agents needed to carry out one million arrests per year, the additional capital investments necessary to increase the ICE Air Operations fleet of charter aircraft to carry out one million annual deportations, and a myriad of other ancillary costs

SPOTLIGHT

Alternative Investments for National Growth

These staggering sums could be used for untold other benefits to this country. For the same costs as pursuing a strategy of mass deportations of one million people a year, sustained over 10-plus years until 13.3 million people have either been deported or left on their own, the United States could:

- Build over 40,450 new elementary schools in communities around the nation.⁷
- Construct over 2.9 million new homes in communities around the nation.⁸
- Fund the Head Start program for nearly 79 years.⁹
- Pay full tuition and expenses for over 4.3 million people to attend a private college for four years, or over 8.9 million people to attend an in-state public college for four years.¹⁰
- Buy a brand-new car for over 20.4 million people.¹¹

A *single year* of a million-deportation regime, with its \$88 billion price tag, would cost:

- Nearly twice the annual budget of the National Institutes of Health.¹²
- Nearly four times the budget of NASA.¹³
- Nearly three times as much as the federal government spends on child nutrition.¹⁴
- More than the government gives out each year in the Child Tax Credit program.¹⁵
- Eighteen times more than the *entire world* spends each year on cancer research.¹⁶

necessary to ramp up federal immigration enforcement operations to the scale necessary.

Beyond the direct financial cost of mass deportation, we also estimated the impact on the U.S. economy. Due to the loss of workers across U.S. industries, we found that mass deportation would reduce the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) by 4.2 to 6.8 percent. It would also result in significant reduction in tax revenues for the U.S. government. In 2022 alone, undocumented immigrant households paid \$46.8 billion in federal taxes and \$29.3 billion in state and local taxes. Undocumented immigrants also contributed \$22.6 billion to Social Security and \$5.7 billion to Medicare.

Mass deportations would cause significant labor shocks across multiple key industries, with especially acute impacts on construction, agriculture, and the hospitality sector. We estimate that nearly 14 percent of people employed in the construction industry are undocumented. Removing that labor would disrupt all forms of construction across the nation, from homes to businesses to basic infrastructure. As industries suffer, hundreds of thousands of U.S.-born workers could lose their jobs.

These numbers do not even come close to capturing the human cost of mass deportation. About 5.1 million U.S. citizen children live with an undocumented family member. Separating family members would lead to tremendous emotional stress and could also cause economic hardship for many of these mixed-status families who might lose their breadwinners, jeopardizing their economic and social well-being.



Mass deportation would almost certainly threaten the well-being of immigrants with lawful status in the United States (and even, potentially, naturalized U.S. citizens) and their communities; they would live under the shadow of weaponized enforcement as the U.S. went after their neighbors, and, as social scientists found under the Trump administration, would be prone to worry they and their children might be next.¹⁷ The visibility of a massive deportation operation—whether one-time or constant—would likely change the way in which many Americans viewed their government and could threaten the social fabric by increasing vigilantism and hate crimes.

However, it is hard to quantify these costs, and they will not fall equally on all Americans. By contrast, every American taxpayer would shoulder the fiscal burden of mass deportations—exacerbated by the reduced tax base mass deportation would create—and every American would feel the effects of a devastated labor market.

About 5.1 million U.S. citizen children live with an undocumented family member. Separating family members would lead to tremendous emotional stress and could also cause economic hardship for many of these mixed-status families who might lose their breadwinners.

KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ About **11 million undocumented immigrants** lived in the United States as of 2022—3.3 percent of the country’s overall population. An additional 2.3 million removable immigrants were released into the United States between January 2023 and April 2024 and would also be targeted in any mass deportation operation.
- ▶ A one-time operation to deport these immigrants would cost at least **\$315 billion**, broken down as follows:
 - The government would have to spend **\$89.3 billion** to conduct sufficient arrests.
 - The government would have to spend **\$167.8 billion** to detain immigrants en masse.
 - The government would have to spend **\$34.1 billion** on legal processing.
 - The government would have to spend **\$24.1 billion** on removals.
- ▶ Deporting one million immigrants per year would incur **an annual cost of \$88 billion, with the majority of that cost going towards building detention camps**. It would take over ten years, and the building of hundreds to thousands of new detention facilities, to arrest, detain, process, and remove all 13.3 million targeted immigrants—even assuming that 20 percent of that population would depart voluntarily during any multi-year mass deportation effort. The total cost over 10.6 years (assuming an annual inflation rate of 2.5 percent) would be **\$967.9 billion**.

The annual costs would break down as follows:

 - The government would have to spend **an average of \$7 billion** per year to conduct one million arrests annually.
 - The government would have to spend **an average of \$66 billion** per year to detain one million immigrants annually, or surveil them on alternatives to detention programs while detention capacity ramps up to one million.
 - The government would have to spend **an average of \$12.6 billion** per year to carry out legal processing for an average of one million immigrants annually.
 - The government would have to spend **an average of \$2.1 billion** per year to remove one million immigrants annually.
- ▶ To carry out over 13 million arrests in a short period of time would require somewhere between 220,000 and 409,000 new government employees and law enforcement officers, which would be nearly impossible given current hiring challenges across law enforcement agencies. Even carrying out one million at-large arrests per year would require ICE to hire over 30,000 new law enforcement agents and staff, instantly making it the largest law enforcement agency in the federal government.

KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ **Mass deportation would exacerbate the U.S. labor shortage.** In 2022, nearly 90 percent of undocumented immigrants were of working age, compared to 61.3 percent of the U.S.-born population aged between 16 and 64, making undocumented immigrants more likely to actively participate in the labor force. Losing these working-age undocumented immigrants would worsen the severe workforce challenges that many industries have already been struggling with in the past few years.
- ▶ Mass deportation would **hurt several key U.S. industries** that rely heavily on undocumented workers. The construction and agriculture industries would lose at least one in eight workers, while in hospitality, about one in 14 workers would be deported due to their undocumented status. Among those industries, certain trades would be hit even harder. Mass deportation would remove more than 30 percent of the workers in major construction trades, such as plasterers, roofers, and painters; nearly 28 percent of graders and sorters of agriculture products; and a fourth of all housekeeping cleaners.
- ▶ Among the deported would be **one million undocumented immigrant entrepreneurs**, who generated \$27.1 billion in total business income in 2022. Losing the 157,800 undocumented immigrant entrepreneurs in neighborhood businesses would lead to disruptions to services that have become an integral part of community life and provide local jobs for Americans.
- ▶ The U.S. would lose out on key contributions undocumented households make to social safety net programs annually, including **\$22.6 billion to Social Security and \$5.7 billion to Medicare**. As the U.S. population ages, the loss of these payments would make it increasingly challenging to keep social safety net programs solvent.
- ▶ Mass deportation would **deprive federal, state, and local governments of billions in local tax contributions from undocumented households**. In 2022 alone, undocumented immigrant households paid \$46.8 billion in federal taxes and \$29.3 billion in state and local taxes. After taxes, they were left with \$256.8 billion in spending power, money that could be spent in local communities.
- ▶ Deporting undocumented immigrants would **separate four million mixed-status families**, affecting 8.5 million U.S. citizens with undocumented family members (5.1 million of whom are U.S. citizen children). It would slash the income of their households by an average of 62.7 percent (\$51,200 per year).
- ▶ Overall, mass deportation would lead to **a loss of 4.2 percent to 6.8 percent of annual U.S. GDP**, or \$1.1 trillion to \$1.7 trillion in 2022 dollars. In comparison, the U.S. GDP shrunk by 4.3 percent during the Great Recession between 2007 and 2009.
- ▶ The negative impact would be the most significant in **California, Texas, and Florida**, the three states that were home to 47.2 percent of the country's undocumented immigrants in 2022 and where one in every 20 residents would be deported.

The Targets of Mass Deportation

It has been 38 years since Congress last provided a path to permanent legal status for most undocumented immigrants. A majority of undocumented immigrants have been in the U.S. for at least a decade, building their lives and raising their families in communities across the country.¹⁸ Hundreds of thousands of undocumented immigrants graduate from schools and attend college every single year, yet are blocked from fully contributing to this country due to their immigration status.

In 2022, we estimate that 11 million undocumented immigrants lived in the United States, comprising 3.3 percent of the total population and 23.8 percent of the immigrant population. Many have some form of temporary but revocable legal status, such as Temporary Protected Status (TPS) or protection under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. However, most lack any lawful immigration status, and risk the possibility of arrest, removal proceedings, and deportation.

In addition, from January 2023 to April 2024, DHS's Office of Homeland Security Statistics reports that 2,264,830 migrants crossed the border, were taken into Border Patrol custody, and were then released into the United States on bond, parole, an order of supervision, or conditional release.¹⁹ Because this entire population is automatically subject to removal proceedings,²⁰ throughout the report we estimate the additional budgetary costs necessary to remove them. We acknowledge that this figure is not a complete estimate of the net change in the undocumented population from 2023 onwards, as it does not account for people who

have overstayed their visas (a number that cannot be calculated given existing government data), individuals who were not taken into Border Patrol custody and who are currently not known to the United States government at all, or undocumented immigrants who may have left the United States in 2023 and 2024.²¹

While the largest share of undocumented immigrants still hails from Mexico (43.1 percent), their number has been declining in recent years, in part due to an increasing number of Mexicans returning to Mexico, as well as expanded opportunities for lawful immigration, including for seasonal agricultural workers.²² At the same time, the number of undocumented immigrants from almost every other region in the world increased between 2019 and 2022.²³



About two thirds (66.3 percent) of undocumented immigrants arrived in the country as adults; a quarter (25.1 percent) arrived as children between the ages of five and 17; and 8.6 percent arrived as children younger than five years old. About 58 percent of undocumented immigrants speak English proficiently. As they have settled into their new communities, they have found jobs to earn a living, raised families, bought homes, and actively participated in their local communities.

The effects of mass deportation would likely be most acutely felt in California, Texas, and Florida, states that combined are home to nearly half of the nation’s undocumented population. Undocumented immigrants comprised 6.4 percent of the total population in Texas, 5.5 percent in California, and five percent in Florida.

In 2022, 39 percent of undocumented immigrant households owned their homes. Mass deportation would uproot the lives of at least 1.6 million homeowners.

Many undocumented immigrants share their lives with U.S. citizens. Removing them from the country would pull apart four million mixed-status families. Those families include 8.5 million U.S. citizens who lived with undocumented immigrants, 5.1 million of whom are children. These family members of undocumented immigrants would not only suffer from tremendous emotional stress but also face potential economic hardship due to the loss of major income earners in their families.

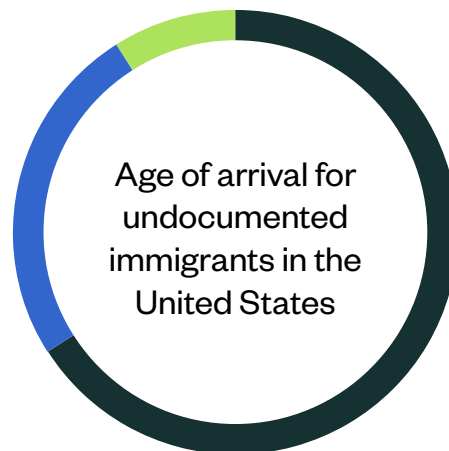
UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES AS OF 2022

11M

Estimated number of undocumented immigrants living in the United States. These immigrants made up

3.3%
of the total population in the United States, and

23.8%
of the immigrant population.



- **66.3%** - Arrived in the country as adults
- **25.1%** - Arrived as children between the ages of five and 17
- **8.6%** - Arrived as children younger than five years old

39.0%

Share of undocumented immigrant households who owned their homes in 2022. Mass deportation would uproot the lives of **1.6 million homeowners**.

Costs to the Federal Government

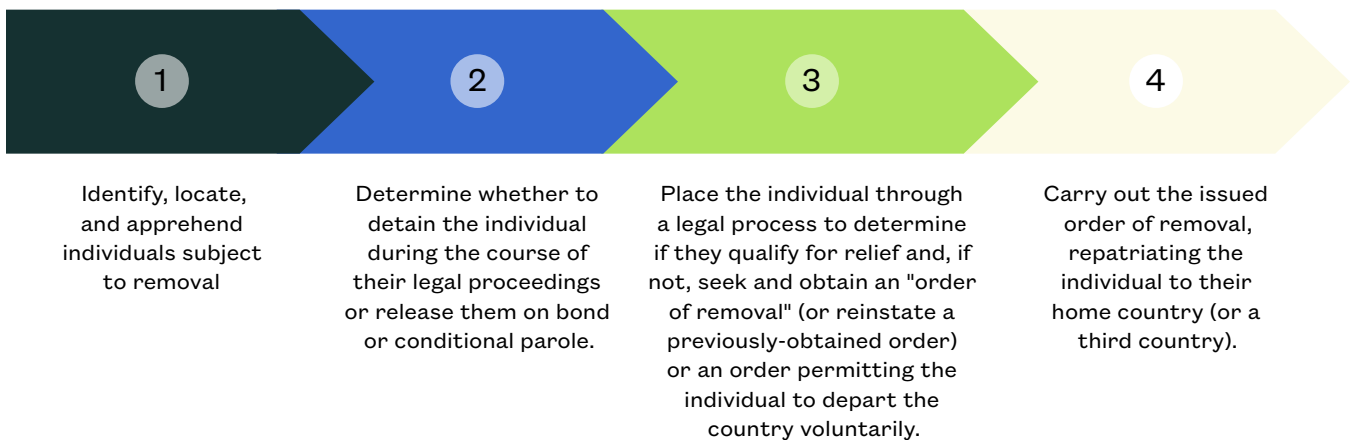
Modeling and Assumptions

We calculate the cost of removing a population of 13.3 million people, composed of the 11 million who were captured in the 2022 ACS along with the additional 2.3 million arrivals captured in DHS data from January 2023 to April 2024, by calculating the component costs for each of the four steps in the removal process. First, the federal government must identify, locate, and apprehend individuals subject to removal. Second, the government must determine whether to detain the individual during the course of their legal proceeding or release them on bond or conditional parole. Third, the government must place the individual through a legal process to determine if they qualify for relief and, if not, seek and obtain an “order of removal” (or reinstate a previously-obtained order) or an order permitting the

individual to depart the country voluntarily. Fourth and finally, the government must carry out the issued order of removal, repatriating the individual to their home country (or a third country).

We acknowledge that it is impossible to fully model the governmental costs of any effort to carry out the largest deportation operation in human history, given the number of variables involved and the scale of operations. The most significant variables for any such operation would be time and capital investment. A single operation aiming to deport 13.3 million people would unfold differently, and with different results and costs, than a longer operation carried out over the course of multiple years. Most saliently, a protracted operation would require sustained investment in detention centers and immigration courtrooms that

FOUR STEPS OF THE REMOVAL PROCESS



would have to remain in operation for over a decade. Therefore, throughout this report we provide two estimates: (1) an estimate of the total cost of deporting 13.3 million people at the current costs, not accounting for any capital expenditures, and (2) an estimate of the costs of deporting roughly one million individuals per year until the undocumented population falls to zero, considering the capital expenditures necessary to increase enforcement capacity to that level and to maintain detention and processing infrastructure for over a decade.

We recognize that any such operation, if ever carried out, would likely produce initial economies of scale; initial arrests would likely target individuals already on ICE's non-detained docket, especially those who have been issued removal orders but have been residing in the U.S. with stays of removal or other administrative forbearance. However, given the unprecedented nature of any such action, it remains unclear how immigrant communities would respond to the initiation of a mass-deportation regime. Would millions pick up and leave, seeking to return to their country of origin to avoid arrests? Or would they go deeper underground, moving locations and changing identities to avoid law enforcement? Without a clear answer to these questions, we are unable to calculate the degree to which costs would change due to economies of scale throughout any such operation.

Our estimate of the cost of removing 13.3 million immigrants in a single, one-time operation does not account for individuals "self-deporting," since it is impossible to know how long such an operation would take and how many people would get the chance to leave before being swept up in an enforcement dragnet.

Our annual-operation model does consider the likelihood that some undocumented immigrants would voluntarily leave the country before being arrested and detained. Millions of undocumented immigrants have U.S. citizen family members, employment, and other deep ties to their communities which would make them

less likely to depart at the start of any major enforcement operation. As a result, it is nearly impossible to determine how many would leave and how many would stay. When calculating the costs of removing one million undocumented immigrants per year, we assume that roughly 20 percent of undocumented immigrants will depart prior to arrest, leaving the remaining 80 percent of the population subject to arrest, detention, legal processing, and removal.²⁴ We find support for this assumption in recent DHS estimates indicating that as of 2022, 79 percent of the undocumented population had been in the United States since before 2009. We presume that individuals who have been in the country for over a decade under constant threat of deportation would be less likely to leave when a large deportation operation is announced.

We assume that roughly 20 percent of undocumented immigrants will depart prior to arrest, leaving the remaining 80 percent of the population subject to arrest, detention, legal processing, and removal.

In general, we do not consider capital expenditures and inflation in the single-operation model. This is because we lack adequate comparators to estimate the costs of ramping up production of detention facilities, courtrooms, personnel, equipment, and other resources needed to conduct such an operation at speed. We have some information allowing us to model these expenditures on the scale needed for an operation that could continue and ramp up over several years, and where such information is available, we incorporate it into our estimates for the annual-operation model.

Our estimate also excludes the legal, managerial, oversight, and other ancillary costs involved with any such operation. As the number of law enforcement agents rises, so too would the managerial and human resources workload of the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice. Lawsuits challenging allegations of widespread human rights violations would inevitably incur their own costs, and government watchdogs would undoubtedly pay close attention to the largest law enforcement operation in world history.

As the number of law enforcement agents rises, so too would the managerial and human resources workload of the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice. Lawsuits challenging allegations of widespread human rights violations would inevitably incur their own costs, and government watchdogs would undoubtedly pay close attention to the largest law enforcement operation in world history.

Throughout the report, we also presume that Congress will not act to change the immigration enforcement process and create a new mechanism for deportation which allows for rapid deportations without any meaningful legal process. While such legislation is not inconceivable, Congress has generally limited the use of rapid removal processes only to those who have been in the United States for a relatively short period of time,

and required court hearings before removal for long-term residents.²⁵

We also presume that the U.S. government would be able to carry out repatriations for every individual issued a removal order. Currently, this is not possible. Many countries heavily restrict or outright ban U.S. repatriation flights, including Venezuela, Mauritania, China, and India. As a result, removing individuals from those countries is either impossible or cost-prohibitive through commercial flights. Nevertheless, because this report aims to estimate the costs of removing the *entire* undocumented population, we disregard this reality of international diplomacy to produce these calculations.

Finally, we do not consider the ongoing costs associated with removing migrants who might arrive in the United States in the future. Our goal is to focus our estimate on the costs associated with the mass removal of the current undocumented population.

The Costs of Arrests

The first step of the removal process generally involves two events: an arrest, and the issuance of a formal Notice to Appear in removal proceedings (which must be served in person).

The majority of ICE arrests occur after individuals are encountered by a local, state, or non-immigration federal law enforcement agency. Before the individual is released from custody by the initial arresting agency, they are taken into custody by federal immigration agents.

The use of these custodial arrests has fluctuated significantly in the last 15 years, following many local jurisdictions adopting “sanctuary” policies which limit local cooperation with ICE, as well as changes in enforcement priorities at the federal level.²⁶ Because the vast majority of undocumented immigrants are not currently in law enforcement custody, they would not be subject to custodial arrests.

The remaining arrests (a minority) occur “at large” in the community, when Detention and Deportation Officers (DDOs) are dispatched to arrest a known or suspected removable noncitizen at their home, work, or other location. The component which carries out most at-large arrests is ICE’s National Fugitive Operations Program (NFOP), which in 2023 consisted of 129 Fugitive Operations teams and 10 Mobile Criminal Apprehension teams.²⁷ Other ICE divisions occasionally conduct at-large arrests as well: ICE’s Criminal Apprehension Program conducts them at times, and ICE Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) has been responsible for several large raids on employers during which dozens of people are arrested at a worksite. During at-large arrest operations, DDOs may choose to arrest only the target, or use the opportunity to interrogate other individuals nearby and arrest any who are potentially removable (a practice known as “collateral” arrests).

To model the costs of apprehending undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. at large as part of a mass deportation operation, we use the average cost of an arrest carried out under the National Fugitive Operations Program. In determining average cost per arrest, we relied on ICE budget and arrest statistics from Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 through 2020. We chose this timeframe to avoid data anomalies caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 and 2022, as well as the more recent implementation of DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas’ enforcement priorities that have led to lower arrest totals and thus would artificially inflate the average cost of an arrest. Using this data, we conclude that the average cost per at-large arrest would be \$6,653.65.²⁸

In addition to the cost per arrest, we consider the costs to transport one million people per year to ICE detention centers after an arrest. We conclude that the minimum cost of transportation from the site of an arrest to the nearest ICE office would be roughly \$3,745 per busload of 45 people, using figures provided by the Office of Inspector General in a September 2023 report examining transportation costs of bus travel from

Border Patrol stations to ICE detention centers.²⁹ This would add an additional \$83.22 per arrest, producing a total average cost per fugitive arrest of \$6,736.87.

We note that this figure is likely significantly lower than the actual cost of transportation, as the contracts reviewed by the OIG were for transporting people from remote areas along the U.S. border. Transportation contracts for arrests inside major metropolitan areas would almost certainly come at higher costs. In addition, costs for transporting vulnerable populations, including hundreds of thousands of children and families, would likely be higher. Therefore, this should be taken as a conservative estimate, with the real cost of transportation substantially higher.

Removing 13.3 Million People in a Single Operation

Under our model, the total cost of arresting 11 million undocumented immigrants in a single mass deportation operation comes to an estimated **\$74 billion**. If we include the costs of arresting the 2.3 million new arrivals from 2023 through April 2024, we expect an additional **\$15.3 billion** in costs. Therefore, we estimate the total arrest costs for a single mass deportation operation at **\$89.3 billion**.

This one-time estimate does not consider any additional costs required to hire the potentially hundreds of thousands of additional law enforcement officers necessary to carry out this operation. From FY 2016 to 2020, there were 32.27 arrests per employee working for the Fugitive Operations Program, compared to 59.3 arrests per employee working for the Criminal Apprehension Program.³⁰ That suggests that a mass deportation operation to round up 13.3 million people could require anywhere from 220,000 to 409,000 additional personnel, a staggering number of people which would require an enormous and near-impossible to estimate initial capital investment to recruit, hire, and train.

As a result, our estimate is likely very conservative, as any mass operation over a short period of time would be more expensive and require additional costs which simply cannot be calculated at this time.

Removing One Million Undocumented Immigrants Per Year

In modeling the cost of finding and arresting roughly one million undocumented immigrants per year, we assume roughly 20 percent of the undocumented population would voluntarily leave during a multi-year mass deportation operation. Therefore, we calculate that the total population to arrest would be 10.6 million in total and take roughly 10.6 years to carry out if arrests were maintained at that level.

Evaluating the cost of a removal target of one million allows us to consider additional costs associated with personnel and other capital expenditures. At a rate of 32.27 arrests per Fugitive Operations employee, that suggests that increasing fugitive arrests to one million per year would require hiring an additional 30,989

ICE employees. At this size, ICE's fugitive operations program would become the largest federal law enforcement agency in the country.

At a cost per employee of \$200,610,³¹ and presuming an annual employee attrition rate of 6.1 percent,³² employee costs to grow the workforce sufficiently to meet initial arrest goals would be roughly \$6,216,700,000. In addition, we conclude that increasing arrests to 1,000,000 a year would require increasing the agency's current non-pay costs to \$154,358,000 per year,³³ along with the costs of transportation stated above.

This highly conservative estimate excludes the substantial costs of additional human resources, management, information technology, and other personnel at DHS necessary to support this increased workforce, nor does it consider whether hiring over 30,000 new employees would be possible in a year.

Taken together, and presuming an annual inflation rate of 2.5 percent, we conclude that an operation of this size over the course of 11 years would cost an estimated total of **\$77.4 billion**, or an average of **\$7 billion per year**.



Increasing fugitive arrests to one million per year would require hiring an additional

30,989

ICE employees.

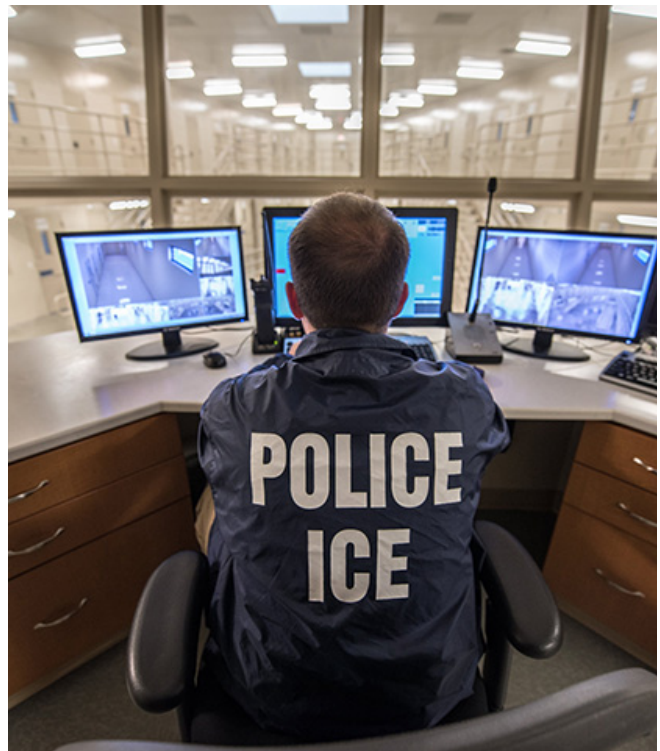
At this size, ICE's fugitive operations program would become the **largest federal law enforcement agency in the United States**.

The Cost of Detention

After arresting removable noncitizens, ICE generally transfers those in its custody to a detention facility where the agency determines if the person must remain in custody during the pendency of any legal immigration process to which they are entitled.³⁴ While certain individuals are subject to mandatory detention, others are eligible for release on bond or their own recognizance. However, we assume that any one-time operation deporting 13.3 million people would require systematic detention of each individual prior to deportation, and many public proposals for mass deportation have explicitly called for the creation of many new detention facilities.³⁵ As a result, for this report, we consider the costs of detention for all 11 million people potentially subject to deportations, as well as the additional 2.3 million new arrivals from 2023 through April 2024. As noted previously, given the difficulty of predicting how an operation of this size and resource demand would be carried out, we do not consider capital expenditures or inflation in this single-operation model.

Detained individuals may include both single adults and families. For the population present through 2022, we estimate that about 985,000 unauthorized noncitizens are under 18.³⁶ We assume for the purposes of this analysis that every one of these children lives with at least one undocumented parent or legal guardian, and therefore estimate that about two million parents and children would likely be held in family detention facilities. The other nine million undocumented individuals would be held in adults-only facilities. For the population that entered between 2023 and April 2024, we identified the number of unaccompanied minors and make the same assumption. We arrive at two million adults and 300,000 family members.

This is important as costs paid by ICE's Custody Operations, which oversees the immigration detention system, differ for operating detention facilities for single adults and for families. ICE has provided estimates of the daily bed rates for each, but bed-rate estimates only include direct costs—excluding the salaries of its Deportation Officers (DOs).³⁷ These are critical costs: DOs process detained individuals who are entering and leaving the facilities, address their requests and grievances, and are responsible for managing their cases.³⁸ The mass detention of individuals will undoubtedly require an increase in DOs.



An ICE ERO officer monitors a detention facility in Buffalo, NY, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Taken September 23, 2015.

To estimate the cost of detention including personnel costs more accurately, we used estimates based on the budget for ICE Custody and Operations between FY 2017 and FY 2020.³⁹ For single adults, we estimate the average daily rate for detention to be \$236.52 per person⁴⁰ and for a single person in a family detention center, \$481.79.⁴¹

The length of time individuals stay in detention also varies.⁴² Between FY 2017 and FY 2020, we estimate that single adults spent 54.7 days in detention⁴³ on average, while families spent 23.5 days.⁴⁴

Combining the average daily cost of detaining an individual with the number of days that individual will be in custody gives us the total cost for detaining each undocumented immigrant targeted for mass deportation.

Removing 13.3 Million People in a Single Operation

Under our model, the total cost of detaining 11 million undocumented immigrants in a single mass deportation operation comes to an estimated **\$139 billion**. If we include the costs of detaining the 2.3 million new arrivals from 2023 through April 2024, we expect an additional **\$28.8 billion** in costs. Therefore, we estimate the total detention costs for a single mass-deportation operation at **\$167.8 billion**.

We estimate the total detention costs for a single mass-deportation operation at \$167.8 billion.

This is undoubtedly a conservative estimate. In general, ICE uses detention more often for individuals with criminal records or those who are recent migrants arriving from the border. These populations have fewer paths to remaining in the United States and are thus more likely to be removed within a short period of time, keeping average length of stay figures relatively short. During a mass deportation operation, we assume that many targets would not fit these profiles and would be eligible for and likely to apply for relief from removal. This would lead to a significant increase in the average length of stay in detention and a significant increase in the overall costs necessary to detain the population. However, given the uncertainties involved, we did not attempt to estimate the extent of this cost increase.

Removing One Million Undocumented Immigrants Per Year

To model the potential costs of expanding detention, we again presume that 20 percent of the undocumented population would leave on their own throughout the multi-year process, leaving a population of 10.6 million who would be held in detention pending removal. We also presume that anyone not physically detained would be placed on electronic surveillance under ICE's Alternatives to Detention (ATD) program. The most recent cost estimate for an ATD is \$4.07 per individual per day.⁴⁵

ICE's current detention contracts include a guaranteed minimum of 29,790 beds.⁴⁶ However, including additional capacity at these and other facilities, ICE has most recently detained over 39,000 people in early 2024.⁴⁷ In the Fiscal Year 2024 budget, Congress provided ICE with sufficient funding to detain 41,500 people at any given time.⁴⁸ This is far below the minimum number of beds needed to detain and remove one million individuals each year.

Thus, we consider the costs of expanding ICE's detention capacity throughout the period it would take to remove all undocumented individuals at a rate of one million

deportations per year, in addition to the costs of placing all arrested individuals who could not be detained at the time of their arrest on an ATD.

While ICE could use unused beds in jails or prisons across the country to expand its capacity, it is unclear how many are available or equipped to detain individuals for civil immigration violations. Instead, we use the costs incurred by CBP to build soft-sided detention facilities in recent years.⁴⁹ This is a useful comparator due to the relative speed at which they can be built.⁵⁰ We also assume DHS would be able to obtain the land necessary to build these facilities, including the use of military bases as it has done in the past.⁵¹ Using the costs related to building a 500-bed facility, we estimate that it would cost \$35,910,000⁵² to build one such soft-sided facility and \$47,950,000⁵³ per year thereafter to sustain it (after adjusting for inflation).

If ICE could remove one million unauthorized immigrants per year, it would take a little less than 11 years for the agency to remove all 10.6 million undocumented individuals. Starting with ICE’s current number of detention beds and estimating that ICE would want to expand its capacity to detain as many individuals as possible by the 11th year, ICE would need to construct 216 soft-sided facilities per year to have enough detention space.⁵⁴

Accounting for annual inflation of 2.5 percent, the construction of 216 soft-sided facilities per year until all undocumented immigrants are detained, and the placement of all individuals who are arrested but cannot be detained in Alternatives to Detention programs, we expect a total cost of \$728.3 billion, or an average of \$66.2 billion per year.

In order to remove one million undocumented immigrants per year, ICE would need to construct at a minimum **216 soft-sided detention facilities** holding 500 beds each per year for 11 years to have enough space.

The Cost of Legal Processing

Most noncitizens who are apprehended in the United States are placed in an adversarial administrative proceeding before an immigration judge (IJ).⁵⁵ The Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) under the Department of Justice (DOJ) oversees the immigration court system.⁵⁶ The federal government is represented by an attorney from ICE's Office of the Principal Legal Advisor (OPLA).⁵⁷ While U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) also plays a role in removal proceedings⁵⁸, it is nearly impossible to predict the share of its non-fee-funded costs related to removal proceedings; furthermore, most costs would be borne by EOIR and OPLA. As such, our cost estimate focuses on those two agencies.

Removing 13.3 Million People in a Single Operation

To model the one-time costs associated with the legal processing of the undocumented population, we consider the annual number of cases completed in comparison to the overall budget approved by Congress and expended by the agency. In the past few years, EOIR's pending caseload has increased dramatically.⁵⁹ We use the number of completed cases per year because it gives us a sense of EOIR's capacity to adjudicate cases, especially as it has increased its personnel in the past few years. We acknowledge that some budgetary resources will be spent on processing cases that remain pending at the end of the fiscal year, which will not show up in the completed caseload. However, the converse is also true: each completed case may have incurred costs in prior fiscal years. Considering the massive growth in the immigration court backlog, we use FY 2023 budget information to estimate legal processing, which we believe best captures the costs of processing pending cases alongside completed ones.⁶⁰

In FY 2023, 734 immigration judges completed 525,819 cases.⁶¹ That year, the agency's budget was \$860 million. We used these numbers to estimate the cost per case, which is **\$1,719.57**.⁶²

A similar approach is taken with OPLA. In FY 2023, the agency reported completing 460,000 cases.⁶³ The discrepancy between this and EOIR's figures may be explained by OPLA's acknowledgement that this estimate is based on its case management system and not verified against EOIR's databases.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, given the lack of other reliable data on OPLA's work capacity, it provides us with a figure to calculate how many cases OPLA was able to prepare given its budget in FY 2023.

To estimate costs associated with OPLA, we use ICE's Budget Execution and Staffing Reports. Using the September report for FY 2023, we see that the total obligations incurred by OPLA during that year amounted to \$372,059,000.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, EOIR does not provide an equivalent expense report to the public. We estimate that it costs OPLA \$850.37 to complete each average case.⁶⁶

Under our model, the total cost of processing 11 million undocumented immigrants in a single mass deportation operation comes to an estimated **\$28.2 billion**. If we include the costs of processing the 2.3 million new arrivals from 2023 through April 2024, we expect an additional **\$5.8 billion** in costs. Therefore, we estimate the total processing costs for a mass-deportation operation at **\$34.1 billion**. We presume that this is an conservative estimate, as it does not take into consideration the fact that long-term undocumented immigrants are more likely to be eligible for and apply for relief from removal, which would increase the

average length of time per case and reduce the total number of cases the average judge could hear in a year.

Removing One Million Undocumented Immigrants Per Year

Immigration court processing presents a key limiting factor in the government’s ability to remove one million unauthorized immigrants per year. We again use a 20 percent population attrition rate to arrive at the number of undocumented noncitizens who would be subject to legal processing at 10.6 million people.

Using the information obtained from the one-time model, we estimate that each one of the 734 IJs in FY 2023 completed an average of 716 cases annually.⁶⁷

We make one key change in this model compared to the one-year model regarding OPLA’s capacity: we assume OPLA will be able to complete the same number of cases as EOIR, ignoring the discrepancy in self-reported completions between the two agencies. We made this change with the assumption that part of the discrepancy between the agencies’ figures is due to different ways of tracking case processing timelines, and to ensure that all cases of the undocumented population are completely processed and at the same rate as EOIR across the multi-year model.

With these figures, we estimate that EOIR will need to hire 181 IJs per year to fully process 10.6 million cases within 11 years.⁶⁸ This estimate includes a personnel annual attrition rate of 23 IJs per year as IJs either retire or otherwise leave the position.⁶⁹ This means that EOIR, considering this attrition rate, would have to hire 181 IJs to net an additional 158 IJs per year. We use the per-case completion cost estimates derived using the agency’s FY 2023 budgets as well: \$1,719.57 per case for EOIR and \$850.37 per case for OPLA.⁷⁰

In addition, we consider that EOIR would need to expand its courtroom capacity. As of January 2024,

the agency had 601 courtrooms available for its 734 IJs.⁷¹ If EOIR had to add a net number of 158 IJs per year, the agency would need to add new rooms to conduct hearings too. EOIR estimates that it is a two-year process to build and occupy a new court.⁷² However, in 2019, DHS built “tent courts” within months to implement the Migrant Protection Protocols. Two of these courts, in Laredo and Brownsville, TX, had a combined capacity of 10 courtrooms for IJs to hold administrative hearings (formally called master calendar hearings). According to a top DHS official, building these two facilities again would incur a one-time cost of \$16.3 million dollars to build and a cost of \$143.3 million to operate annually, adjusted for inflation.⁷³ If we presume that EOIR’s current ratio of courtrooms to IJs (0.82 courtrooms for every one IJ) is sufficient, EOIR would have to build more than 1,100 tent-style courtrooms to accommodate its newly hired IJs over the nearly eleven-year period.

EOIR will need to hire

181 immigration judges per year

to fully process 10.6 million cases within 11 years.

Using these figures, and accounting for a 2.5 percent annual inflation rate over the 10-plus years it would take to process all these cases, we estimate that it would cost a total of **\$138.9 billion, or an average of \$12.6 billion per year.**

The Cost of Removals

The final step of the removal process involves physically repatriating a person to their home country. For individuals who are not permitted to voluntarily repatriate through commercial air flight, this process is carried out by ICE’s Transportation and Removal Program (TRP). For individuals from Mexico, this process generally entails transportation to the U.S.-Mexico border by bus or airplane, after which the person is repatriated by land (some individuals are also repatriated by flight to Mexico City). Individuals from Canada can be deported by ground transportation. Individuals from every other country can only be repatriated by air. ICE does not have its own fleet of planes. Instead, its “ICE Air” operations are operated by contractors who provide the planes and pilots.⁷⁴

Many countries are “recalcitrant” and largely do not permit the United States to carry out deportation flights (or permit only a handful of flights per year).⁷⁵ These countries include places such as Russia, China, Venezuela, India, and Mauritania. That means that even if the United States could obtain removal orders for every undocumented immigrant from those countries, it could not deport those individuals unless a third country stepped up and agreed to take them. As a result, it is currently diplomatically impossible to remove all undocumented immigrants. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this analysis alone, we assume that every person can be repatriated to their home country, and that ICE would not use commercial air repatriations for individuals held in detention and ordered removed during a multi-year mass deportation operation.

Removing 13.3 Million People in a Single Operation

In 2023, Acting ICE Director Tae Johnson testified at a Congressional hearing that the average ICE Air removal flight cost roughly \$17,000 per flight hour.⁷⁶ We use this \$17,000 figure as our baseline estimate for costs incurred in any removal flight. For individuals deported to Mexico, we conclude that roughly 10 percent would be deported by air (as ICE reported in 2016),⁷⁷ while the remaining 90 percent would be deported by ground transportation.

ICE has never provided an exact cost of ground transportation. In 2007, at a time when the vast majority of ICE removals were to Mexico, agency officials indicated that the cost of removal transportation was roughly \$1,000 per person.⁷⁸ Adjusted for inflation, that figure is now \$1,479.29.⁷⁹ We estimate that roughly 4.8 million undocumented Mexicans and Canadians present in the U.S. as of 2022 (as well as an additional 340,000 Mexicans released after crossing the border between January 2023 and April 2024) would be removable by bus at a total cost of \$7 billion.

For the 8.5 million individuals who were present as of 2022 or who arrived across the southern border after that point and would be removed by plane, we first calculated the average flight hours necessary to remove each nationality and then generated a cost per deportation flight per nationality. We estimate that the cost of removal flights for this population would be \$17.1 billion in total.

Our estimate presumes that a mass deportation operation of this scale would require over 65,700 individual removal flights. That compares to an average of just 137.6 removal flights in the last year.⁸⁰ In other

words, to deport 13.3 million undocumented immigrants over a single event, ICE would have to find enough flight capacity to increase its annual removal flights by nearly 47,500 percent in a short period of time.

To deport 13.3M undocumented immigrants over a single event, ICE would have to find enough flight capacity to increase its annual removal flights by nearly

+47,500%

in a short period of time.

Under our model, the total cost of removing 11 million undocumented immigrants in a single mass deportation operation comes to an estimated **\$20.6 billion**. If we include the costs of removing the 2.3 million new arrivals from 2023 through April 2024, we expect an additional **\$3.4 billion** in costs. Therefore, we estimate the total removal costs for a mass-deportation operation at **\$24.1 billion**.

Our estimate is undoubtedly conservative. We do not calculate the cost of building new staging facilities for deportation flights, as the choice of location and size would have a significant impact on cost estimates and is therefore impossible to calculate. We also know that previous efforts to dramatically increase removals have come at very high costs. In September 2021, following the mass crossing event in Del Rio, Texas—where over 10,000 Haitian nationals crossed the border in a three-day period—ICE signed an emergency air contract to run 44 removal flights to Haiti in a two-week period at an average per-flight cost of \$179,079.⁸¹ Adjusted for inflation, this figure is roughly 26 percent higher than our estimate of the cost of a regular removal flight to Haiti in 2023 dollars. Therefore, we presume that the actual

costs of any mass removal operation would likely be significantly higher than our estimate.

Removing One Million Undocumented Immigrants Per Year

Costs of removal would also be very high in any scenario where deportations were increased to one million per year. Assuming again for the purposes of this analysis that mass repatriations are possible even to countries which are currently “recalcitrant,” and that roughly 20 percent of the undocumented population would voluntarily depart during a mass removal operation, we estimate that 10.6 million people would still need to be removed.

Using the calculations above, we estimate that the average cost of a removal, either by flight or by bus, is \$1,815.14. Therefore, we estimate the flight and bus cost alone to remove one million people per year at \$1,815,140,000.

In order to reach a figure of one million deportations per year, the agency would also have to significantly increase its current staffing. From Fiscal Year 2015 through 2019 (before years impacted by the COVID pandemic), ICE averaged 245,026 removals per year at an average staff cost per removal of \$69.95. Therefore, we estimate an annual staff cost of at least \$69,950,000 per year.

Accounting for annual inflation of 2.5 percent, we estimate that the costs of removing one million individuals per year would total **\$22.4 billion, or an average of \$2.1 billion per year**.

As with the prior estimate, this is likely a significantly conservative figure. Under this scenario, ICE would still be required to increase its removal flight capacity per year by 3,720 percent, which would likely increase the cost per flight hour significantly due to the current challenges in the aviation market of finding sufficient pilots and planes. We were also unable to estimate the additional costs necessary to obtain more charter aircraft for removals, given the impossibility of predicting the private commercial decisions that would entail.

Costs to the U.S. Economy

Labor Market Impact

Undocumented immigrants are more likely to be of working age than the U.S.-born. In 2022, 89.4 percent of undocumented immigrants were between the ages of 16 and 64, compared with 61.3 percent of the U.S.-born population. This helps explain the high labor-force participation rate of undocumented immigrants—three quarters of this population participated in the workforce in 2022. Despite comprising just 3.3 percent of the population, undocumented immigrants represented 4.6 percent of the country’s employed labor force, or 7.5 million people.

With an unemployment rate averaging under 4.0 percent since 2022, U.S.-born workers could not fill all the jobs of undocumented workers even if they tried to. The country is heavily reliant on an undocumented workforce in industries like construction, agriculture, and hospitality.

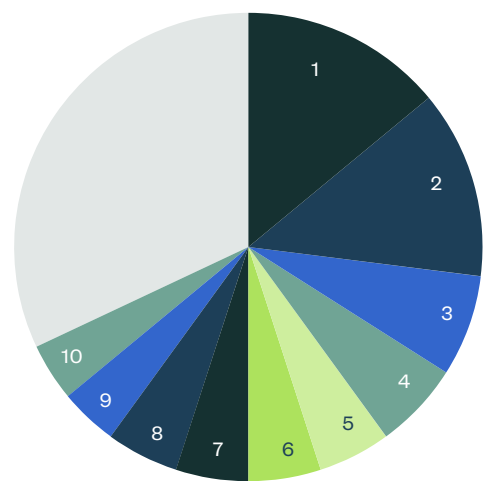
4.6%

Undocumented immigrant share of the United States employed labor force.

Nationally, mass deportation would remove 1.5 million workers from the construction workforce and 224,700 workers from the agriculture industry. Meanwhile, about one million undocumented workers in the hospitality industry would be deported due to their lack of immigration status; 870,400 in the manufacturing industry; 500,800 in general services, which includes things like auto repair, barber shops, and dry cleaning services; and 460,500 in transportation and warehousing.

TOP INDUSTRIES FOR UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT WORKERS

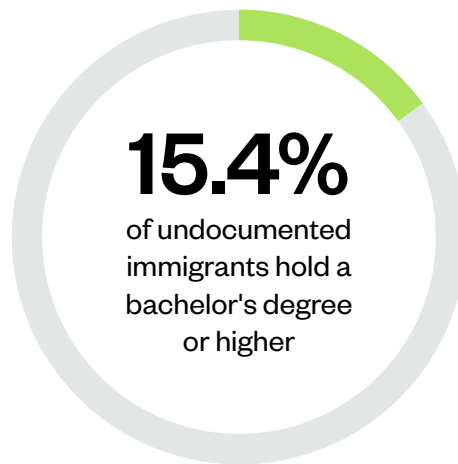
	Industry Group	Number of Undocumented Immigrant Workers	Share of Workforce Being Undocumented Immigrants
1	Construction	1,544,600	13.7%
2	Agriculture	244,700	12.7%
3	Hospitality	1,002,200	7.1%
4	General Services	500,800	6.5%
5	Wholesale Trade	193,400	5.5%
6	Transportation and Warehousing	460,500	5.5%
7	Manufacturing	870,400	5.4%
8	Professional Services	970,800	4.7%
9	Retail Trade	708,500	3.9%
10	Mining and Extraction	22,100	3.6%



Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 2022 1-year American Community Survey

More importantly, undocumented immigrants often take jobs that employers say many U.S.-born workers are not willing to take on, like cutting meat, washing dishes, or cleaning hotel rooms. In 2022, more than one third of the country's plasterers and stucco masons, drywall installers and ceiling tilers, and roofers were undocumented immigrants. And about one quarter of construction laborers, agricultural graders and sorters, agricultural laborers, and housekeeping cleaners were undocumented workers.

Mass deportation would also lead to a significant loss of high-skilled talent for the United States. About 1.7 million undocumented immigrants have a bachelor's degree or higher, making up 15.4 percent of the undocumented population. In addition, more than 457,800 undocumented immigrants were enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities in 2022—students with the potential to help ease the country's shortage for high-skilled workers after their graduation.



In 2022, more than **one third** of the country's plasterers and masons, drywall installers and ceiling tilers, and roofers were undocumented immigrants.



Bradenton, Florida, Ken Schulze. Taken October 1, 2023.

Impact on American Workers

Deporting undocumented workers would wreak havoc on industry, exacerbating labor shortages and triggering additional job losses for American workers. For example, if a shortage of construction workers prevents a house from getting built, the businesses that would be furnishing that house—from kitchen appliances to bedframes—lose business, too. Without field workers to pick crops, truckers have no goods to transport, and farmers have no need to buy new farm equipment.

Proponents of mass deportation of undocumented immigrants argue that it would raise wages for American workers.⁸² But past economic research suggests the opposite is true. In a literature review, economist Michael A. Clemens of George Mason University concludes that “the immigrants being targeted for removal are the lifeblood of several parts of the U.S. economy.”⁸³

When at least 400,000 Mexicans left the United States early in the Great Depression, often due to government coercion, the employment and wages of U.S.-born workers decreased slightly, with workers without a college degree affected most acutely.⁸⁴ After the U.S. government ended the Bracero Program in the 1960s, excluding nearly half a million Mexican seasonal farm laborers, agricultural employment and wages did not rise for American workers as intended⁸⁵ and farmers suffered long-term declines in income and land value.⁸⁶

One 2023 study looked at the economic effects of increased deportations under Secure Communities, a federal initiative that resulted in the deportation of an estimated 400,000 immigrants between 2008 and 2014, and found that when 500,000 undocumented immigrant workers were forced out of the country, 44,000 fewer jobs were held by U.S.-born workers.⁸⁷



“The economy is not a zero-sum game,” lead author Chloe East, an economist at the University of Colorado Denver who focuses on immigration policy, told *The Washington Post*. **“When one person has a job, that does not mean one less job for somebody else.”**⁸⁸

“Mexican workers from the Bracero program on Horst ranch in Polk County, Ore.,” by Oregon State University, Licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.

This does not represent temporary layoffs, but persistent declines. “In the real economy,” Clemens writes, businesses respond by investing in industries and technologies that use less low-skill labor, “reducing demand for U.S. workers, too.”⁸⁹

Mass deportation would also affect one million undocumented immigrant entrepreneurs, who generated \$27.1 billion in total business income in 2022 and provide jobs for American workers. About 30 percent of these undocumented immigrant entrepreneurs work in construction, 18.7 percent in professional services, and 16.6 percent in general services. They also include 157,800 undocumented immigrant entrepreneurs in local businesses that provide essential goods and services in neighborhoods across the country—such as grocery stores, restaurants, clothing shops, and gas stations—which have become an integral part of community life and source of local jobs for Americans.⁹⁰

Additionally, many Americans are members of households that would be directly impacted by mass deportation: the 8.5 million U.S. citizens who are part of mixed-status families. Deportation will lead to a decrease of \$51,200 in annual household income for these families, or 62.7 percent of their total household income, on average.

Deportation of all undocumented immigrants will lead to a decrease of **62.7%** of total household income for mixed-status families, on average.

UNDOCUMENTED ENTREPRENEURS

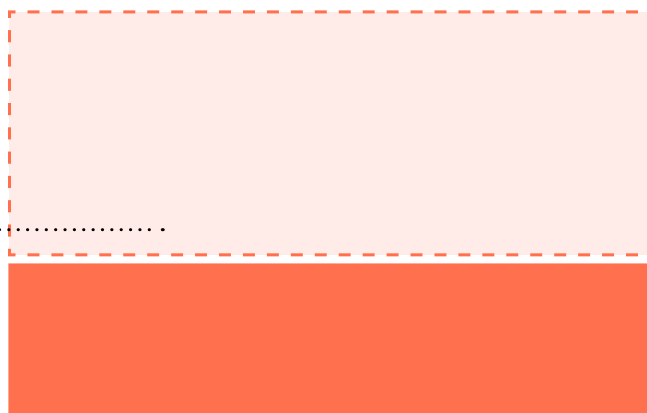
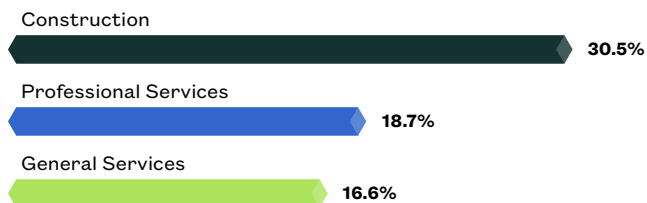
\$27.1B

Total business income generated by undocumented immigrant entrepreneurs in 2022.

157,800

Number of undocumented immigrant entrepreneurs in local businesses that provide essential goods and services in neighborhoods across the country.

Share of undocumented immigrant entrepreneurs who worked in...



Macroeconomic Impact

In addition to the hundreds of billions of dollars mass deportation would cost the U.S. government, mass deportation would result in losses of tens of billions of dollars in federal, state, and local tax revenues, and of trillions of dollars in economic output for the country due to loss of workers, economic activities, and consumer spending.

Undocumented immigrants pay sales and excise taxes on goods and services, like food and utilities; property taxes through rent or home ownership; and income and payroll taxes automatically deducted from paychecks or paid through filing income tax returns. In 2022 alone, undocumented immigrant households paid \$46.8 billion in federal taxes⁹¹ and \$29.3 billion in state and local taxes.⁹²

Yet undocumented immigrants are unable to benefit from many of the programs they pay into, including Social Security, Medicare, and unemployment insurance. In 2022, undocumented immigrants paid \$22.6 billion to Social Security and \$5.7 billion to

Medicare. As the U.S. population ages, the loss of these payments will make it increasingly challenging for social safety net programs to remain solvent.

Deporting all the undocumented immigrants would also result in the loss of their purchasing power—\$256.8 billion in 2022 alone—that could be spent on goods and services to support U.S. businesses and sustain jobs for American workers.

Overall, mass deportation would lead to a loss of 4.2 percent to 6.8 percent of U.S. GDP, or \$1.1 trillion to \$1.7 trillion in 2022 dollars.⁹³ In comparison, the U.S. GDP shrank by 4.3 percent during the Great Recession between 2007 and 2009.⁹⁴

Deporting all undocumented immigrants would result in a loss of...

\$46.8B
in federal taxes

\$29.3B
in state & local taxes

\$22.6B
in Social Security

\$5.7B
in Medicare

\$256.8B
in purchasing power

4.2% - 6.8%
U.S. GDP

SPOTLIGHT

Case Study:

The Impact of Senate Bill 1718 on Florida

Florida recently implemented legislation targeting undocumented immigrants, with repercussions that surprised even the lawmakers who had supported it—and illustrate that, inevitably, hardline immigration enforcement measures will have negative economic impacts on U.S. citizens.⁹⁵

In May 2023, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed Senate Bill 1718 into law. SB 1718 requires private businesses with 25 or more employees to use the federal E-Verify database to screen new workers; makes it a felony to transport an undocumented immigrant into the state or for an undocumented immigrant to use a false ID to obtain work; and prohibits undocumented immigrants from driving with an out-of-state license, among other provisions.

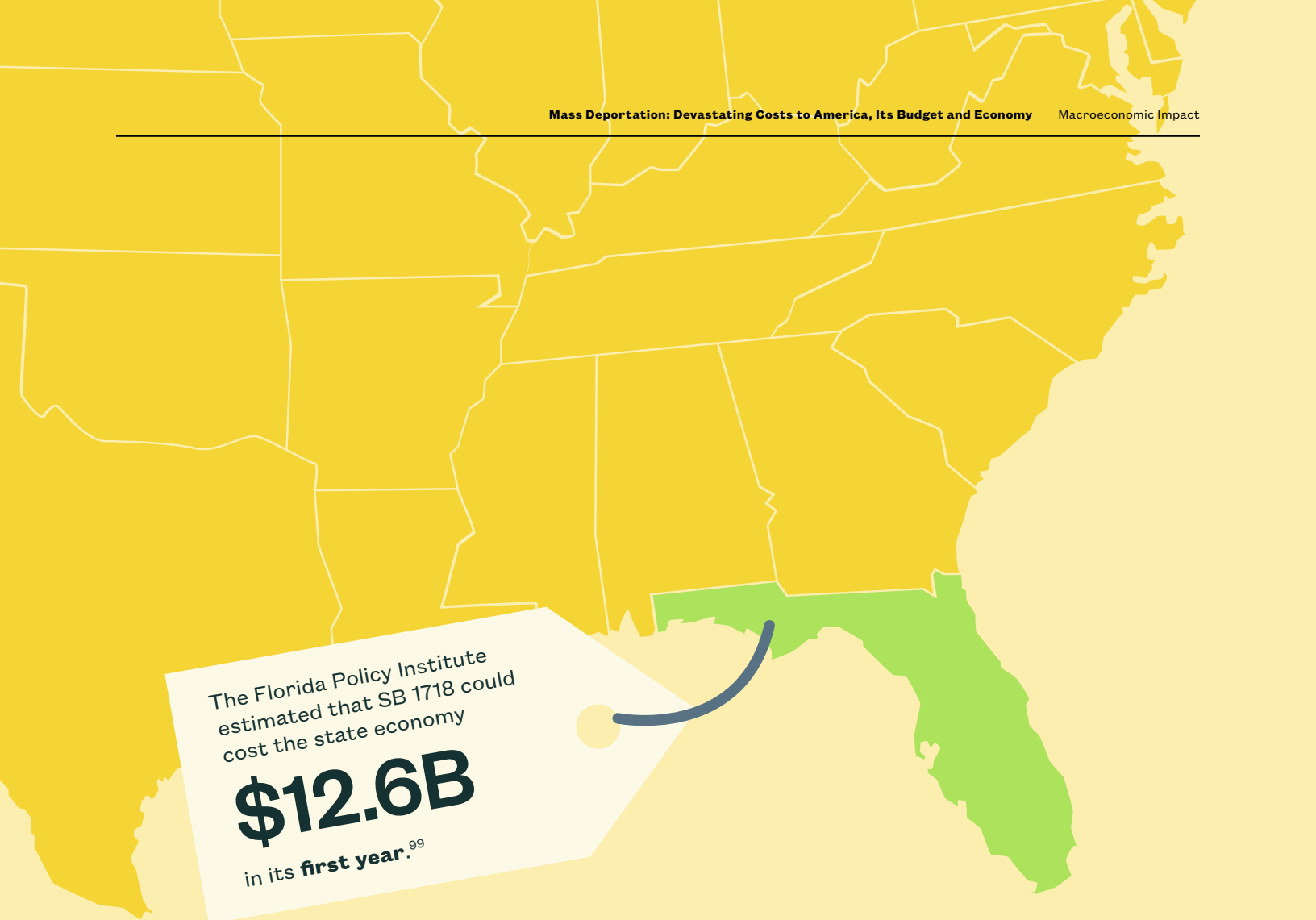
Even before the law went into effect that July, undocumented immigrants began moving out of state, afraid and unable to work.⁹⁶ Within months, farmers, builders, restaurants, hotels, and other businesses in the state complained of worker shortages.⁹⁷ Even

people with legal work authorization moved, worried for their undocumented family members.

“They’re just picking up and leaving to a state where they’re more friendly towards migrants, where they don’t have to be looking over their shoulder every 10 seconds and saying, ‘Look, I’m going ... to be deported,’” Greg Batista, owner of G. Batista Engineering & Construction, told the *Tampa Bay Times*.⁹⁸



Construction worker in Sarasota, Florida, U.S. Photo by [Bilanol](#).



The Florida Policy Institute
estimated that SB 1718 could
cost the state economy

\$12.6B

in its **first year**.⁹⁹

Construction projects stalled, fruit rotted in the fields, hotels and restaurants fired staff and put up “Help Wanted” signs.¹⁰⁰ Rental units were left empty, and businesses lost customers.¹⁰¹ Walt Disney World had trouble finding cast members.¹⁰² State representatives who had themselves supported the legislation publicly appealed to immigrants not to leave.¹⁰³

Florida’s experience provides a small peek into how a national mass deportation of undocumented immigrants would have more significant impact across states and economic sectors in the U.S. economy. While Florida is home to a higher share of undocumented immigrants than most states—five percent compared with the national average of 3.3 percent—its outsized reliance on undocumented immigrant workers is not atypical.

The negative impact of targeting undocumented immigrants with anti-immigration policies in Florida should not have come as a surprise. When Georgia enacted similar legislation in 2011,¹⁰⁴ the ensuing labor shortage resulted in an estimated \$140 million in crop losses that year alone.¹⁰⁵

In Arizona, legislators stopped short of expanding its law targeting undocumented immigrants in 2010 after opposition from business leaders. Economists estimated an exodus of the undocumented population would shrink Arizona’s economy by \$48.8 billion annually, cost the state 10.1 percent of its tax revenues, and lead to the loss of 581,000 jobs, affecting all Arizonans.¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

With undocumented immigrants now comprising nearly one in every 20 workers, the long-term costs of a mass deportation operation, while difficult to gauge, would undeniably be enormous. American businesses would struggle to fill essential positions and, as a result, curtail the hiring of U.S.-born workers and immigrants authorized to work. Higher prices and inflation would follow, placing financial strain on all Americans.

Similarly, the ultimate effects of standing up a mass deportation operation on the United States government—and citizens' relationships with it—can be broadly predicted, if not thoroughly quantified. Widespread “fugitive operations” in which ICE agents burst into homes and businesses across America would become one of the most visible symbols of the federal government. All Americans—especially those living in heavily-immigrant neighborhoods, or whose ethnic background allowed them to be stereotyped as “foreign”—would likely have to prove, repeatedly, that they are not deportable. Standing up dozens of soft-sided facilities would put detention camps within sight of many Americans.

Widespread “fugitive operations” in which ICE agents burst into homes and businesses across America would become one of the most visible symbols of the federal government.

The cost to U.S.-born Americans, in tax dollars spent and in economic output lost, pales in comparison to the devastation that undocumented immigrants and their families would suffer. Uprooted from their homes and communities after decades in the country, they would face an uncertain future and the potential separation of their families, which include millions of U.S.-citizen children who have known only this country as home.

To speak of the enormity of the fiscal and economic costs of mass deportation is not to minimize the importance of this suffering. It is to reinforce just how radical a step a deportation campaign targeting millions of undocumented immigrants, who have been so integral to the U.S. economy and American communities, would be. There is no way to engage in mass deportation without fundamentally changing the federal government, the national economy, and, ultimately, America itself.

Methodological Appendix

Estimating the Undocumented Population

Except where otherwise noted, we define an immigrant as anyone born outside the country to non-U.S. citizen parents who is a resident of the United States. This includes naturalized citizens, green card holders, temporary visa holders, refugees, asylees, and undocumented immigrants, among others.

To generate the estimates of the undocumented immigrant population, we use the microdata from the 2022 1-year American Community Survey (ACS) from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) database.¹⁰⁷ We then apply the residual estimation methodology outlined by Harvard University economist George Borjas to arrive at an estimate of the undocumented immigrant population in the overall United States and individual states.¹⁰⁸

It has been shown that census data tends to overestimate the number of naturalized citizens when compared to administrative records, especially for immigrants recently arrived or whose country of origin is Mexico.¹⁰⁹ For this reason, the immigration status of the foreign-born population is adjusted for misreporting in three ways. Foreign-born individuals who reported naturalization are reclassified as non-naturalized if the individual had resided in the United States for less than five years (as of 2022); or if married to a U.S. citizen, for less than three years; or if they reported their country of origin as Mexico.

Following this reclassification, we then use the following criteria to code foreign-born individuals as legal U.S. residents:

- Arrived in the U.S. before 1980
- Naturalized citizen
- Children less than 18 years old reporting at least one U.S.-born parent
- Recipients of Social Security benefits, Supplemental Security Income, Medicaid, Medicare, military insurance, or public assistance
- Households with at least one citizen that received SNAP benefits
- People in the Armed Forces and veterans
- Refugees
- International students
- Working in occupations requiring a license
- Working in occupations where immigrants are likely to be on H-1B or other visas, including computer scientists, professors, engineers, and life scientists

- Government employees and people working in the public administration sector
- Any of the above conditions applies to the householder's spouse
- Children of householders who are refugees or work in occupations that require a license or are likely to be on H-1B or other visas, as people with these statuses can generally apply for legal immigration status for their children

The remainder of the foreign-born population that do not meet these criteria are reclassified as undocumented. In part to adjust for misreporting in the ACS data noted above around reporting of naturalized citizens whose country of origin is Mexico, the make-up of the sample is then reweighted based on the country of origin to reflect the demographic make-up of undocumented immigrants based on DHS estimates, which are based on administrative records.¹¹⁰

The ACS sample is centered around July 1, 2022. To reflect immigration that occurred in the latter half of 2022, we applied a reweighting ratio of 1.59 to immigrants who arrived in the United States in 2022. This generates an updated estimate that better reflects the total number of immigrants who arrived in the United States in 2022.¹¹¹

Estimating the Cost of Mass Apprehensions

Calculating the exact cost of an unprecedented mass deportation operation is no easy task. Throughout this report, we have used government cost projections, reports, and estimates in order to produce a model of the individual cost for each step of the removal process: apprehensions, detention, legal processing, and removal.

Scenario 1: One-Time Mass Deportation

To calculate the costs of apprehension for a single mass deportation effort, we used the following figures: (1) share of population that would be arrested for detention by ICE, and (2) the average cost of an at-large arrest.

- To calculate the share of population that would be arrested, we used the ACS figure of 11 million and added that to the 2.3 million figure for individuals released from DHS custody from January 2023 through April 2024. We presume that under this scenario, DHS would re-arrest all individuals who had previously been released, in order to detain them for the purposes of mass removals. We note that even if DHS does not choose to arrest individuals at this stage of the process, it would likely require the agency to arrest the person again at some future point in order to effectuate removals.
- To calculate the average cost per fugitive arrest, we did the following:
 - We examined ICE Congressional Budget Justifications from FY 2016 through FY 2025.¹¹² Each of these documents not only provide the annual budget for ICE's National Fugitive Operations Program (NFOP), but a total of the number of arrests carried out by NFOP teams across the country.
 - We concluded that the period from FY 2016 through FY 2020 was the most relevant comparator for calculating the cost of mass arrests, as NFOP arrests declined significantly due initially to the COVID-19 pandemic and then again due to the Biden administration's enforcement priorities memos and end to the practice of collateral arrests.

- For the period from FY 2016 through FY 2020, ICE reported that NFOP teams carried out an average of 26,985 arrests per year, peaking at a reported 41,455 NFOP arrests in FY 2018.¹¹³ During those years, Congress appropriated an inflation-adjusted annual average of \$179,551,396 for the NFOP line item within ICE. We then divided the annual average budget by the annual average NFOP arrests to produce a single figure for average cost per NFOP arrest.

	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	Annual Average
Obligated Budget Authority (Inflation-Adjusted)	\$198,853,940	\$189,100,100	\$194,580,160	\$150,602,130	\$164,620,650	\$179,551,396
National Fugitive Operations Program Arrests	21,635	31,142	41,455	23,712	16,983	26,986

- We then calculated the average cost to transport an individual to an ICE detention center using information provided by DHS OIG in a 2023 report on CBP transportation costs for buses taking migrants from Border Patrol stations to ICE detention centers.¹¹⁴ This information, \$3,745 per bus of 45 people, produced a per person cost of \$83.22. As each ICE Field Office manages its own transportation contracts, actual costs are largely not made public, making this a particularly difficult figure to calculate. We recognize that this figure likely understates costs by a large amount, especially given the varying demographics of individuals who would be transported to detention centers. ICE has previously reported that the cost to transport families and unaccompanied children ranged from \$989.35 per unaccompanied child in FY 2016 to \$1,230 per person to transport family units in FY 2017.¹¹⁵ We chose to err on the side of a more conservative estimate, given the uncertainties surrounding this figure.

Using this approach, we estimated an average cost per NFOP arrest of \$6,653.65, plus an additional \$83.22 per arrest for transportation, producing a total cost per-arrest cost of \$6,736.87, for a total combined cost of \$89.3 billion dollars.

Scenario 2: Removing One Million Undocumented Immigrants Per Year

To calculate the costs of apprehension for a sustained campaign of one million removals per year, we determined that a more sophisticated figure than average cost per apprehension would be needed. We used the following figures instead: (1) share of population that would be arrested for detention by ICE, (2) the number of staff required to carry out one million apprehensions per year, and (3) the annual non-pay cost to carry out one million apprehensions per year.

- To calculate the share of population that would be arrested, we used the same methodology as above but assumed that 20 percent of the population would depart during any multi-year mass deportation operation.¹¹⁶ This produces a figure of 10.6 million.

- To calculate the number of staff required to carry out one million apprehensions per year, we took the average NFOP arrest per year (calculated above) and divided by the average number of staff working in ICE’s Fugitive Operations Program during FY 2016 to FY 2020: 836.4.¹¹⁷ We then multiplied that number by the most recently available average cost per Fugitive Operations staff member.
- To calculate the additional non-staff costs, we noted ICE reporting that in FY 2023 \$4.552 million was appropriated in non-pay assets for the fugitive operations program. We subtracted the average number of NFOP arrests per year (29,486) from one million and determined that ICE would need to increase arrests by 970,514, or an additional 32.91 times the current number of arrests, and multiplied that number by the \$4.552 million figure, to get a total non-pay annual cost of \$154,358,320.

Using this approach, we estimated an annual cost in the first year of \$6,454,300,000. We then applied a 2.5 percent inflation rate over 11 years to produce a final estimate of \$77.4 billion, with an average per-year cost of \$7 million.

Estimating the Cost of Mass Detention

Scenario 1: One-Time Mass Deportation

To calculate the costs of detention, we used the following figures: (1) share of the population that would be detained in single adult facilities and family detention facilities; (2) the total daily cost to detain an individual; and (3) the average length of stay.

- Because the cost of detaining families is higher than single adults, we calculated the share of single adults and families. To do so, we did the following:
 - We broke down our total estimated undocumented population using ACS data for 2022 (10,990,489).
 - We used ACS data to determine that about 985,000 undocumented individuals were under 18 in 2022. We assumed that each of these children have at least one undocumented parent or legal guardian (for a total of 1,971,000), and that the remainder of the undocumented population were adults who would not be detained in family units (9,020,000).
- To calculate the total daily cost to detain an individual, we did the following:
 - We used ICE’s Custody Operations “Total Obligated Authority” figures from each end-of-fiscal-year Monthly Execution and Staffing Reports (MER) from FY 2017 through FY 2020. These years were chosen for several reasons. First, these years saw an increase in interior enforcement compared to more recent years. Second, during this time, three family detention facilities were operated with a higher average population as compared to recent years,¹¹⁸ which allows us to more accurately estimate the personnel costs of managing both single adult and family detention facilities. Lastly, we try to focus on years least affected by the fluctuations in detention levels caused by the pandemic.
 - We used the MER instead of the Congressionally appropriated figures for each year because these reports provide us with a more accurate depiction of Custody Operations’ costs. These reports show the total amount

obligated and expensed per month, including transfers and reprogramming, which may total more or less than the appropriated amount. For example, the MER for FY 2018 shows that the total obligations incurred during that year (\$3,147,645,571) were higher than the Congressionally appropriated figure (\$3,075,685,000).¹¹⁹

- To determine the share of the total annual costs attributable to single adult and family detention, we figured out the total budget per year, considered the budgeted costs for both single adult and family detention and calculated the percentage of costs attributable to each. For example, in FY 2017, 92 percent of Custody Operations costs were estimated to relate to single adult detention and eight percent to family detention.
- We then used the annual detained populations for both single adults and families to calculate the cost per detained individual and determined the daily costs for each. We did this calculation for each year from FY 2017 through FY 2020 and adjusted each daily cost for inflation. We then found the average rate for that period.
- Using these figures, we arrived at the following estimates:

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	Average Bed Rate
Total Obligated Authority (MER)	\$2,662,009,302	\$3,147,645,571	\$3,361,513,162	\$3,180,920,074	
Share of Total Costs (Single Adult)	\$2,449,644,684 (92%)	\$2,799,228,577 (89%)	\$3,009,763,273 (90%)	\$2,844,922,277 (89%)	
Annual Cost per Single Adult	\$64,285.01	\$66,351.30	\$59,997.27	\$84,358.98	
Daily Cost (Single Adult) (Adjusted for Inflation)	\$228.17	\$230.68	\$205.41	\$281.8	\$236.52
Share of Costs (Family)	\$212,364,617.80 (8%)	\$348,416,993.78 (11%)	\$351,749,888.82 (10%)	\$335,997,797.32 (11%)	
Annual Cost per Family	\$144,269	\$139,367	\$140,700	\$134,399	
Daily Cost (Family) (Adjusted for Inflation)	\$511.97	\$484.54	\$481.70	\$448.96	\$481.79

- To calculate the average length of stay (ALOS), we did the following:
 - For single adults, we used ICE’s ALOS for FY 2017 through FY 2020 for its single adult facilities. We focused on the population detained by ICE (and not CBP) as those were more likely to be the result of interior enforcement. We arrived at an average of 54.7 days.
 - For family detention, we used the average ALOS for the three family detention centers South Texas FRC, Karnes County FRC, and Berks County FRC from FY 2017 through FY 2020. We arrived at an average of 23.5 days. ICE does not publish separate figures for an ALOS for families apprehended by ICE, instead of CBP. As a result, the average ALOS for families is heavily skewed toward families apprehended at the border. Nevertheless, the Flores Settlement Agreement generally prohibits children from being detained for longer than 20 days.¹²⁰ This means that families detained in the interior would have to be prioritized for legal processing and the government would have to adhere as closely as possible to the estimated ALOS.
 - In calculating the costs for the additional 2.3 million new arrivals who entered between January 2023 and April 2024, we used the same costs and ALOS as above. However, to arrive at the share of single adults and families, we did the following:
 - For the more recently arrived population, we assumed that all unaccompanied minors (151,570) had at least one undocumented parent or legal guardian (for a total of 303,140). The rest were assumed to be single adults (1,961,690).

Using this approach, we estimate that the U.S. government would have to expend \$167.8 billion to detain approximately 13.3 million noncitizens for the purpose of a single-event mass deportation effort.

Scenario 2: Removing One Million Undocumented Immigrants Per Year

To calculate the costs of detention, we used the following figures: (1) share of population that would be detained considering a 20 percent attrition rate; (2) the average cost of detention per person per year; (3) ICE’s needed detention capacity each year for nine years; (3) the annual cost of constructing new soft-sided facilities and sustaining previously built facilities; (4) the average cost of placing individuals on alternative to detention programs; and (5) an annual inflation rate of 2.5 percent (applied to the total of 1-4).

- To calculate the average cost of detention per person per year we assumed the proportion of undocumented families and single adults will remain constant throughout the 11-year period it would take to remove them at a rate of one million per year.
- We combined the ACS 2022 population with the 2.3 million new arrivals from 2023-24 (13,255,319) and calculated the population subject to detention given the 20 percent attrition rate: 10,604,255.
 - We then estimated the share of family and single adults by summing up those populations:
 - Families = $1,970,836 + 303,140 = 2,273,936$ (17 percent)
 - Single adults = $9,019,653 + 1,961,690 = 10,981,343$ (83 percent)

- We use the previously estimated average cost of detention per family (\$481.79) and single adult (\$236.56) and calculate the share attributable to families and single adults to estimate that the overall average cost of detention is \$278.63 per person per year.
- We presume that undocumented immigrants will be held throughout the year in these facilities, requiring constant detention costs regardless of average length of stay. This mirrors some current ICE practices of signing contracts with detention centers that pay a flat rate regardless of the number of people being held in custody.
- To calculate ICE's needed detention capacity per year, we used the following:
 - We started with ICE's current detention capacity at 35,959.¹²¹
 - We obtained information about the estimated costs and capacity of building temporary soft-sided facilities:
 - Capacity of one facility: 500
 - Cost to build a new facility: \$35,910,000 (adjusted for inflation)
 - Cost to sustain a previously built facility: \$47,950,000 (adjusted for inflation)
- We estimated that to build enough capacity to detain all 10.6 million undocumented noncitizens, including considering the removal of one million undocumented immigrants per year, ICE would have to build 216 soft-sided facilities a year for 10.6 years.
- We included in our overall estimate that every non-detained undocumented noncitizen would be placed on an ATD program, which averages at \$4.07 per day. Since, in this scenario, ICE arrests 1 million people per year, we assume that any one of those individuals who are not detained will be placed on an ATD.
- We also included an annual inflation rate of 2.5 percent per year.

With these figures, we estimate that it would take 10.6 years to remove the entire population if 1,000,000 noncitizens were removed each year. During that time, at a building rate of 216 500-capacity soft-sided facilities per year, the government would be able to detain all undocumented noncitizens by the 11th year.

The total cost of detention for a multi-year deportation process at the rate of one million people per year is estimated at \$728.3 billion, or \$66.2 billion per year on average.

Calculating the Cost of Mass Legal Processing

Scenario 1: One-Time Legal Processing

To calculate the costs of legal processing, we used the following figures: (1) the average cost per case for both EOIR and OPLA; (2) total number of cases completed per year for both EOIR and OPLA; and (3) the number of cases that would need to be processed.

EOIR Cost Estimates

- To calculate the cost of EOIR's legal processing, we use the base budget approved by Congress in FY 2023.
- To calculate the legal processing costs per case, we divided EOIR's total budget (\$860,000,000) by the number of total completed cases (525,819). We estimated that each case would cost \$1,719.57 (adjusted for inflation).
- We then multiplied the cost per case by the total estimated ACS 2022 undocumented population (10,990,489).
- We arrived at a total cost of \$18,898,915,169.73 for EOIR.

OPLA Cost Estimates

- To calculate the cost of OPLA's legal processing, we use the total obligated budget by the agency in FY 2023.¹²²
- To calculate OPLA's costs to process each case, we divide OPLA's obligated budget (\$372,059,000) by the number of completed cases (460,000). We estimated that each case would cost \$850.37 (adjusted for inflation).
- We then multiply the cost per case with the total estimated undocumented population (10,990,489).
- We arrived at a total cost of \$9,345,982,130.93 for OPLA.

To calculate the costs for the additional 2.3 million new arrivals who entered between January 2023 and April 2024, we used the same formulas as above but instead used the new arrivals population of 2,264,830 to estimate EOIR's and OPLA's costs. We arrived at the following:

- EOIR: \$3,894,533,723.10
- OPLA: \$1,925,943,487.10

Using these figures, we estimated that the U.S. government would have to expend a total of \$34.1 billion to process approximately 13.3 million noncitizens during a single mass deportation event.

Scenario 2: Removing One Million Undocumented Immigrants Per Year

To calculate the costs of legal processing, we used the following figures: (1) share of population that would be subject to legal processing considering a 20 percent attrition rate; (2) the average cost per case for both EOIR and OPLA; (2) total number of cases completed per IJ for EOIR and per litigation team for OPLA; (3) the number of cases that could be processed per year; (4) the costs of building new "tent courts"; (5) the costs of operating those "tent courts" per year; and (6) an annual inflation rate of 2.5 percent (applied to the total of 1-5).

- To calculate the share of the undocumented population that would be subject to legal processing, we combine the ACS 2022 population with our 2.3 million new arrivals (13,255,319) and calculated the population subject to detention given the 20 percent attrition rate: 10,604,255.

EOIR Cost Estimates

- To calculate the cost of EOIR's legal processing in the multi-year model, we used the agency's FY 2023 budget to estimate the total cost of processing each case, which is \$1,719.57 (adjusted for inflation).
 - We calculated each IJ's annual case completion rate by dividing the number of completed cases in FY 2023 (525,819) by the number of IJs that year (734). We arrived at an estimate of 716 cases per year.
 - We then calculate the number of IJs needed to process 10,604,255 cases in 11 years (to remain consistent with the removal of one million undocumented immigrants per year). This number is about 158 judges per year. However, given the estimated attrition rate of 23 departing per year, EOIR would need to hire 181 IJs to ensure a net positive addition of 158 IJs per year.
- The attrition rate was calculated comparing the number of IJs that departed and were hired between FY 2013 and FY 2023. We chose a 10-year span given the fluctuations in the attrition rate during the past few years, including a high of 45 departures (FY 2019) and a low of 13 departures (FY 2013 and FY 2014).
- We then multiplied the number of annual case completions per year with the estimated cost for each case including considerations for additional adjudicatory capacity of 158 net IJs added each year.
- We included an annual inflation rate of 2.5 percent per year.

OPLA Cost Estimates

- To calculate the cost of OPLA's legal processing, we used the agency's FY 2023 budget to estimate the total cost of processing each case, which is \$850.37 (adjusted for inflation).
 - We used the same calculation as we did to estimate EOIR's multi-year case completion rates and assumed OPLA would complete the same number of cases as EOIR.
 - We then multiplied the number of OPLA's cost per case with the estimated number of EOIR's IJ cases completed per year across all nine years.
 - We included an annual inflation rate of 2.5 percent per year.

To calculate the cost of expanding EOIR's courtrooms, we used estimates for constructing and operating similar facilities.

- In October 2021, DHS indicated that to rebuild the Laredo and Brownsville, TX, tent courts, it would take 30 days with a one-time cost of \$16.3 million (adjusted for inflation) and \$11.9 million (adjusted for inflation) to operate monthly. Each of these facilities had a different number of master calendar hearing courtrooms (four for Laredo and six for Brownsville) and we couldn't determine the total costs per facility. Instead, we estimated the cost per courtroom by dividing the entire amount by 10 to arrive at the following estimates: \$1,630,000 (start-up costs per courtroom) and \$143,280,000 (operating costs for each courtroom per year).

- We used the ratio of .82 courtrooms to one IJ using the FY 2023 ratio (601 courtrooms for 734 IJs). Then we estimated the number of new courtrooms needed by adding 158 IJs per year (starting after year one) until the courts had the capacity to process all 10.6 million undocumented immigrants in 11 years. We then added the operating costs per facility per year that it would operate.

Using these figures, we estimated that the U.S. government would have to expend a total of \$138.9 billion, or \$12.6 billion on average per year, to process approximately 10.6 million noncitizens at a rate of one million per year.

Calculating the Cost of Mass Removals

Scenario 1: One-Time Mass Removals

To calculate the costs of a mass removal operation, we used the following figures: (1) share of population that would be removed, (2) estimates of the nationality of the undocumented population, (3) cost for removal flights (by flight hour) or other transportation, and (4) average flight hours necessary per nationality.

- To estimate the nationality of the undocumented population through 2022, we used ACS data to produce country-specific estimates. To that, we added nationalities of individuals who have been encountered and released at the southern border, using data from OHSS's Immigration Enforcement and Legal Processes Monthly Tables.¹²³
- To estimate the cost for removal flights, we examined public data on ICE Air charter flights. Notably, ICE does not report the average cost required to remove a person to their home country. In late 2019, ICE reported the average cost of an ICE Air charter flight and has not updated that number since.¹²⁴ This page noted that "A daily scheduled charter flight average cost is \$8,577 per flight hour. A special high-risk charter flight average cost is between \$6,929 to \$26,795 per flight hour, depending on aircraft requirements."¹²⁵ Given the uncertainty around this figure and the fact that prices had increased dramatically since 2019, we chose to use the figure of \$17,000 per flight hour provide by Acting Director Johnson in April 2023. We recognize that this figure likely overestimates the costs of some routine removal flights to nearby countries, and likely underestimates the costs of flights to countries necessitating special high-risk charters.
- To calculate the average cost per removal for each nationality, we used a publicly-available flight time calculator to determine the length of time necessary to fly from Dallas Fort Worth International Airport to the capital city or known removal flight destination of each country.¹²⁶ We then presumed that each flight leg would require an average of 30 minutes take-off and landing time, which we factored in when determining cost per flight hours. We then presumed that any flight longer than eight hours would require a stop-over and require a second flight leg. Together, this adds an additional hour of flight time to any trip shorter than eight hours and an additional two hours to any trip longer than eight hours. We then presumed that a single flight can carry roughly 130 people (likely a generous estimate, as ICE uses both Boeing 737s which can hold that many passengers and smaller McDonnell Douglas MD-80s), and calculated the number of flights necessary to remove each nationality.¹²⁷ The results of these calculations are below (note that for Mexico, we presumed just 10 percent of the population would be deported by air, and for Canada, we assumed 100 percent of the population would be deported by bus). Note that because our calculations were based on costs per flight, including flights that were less than full, the "average cost per removal" is a close but not precise approximation of what was used for our analysis.

Nationality	Estimated Undocumented Population through 2022	Migrant Encounters at the Southwest Border Resulting in a Release From Custody from January 2023 to April 2024	Average Cost Per Removal	Total Cost of Removals Per Country
Mexico	4,740,303	377,229	\$1,432.49	\$7,330,805,003
Guatemala	746,800	238,978	\$945.90	\$932,444,883
El Salvador	703,100	56,564	\$993.85	\$754,989,145
Honduras	558,100	197,740	\$1,002.56	\$757,778,051
Philippines	352,500	30	\$4,751.28	\$1,674,969,462
Venezuela	325,900	362,544	\$1,538.72	\$1,059,321,139
Colombia	250,200	159,402	\$1,530.00	\$626,691,060
Brazil	235,900	37,990	\$3,025.13	\$828,552,364
India	229,200	50,790	\$4,999.74	\$1,399,878,208
China	211,200	49,690	\$4,053.85	\$1,057,607,923
Dominican Republic	197,100	32,170	\$1,272.82	\$291,819,559
Ecuador	158,000	142,323	\$1,599.74	\$480,439,794
Haiti	126,600	117,003	\$1,207.44	\$294,135,007
Korea	113,600	0	\$3,966.67	\$450,613,333
Canada	105,600	0	\$1,479.29	\$156,213,024
Nicaragua	101,500	34,001	\$1,081.03	\$146,480,055
Vietnam	97,300	5,550	\$4,807.95	\$494,497,526
Cuba	92,000	128,450	\$836.92	\$184,499,692
Jamaica	90,600	3,740	\$1,102.82	\$104,040,087
Peru	88,800	61,715	\$2,013.85	\$303,114,054
Nigeria	69,100	1,160	\$3,827.18	\$268,897,631
Japan	66,400	0	\$3,779.23	\$250,940,923
Ukraine	56,000	80	\$3,461.03	\$194,094,318
United Kingdom	52,900	0	\$2,750.51	\$145,502,128
Pakistan	41,100	1,690	\$4,746.92	\$203,120,838
Argentina	37,400	610	\$3,147.18	\$119,624,292

Nationality	Estimated Undocumented Population through 2022	Migrant Encounters at the Southwest Border Resulting in a Release From Custody from January 2023 to April 2024	Average Cost Per Removal	Total Cost of Removals Per Country
Germany	37,100	0	\$2,990.26	\$110,938,513
Ethiopia	33,900	2,620	\$4,755.64	\$173,676,010
Other USSR/ Russia	33,100	0	\$3,408.72	\$112,828,564
Nepal	31,500	4,930	\$4,716.41	\$171,818,826
Poland	31,300	0	\$3,291.03	\$103,009,103
Trinidad and Tobago	28,700	110	\$1,678.21	\$48,349,090
Turkey	28,000	18,530	\$3,683.33	\$171,385,500
Chile	27,700	1,630	\$2,937.95	\$86,170,036
Bangladesh	26,200	3,420	\$4,842.82	\$143,444,344
Kenya	25,800	100	\$4,960.51	\$128,477,282
Ghana	25,300	3,530	\$3,740.00	\$107,824,200
Spain	25,000	110	\$2,855.13	\$71,692,269
France	23,700	80	\$2,846.41	\$67,687,636
South Africa	22,100	90	\$5,165.38	\$114,619,885
Thailand	22,100		\$5,117.44	\$113,095,333
Taiwan	21,800		\$4,433.08	\$96,641,077
Egypt	21,300	4,480	\$4,018.97	\$103,609,159
Africa, not specified	20,400		\$4,184.62	\$85,366,154
Guyana	19,100	20	\$1,883.08	\$36,004,431
Costa Rica	17,300	3,300	\$1,185.64	\$24,424,205
Italy	16,900	0	\$3,199.49	\$54,071,333
Bolivia	16,700	6,380	\$2,292.82	\$52,918,297
Australia	16,600	0	\$4,882.05	\$81,042,051

Nationality	Estimated Undocumented Population through 2022	Migrant Encounters at the Southwest Border Resulting in a Release From Custody from January 2023 to April 2024	Average Cost Per Removal	Total Cost of Removals Per Country
Micronesia	16,100	0	\$3,962.31	\$63,793,154
Indonesia	15,700		\$5,653.59	\$88,761,359
Iran	15,000	760	\$4,206.41	\$66,293,026
Afghanistan	13,700	6,320	\$4,428.72	\$88,662,933
Marshall Islands	12,800		\$3,644.10	\$46,644,513
Ireland	12,700		\$2,597.95	\$32,993,949
Albania	12,500	470	\$3,495.90	\$45,341,790
Cameroon	12,500	3,300	\$4,066.92	\$64,257,385
Hong Kong	12,100		\$4,642.31	\$56,171,923
Saudi Arabia	11,300		\$4,476.67	\$50,586,333
Panama	11,200	1,630	\$1,294.62	\$16,609,915
Congo	11,100	1,760	\$4,398.21	\$56,560,918
Portugal	10,600		\$2,746.15	\$29,109,231
Uruguay	10,200		\$3,060.00	\$31,212,000
Lebanon	10,200	160	\$4,524.62	\$46,875,015
Malaysia	10,000		\$5,457.44	\$54,574,359
Romania	9,700	2,310	\$3,413.08	\$40,991,054
Uzbekistan	9,600	11,930	\$4,188.97	\$90,188,618
Kazakhstan	9,100	920	\$3,944.87	\$39,527,615
Moldavia	9,000		\$3,391.28	\$30,521,538
Asia, not specified	8,800		\$4,707.69	\$41,427,692
Cambodia	8,300		\$5,134.87	\$42,619,436
Morocco	8,300	1,280	\$2,881.28	\$27,602,682
Israel/Palestine	7,800		\$4,053.85	\$31,620,000
Belarus	7,400	120	\$3,321.54	\$24,977,969

Nationality	Estimated Undocumented Population through 2022	Migrant Encounters at the Southwest Border Resulting in a Release From Custody from January 2023 to April 2024	Average Cost Per Removal	Total Cost of Removals Per Country
Netherlands	7,000		\$2,968.46	\$20,779,231
Singapore	5,200		\$5,479.23	\$28,492,000
Sri Lanka	5,200	670	\$5,461.79	\$32,060,736

The table above does not count an additional roughly 402,000 people whose nationality was uncertain or who were from countries with fewer than 5,000 individuals in the United States. In order to calculate the additional costs of removing these individuals we calculated the average removal cost across the populations listed above at \$1,871.99 per person, and added that to the more precise figures above.

Using this approach, we estimated a total cost for a single-event mass removal of the 11 million undocumented immigrants present in 2022 at \$20.6 billion, as well as the 2.3 million who arrived in the 16 months following that at \$3.4 billion, for a total cost of \$24.1 billion.

Scenario 2: Removing One Million Undocumented Immigrants Per Year

To calculate the removal costs associated with a multi-year mass removal operation, we used the following figures: (1) share of population that would be removed; (2) average cost per removal; (3) additional staff costs necessary for mass removals; (4) a 2.5 percent annual inflation rate (applied to the total of 1-3).

- To calculate the share of population that would be deported, we used the same methodology as above but presumed that 20 percent of the population would depart during any multi-year mass deportation operation.¹²⁸ This produces a figure of 10.6 million. For this estimate, we presume no change in nationality portfolio and that this 20 percent drop would be consistent across nationalities.
- We used the average cost per removal calculated above of \$1,871.99.
- To calculate the number of staff required to carry out one million removals per year, we took the average number of ICE removals from FY 2015 through FY 2019 and divided by the average budget assigned to personnel in ICE’s Transportation and Removal Program in order to get the current staff cost per removal.¹²⁹ We then multiplied that number by one million to get an annual staff cost of one million removals of \$70 million.

Using this approach, we produced a final estimate of \$22.4 billion, for an average annual cost of \$2.1 billion, to deport one million people a year in a multi-year operation.

Economic Contribution of Undocumented Immigrants

The analysis is primarily based on the American Immigration Council’s analysis of the microdata from the 2022 1-year American Community Survey.¹³⁰

When estimating industries and occupations with the largest share of undocumented workers, the universe is restricted to employed workers aged 16 and above.

Educational attainment figures for the U.S.- and foreign-born individuals ages 25 and up are calculated using microdata from the ACS. Using an age threshold of 25 allows us to examine the segment of the population most likely to have already completed their final level of educational attainment.

Tax Estimates

A household is defined as an undocumented immigrant household if the household head is an undocumented immigrant.

When estimating the tax contributions of undocumented immigrants, we follow the methodology detailed by Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP).¹³¹ For federal income tax rate estimates, we use data released by the Congressional Budget Office and calculate federal tax contributions using federal tax bracket determined with adjusted household income.¹³²

Following the ITEP methodology, when calculating income and payroll taxes, the total amount paid is reduced by 40 percent to reflect a 60 percent contribution rate.¹³³ This takes into account lower tax compliance rates among undocumented immigrants, but also the fact that some undocumented immigrants pay more income tax via withholding than they owe. When calculating sales and excise taxes, we recalculate the income brackets that undocumented households fall into, as it is recognized that approximately 15 percent of the income earned by undocumented immigrants goes towards remittances, leaving less to spend in their local communities.¹³⁴ Corporate income tax rates are also recalculated to reflect lower levels of capital ownership.

Consistent with past American Immigration Council research, we use the term “spending power,” which we define as the disposable income left over after subtracting federal income, state, and local taxes from total annual household income.

Gross Domestic Product Estimates

Using the Regional Input-Output Modeling System (RIMS) multipliers from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, we estimate the impact of a change in final demand due to losing all undocumented workers on U.S. industries in terms of output, employment, and labor earnings.¹³⁵ We use broad categories of industries—sometimes called the “2-digit” North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes—when calculating the number of undocumented workers in each industry. The multipliers are based on estimates of local area personal income and on the national input-output (I-O) accounts.¹³⁶

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- 3 Charlie Savage, Maggie Haberman, and Jonathan Swan, “Sweeping Raids, Giant Camps and Mass Deportations: Inside Trump’s 2025 Immigration Plans,” *New York Times*, November 11, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/11/us/politics/trump-2025-immigration-agenda.html>.
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- 21** We were unable to produce these estimates without 2023 ACS data. In addition, the DHS Visa Overstay report for 2023 has yet to be published. We also chose not to include reported numbers of “got-aways,” as we cannot be certain that these individuals remained in the United States or did not subsequently present themselves to U.S. immigration officials.
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- 29** Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, “ICE Should Improve Controls Over Its Transportation Services Contracts,” September 25, 2023, at 23-59, <https://www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2023-09/OIG-23-59-Sep23.pdf>.
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- 33** See Methodology section for more detail.
- 34** Under 8 USC § 1229 (INA § 240), noncitizens not subject to expedited removal or who have not been previously removed may be placed in removal proceedings before an immigration judge. In FY 2023, ICE reported that it was monitoring 1,292,830 individuals with final orders of removal on its non-detained docket, meaning that these individuals may not have access to legal processing. However, other avenues for relief may exist for noncitizens not subject to § 240 proceedings, which is how many of these individuals have pending applications for immigration relief, pending appeals with the Board of Immigration Appeals or a circuit court, or other bases to challenge their removal order. Thus, we err on the side of presuming that all 13.3 million undocumented immigrants will be processed through the immigration court system.
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- 38** See U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, “Fiscal Year 2021 Congressional Budget Justification,” at 48, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/u.s._immigration_and_customs_enforcement_0.pdf.
- 39** See Methodology section for more detail.
- 40** See Methodology section for more detail.

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- 41** See Methodology section for more detail. These figures are adjusted for inflation.
- 42** Average length of stay (ALOS) refers to the duration of time, in days, that a noncitizen remains in ICE custody. Unauthorized immigrants detained inside the U.S. generally have higher lengths of stay compared to migrants detained at the border because these cases are typically more complex, require a hearing before an immigration judge, and many are not subject to expedited removal.
- 43** To arrive at the single adult ALOS, we focused on individuals detained by ICE and not by CBP at the border. Individuals detained in the interior of the U.S. typically have more complicated cases and are not subject to expedited removal, which means they spend longer in detention than migrants who present themselves at the border.
- 44** See Methodology section for more detail.
- 45** See U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, “Fiscal Year 2025 Congressional Budget Justification,” at 55, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-04/2024_0308_us_immigration_and_customs_enforcement.pdf.
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- 47** *Ibid.* We reviewed the facilities without a guaranteed minimum and added the latest ICE statistics report from 2017 that included the capacity for each of these facilities. See Immigration and Customs Enforcement, “Authorized DMCP Facility List,” July 8, 2017, <https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/publications/ice-dmcp-facility-list-ero-custody-management-division-2017/>.
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- 53** See Department of Homeland Security, “Fiscal Year 2023 Expenditure Plan: Border Management -Title V, Section 546,” March 27, 2023, at 6, <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/OCFO%20-%20Section%20546%20Border%20Management%20FY%202023%20Spend%20Plan%20%281%29.pdf>. The figure in the report, \$45.061 million, is for the sustainment of a facility with the same capacity in Tucson, Arizona. It was adjusted for inflation using the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation Calculator available at <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>.
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- 55** American Immigration Council, “The Removal System of the United States: An Overview,” August 9, 2022, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/removal-system-united-states-overview>.

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- 56** EOIR primarily decides whether foreign-born individuals charged by DHS with violating immigration law should be 1) ordered removed from the United States or 2) granted relief or protection from removal and allowed to remain in the country. In FY 2025, EOIR operated approximately 70 immigration courts and adjudication centers throughout the country. It also operates a centralized Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) located at EOIR Headquarters in Falls Church, Virginia to oversee appeals made from the immigration court level. See U.S. Department of Justice, Executive Office for Immigration Review, “FY 2025 Performance Budget,” March 2024, at 11, https://www.justice.gov/d9/2024-03/eoir_fy_2025_pb_narrative_02.29.24_final_1.pdf.
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- 61** See EOIR Adjudication Statistics, “New Cases and Total Completions,” generated April 19, 2024, 1, <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/media/1345076/dl?inline>.
- 62** See Methodology section for more detail. This figure was adjusted for inflation.
- 63** See Immigration and Customs Enforcement, “ICE Annual Report: Fiscal Year 2023,” December 29, 2023, at 63, <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/eoy/iceAnnualReportFY2023.pdf>.
- 64** Ibid.
- 65** This figure is lower than the Congressionally-appropriated figure (\$402,314,000), meaning the work the agency accomplished was done with less funds than were appropriated.
- 66** See Methodology section for more detail. This figure was adjusted for inflation.
- 67** This number may be on the higher end given that EOIR has indicated that once an immigration judge is fully tenured, each IJ and their support staff could adjudicate upwards of 600 cases per year. During the Trump administration, immigration judges were required to process a certain number of cases annually and were prevented from using certain judicial tools, like termination and administrative closure, to adjudicate a case. The average case completion rate between FY 2017 and FY 2020 was 513 cases per year; however, FY 2019 had the highest rate with 626.9 cases.
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- 69** See Methodology section for more detail.
- 70** See Methodology section for more detail.
- 71** See EOIR Adjudication Statistics, “Number of Courtrooms,” generated April 19, 2024, <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/media/1344916/dl?inline>.
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