



A volunteer escorts a 2-year-old American boy to be reunited in February with his mother, who is from Honduras and awaits deportation at the Dilley family detention center outside of San Antonio. Christopher Lee for ProPublica

Trump Has Detained the Parents of More Than 11,000 U.S. Citizen Kids



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- **More Moms Deported:** An exclusive data analysis found Trump has deported moms of U.S. citizens at four times the rate of his predecessor.
- **Left Stranded:** Because American-born kids can't legally join their parents in immigration detention, some end up with friends or strangers when their parents are detained or deported.
- **New Directive:** Trump administration officials revised a document advising how ICE officers should interact with parents, removing the word "humane."

These highlights were written by the reporters and editors who worked on this story.

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The baby needed somewhere to go. So in the frantic hours before officers took her parents away to immigration detention, her mom turned to their pastor and his wife. As squad cars waited outside the family's Lakeland, Florida, trailer home, she gave them a crash course in how to care for the 4-month-old.

Briany, with her plump cheeks and full head of dark hair, wasn't normally this fussy. But it was late that January night — around midnight — and she was still hungry. Her mom, Doris Flores, had tried nursing her to calm her down. It didn't work. When she brought Briany to her breast, the milk wouldn't come. Flores thought it had to do with the panic that set in after the officers arrested the baby's father and told her she was next.

The baby also drank formula. The pastor and his wife, who'd never had children of their own, should take her bottles and the yellow cans of formula, too, and follow the instructions on the label. They should use distilled water, never from the tap. Briany drank 5 ounces at each feeding. She needed to eat every two to two-and-a-half hours.

She was almost due for her next round of vaccinations. She was getting big enough for Size 3 diapers. What made her happiest was to be held in someone's arms.

The Rev. Israel Vázquez, 58, soft-spoken with close-cropped hair, had held Briany before, when he formally presented the baby to God in a ceremony at his Pentecostal church in Lakeland. If he and his wife, a fellow pastor at the church, didn't take the girls in, they would have to go into foster care. "What else could we do?" he said.

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The Rev. Israel Vázquez and his wife, the Rev. Raysa Vázquez, assumed care in January for 4-month-old American citizen Briany after her parents were taken into immigration detention. Jennifer Ortiz for ProPublica

The baby's half-sister would be easier for the older couple to take care of. Eight-year-old Briana was quiet and humble. She preferred speaking in English rather than Spanish. Her favorite color was blue.

Deputies from the Polk County Sheriff's Office helped load a baby stroller and bouncy swing into the couple's car. Then the officers, employed by one of the hundreds of Florida agencies carrying out immigration enforcement for the Trump administration, handcuffed a sobbing Flores.

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Incidents like this, involving the arrest and detention of immigrant parents with American citizen children, occurred twice as often after President Donald Trump returned to office, according to an analysis of a new nationwide Immigration and Customs Enforcement dataset shared exclusively with ProPublica. In the first seven months of his second term, authorities arrested and detained parents of at least 11,000 U.S. citizen children — a number that, if the pace held up, will have roughly doubled by now. That's an average of more than 50 U.S. citizen kids a day with a parent pulled into detention.

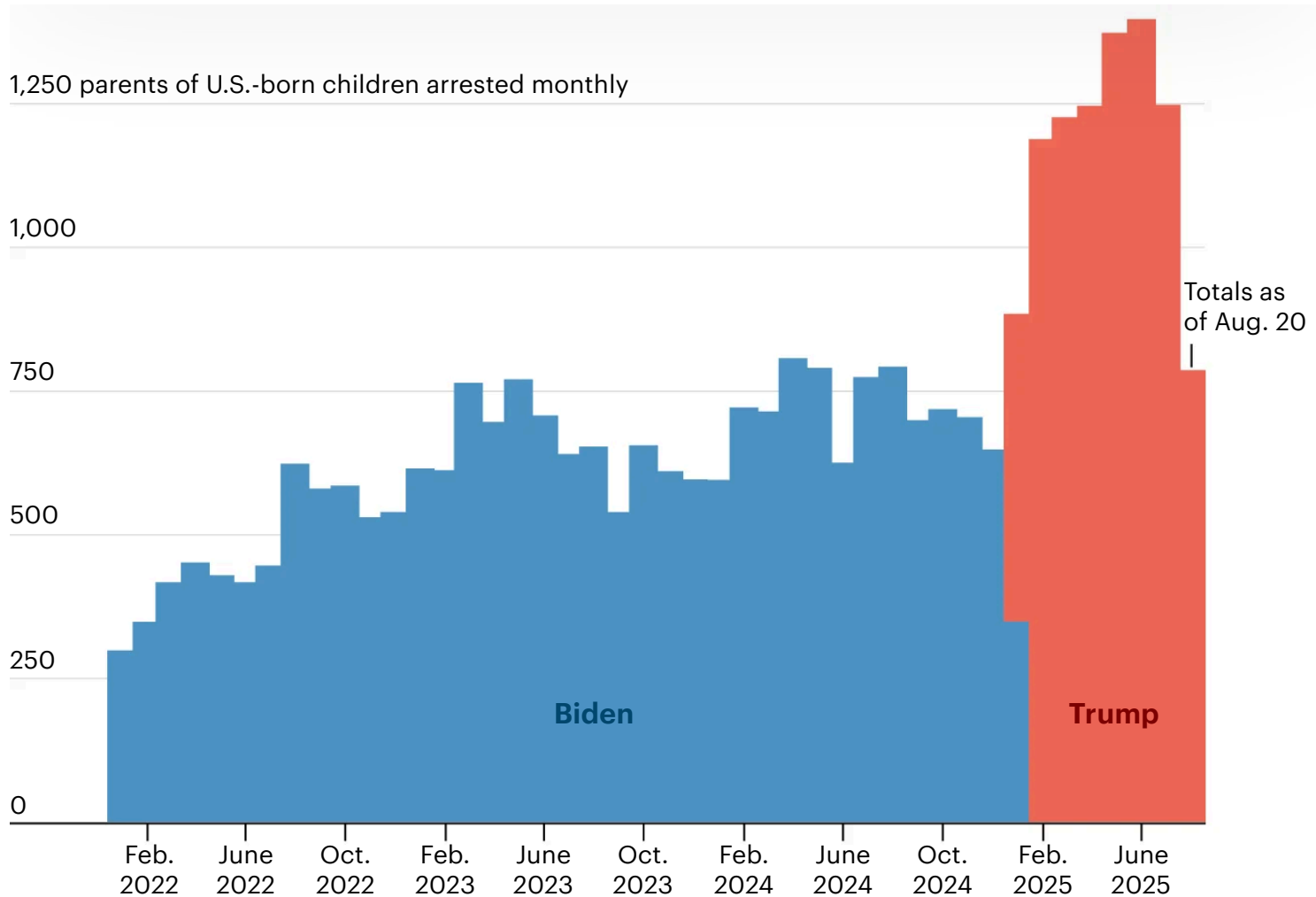
The data underlying this analysis was obtained by the University of Washington Center for Human Rights [as part of an ongoing public records lawsuit](#). It covers the last three years of the Joe Biden administration and the Trump administration until mid-August 2025.

Under Trump, Arrests of Immigrant Parents With U.S.-Born Children Surged

ICE arrests of parents doubled in the first seven months of Trump's second term compared with the Biden administration.

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Note: Arrest figures for both administrations represent an undercount due to data limitations. See our methodology for more details. Source: ProPublica analysis of ICE data obtained by the University of Washington Center for Human Rights. Chris Alcantara/ProPublica

The differences between the fates of detained immigrant parents under the two presidents are stark, our analysis shows. The impact on mothers is particularly pronounced. Trump is deporting about four times as many moms of U.S. citizen children per day as Biden did.

Immigration authorities are arresting more of these moms in the first place, but that doesn't account for all of the surge in deportations. If arrested, they are seldom allowed to return home to their families anymore. About 30% of such arrests under Biden resulted in a deportation. Under Trump, almost 60% resulted in a deportation.

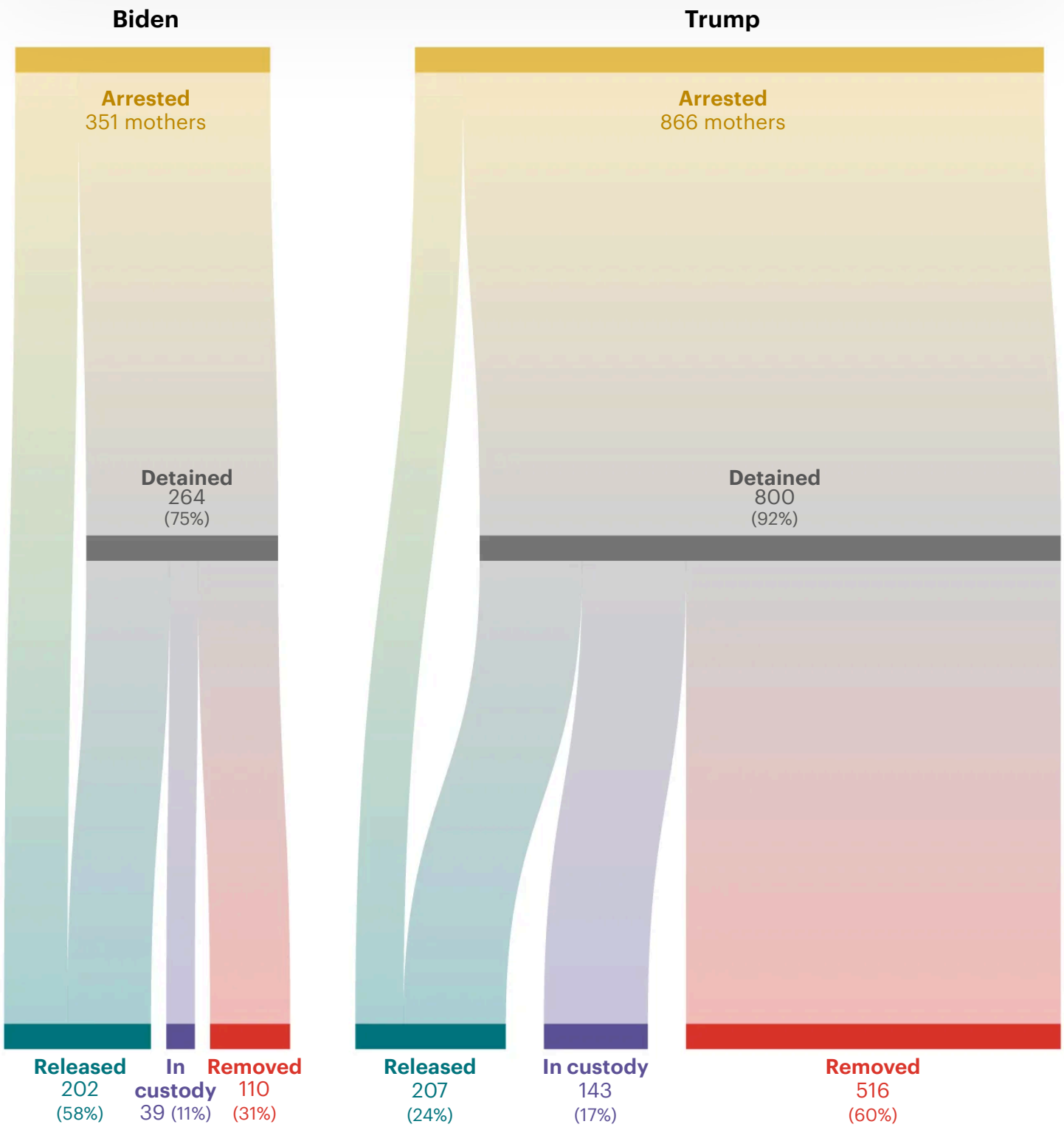
Compared with the Biden administration, Trump officials are detaining many more parents with [only minor criminal histories or none at all](#). Under Trump, more than half of the detained fathers of American citizen kids, and about three quarters of the mothers, had no criminal convictions in the United States except for traffic- or immigration-related offenses.

Immigrant Mothers of U.S. Citizen Children Are Released Less Often During Trump's Administration

ProPublica compared what happened to U.S. citizen children's mothers arrested during the same seven-month period — Jan. 20 through Aug. 20 — in 2024 (under Biden) and 2025 (under Trump), looking at over 1,000 cases. About a third of the arrests made during the Biden administration led to a deportation. Under Trump, that rate doubled.

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Note: Outcomes for arrests under Biden were measured as of October 15, 2024. Outcomes for arrests under Trump were measured on the same date in 2025. Arrest and outcome figures for both administrations represent an undercount due to data limitations. See our methodology for more details. Sources: ProPublica analysis of ICE data obtained by the University of Washington Center for Human Rights and the Deportation Data Project. Chris Alcantara/ProPublica

Current and former officials from the Department of Homeland Security said such separations are not necessarily a

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Trump's border czar, introduced the directive to field offices around the country. If agents encountered parents, the directive would help them enforce immigration laws without "unnecessarily undermining their parental rights," according to his August 2013 talking points, which were obtained by ProPublica.

Now, Sandweg and the other former officials said, the second Trump administration has put aggressive enforcement goals like [arresting 3,000 immigrants a day](#) above concerns about the harms of hastily separating children from their parents.

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ProPublica sent detailed questions about our findings to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, which oversees ICE. DHS Acting Assistant Secretary Lauren Bis said in an emailed statement that the agency "cannot verify the veracity of the data" that ProPublica analyzed. (We validated the data, which the agency provided via Freedom of Information Act requests, and our approach with outside experts.) Bis also said in the statement, "ICE does not separate families."

Immigrant parents can choose to leave the country with their children or to designate someone to care for them, Bis said, which "is consistent with past administration's policies." The revised directive "simply standardizes the required forms." She added that "under President Trump, ICE will not ignore the rule of law."

A White House spokesperson wrote in a statement that those in the country illegally "who wish to avoid the deportation process should self-deport."



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The unraveling of Flores' family began with another kid's alleged threat against 8-year-old Briana.

According to a Jan. 15 police report, the girl's school bus driver had contacted the Polk County Sheriff's Office after Briana claimed a student at her elementary school, a boy with blond hair and blue eyes, had threatened to kill her.

The sheriff's office dispatched a deputy to the family's mobile home, where she introduced herself to Flores and her fiancé, Egdulio Velasquez, and asked to speak with Briana. The 8-year-old was "timid," according to the police report, and initially denied any trouble with fellow students. The family said that the deputy questioned Briana alone outside the trailer. Eventually, the girl let on that her classmate had indeed been bothering her, poking her in the back and face with his fingers — but did not say the boy had threatened to kill her, according to the police report.

The deputy went to the classmate's house, and the boy told her it was Briana who had made the threats. He said she had pointed a broken pencil at him. The deputy filled out two threat assessment forms, one for the boy, one for the girl, noting that she hadn't checked the boy's home for firearms because his "father was uncooperative" but had searched Briana's trailer.

"I was unable to determine probable cause," the deputy wrote in her report. She would have to drop the case. But her investigation had turned up something else: Flores and Velasquez were both immigrants from Honduras.

A second sheriff's deputy arrived at the trailer not long after and took their passports. According to police records, he then called an ICE hotline, a requirement stemming from Florida's close cooperation with the agency. An operator told him that both parents had deportation orders: Velasquez from a DUI conviction and Flores from a missed asylum hearing.

Flores said she had missed the hearing because of computer issues and was trying to appeal the ruling. She'd crossed the border into the United States and applied for asylum in 2023, after a man in Honduras had threatened to kill her. DHS' Bis confirmed that Flores entered the country in 2023 and had a deportation order issued in May 2025.

Flores had met Velasquez, who is from the same rural Honduran province of Olancho, in the United States. Briana, his daughter from a previous relationship, was born in Honduras. The family built a life together in Lakeland, where he worked in a factory that built shipping pallets, and they became members of Vázquez's church.

A third squad car appeared outside the trailer. The officers arrested Velasquez first, keeping him handcuffed in the back of one of the cars for hours. But before they could arrest Flores, they needed to figure out what to do with the kids.

"Don't be like this," Flores recalled saying to the officers as she held baby Briana. "My girl needs me." She said they told her they were just doing their jobs. She said she prayed to God: "Lord, I'm putting everything in your hands."

According to Flores and Velasquez, one of the deputies took a liking to a family kitten and offered to take it home with him. Velasquez said he later saw the kitten clinging to the officer's pants.

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The Polk County Sheriff's Office did not respond to specific questions about the incident, instead sending an emailed statement that outlined [its state-mandated cooperation with federal immigration authorities](#).

It was close to 11 p.m. when an investigator from Florida's child protective services finally arrived, the family said. She informed Flores that if she couldn't find someone to take the children, the state would place them in the foster care system. So Flores called her pastor.

Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd recently began calling for a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who

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“Nothing has changed in how we deliver day-to-day law enforcement services in our community,” she wrote, “other than asking everyone with whom we interact their place of birth.”



ProPublica’s reporting shows that the parents of at least 11,000 U.S. citizen children were arrested and detained in the first seven months of the Trump administration’s immigration crackdown. First image: Two volunteers place a 2-year-old American child in a car so he can be reunited with his mother, who is from Honduras and awaits deportation at the Dilley, Texas, family detention center. Second image: Two American children, left, talk on the phone with their father, who is detained at “Alligator Alcatraz” in Florida after being arrested on Christmas. First image: Christopher Lee for ProPublica. Second image: Michelle Bruzzese for ProPublica.

Federal policy still says ICE officers should ask people they arrest if they are the parents or legal guardians of minors — and if they are, they should be allowed to make arrangements for the children’s care. The Trump administration’s July revision to this directive, the one that removed the word “humane” from the preamble, also added a new line. It specifies that the directive “in no way limits the ability of ICE personnel to make enforcement decisions on a case-by-case basis.”

In practice, instances when parents are spared are becoming increasingly rare, said Andrew Lorenzen-Strait, a former ICE official who oversaw implementation of the directive at ICE during the Obama and first Trump administrations. “It may happen on a case-by-case basis because an officer in and of himself has humanity,” he said.

ProPublica followed multiple families through their sudden separations — examining the moment itself and its aftermath — and found a wide variety of outcomes for the children.

Fernanda, a Florida restaurant worker, made an agonizing decision after the father of her children was arrested and deported: She would send their toddler son and 4-year-old daughter to Guatemala to live with him. She feared it was only a matter of time until immigration agents came knocking on her door. She didn’t want the children, both U.S. citizens, to be stranded.

Fernanda asked to be identified by only her middle name because of her immigration status. The Guatemalan-Maya Center, a nonprofit, helped her take the kids to the Fort Lauderdale airport in early February, the little boy dressed in a Spider-Man outfit, the little girl in a CoComelon sweatshirt and pink hat, and put them on a plane.

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1-year-old, who is a U.S. citizen. She said she decided not to file an appeal after a judge denied her asylum claim and that an ICE agent and a social worker were dispatched to Florida to retrieve the girls. Then, she said, she and her daughters were escorted to the border to cross on foot into Mexico — where they knew no one and had no money.

A DHS spokesperson confirmed that the family was sent to Mexico together.



A deported father holds his 4-year-old daughter at La Aurora International Airport in Guatemala City. Their mother, Fernanda, decided to send her two children, both U.S. citizens, to Guatemala to live with him after he was deported, fearing the same would happen to her. Daniele Volpe for ProPublica

Mauricio Ayala, a 24-year-old engineer working at a firm in downtown Seattle, called 911 after immigration agents arrested his dad last April. “My father has been illegally detained,” he told the dispatcher nervously, stumbling over his words. “A bunch of masked men in unmarked vehicles pulled up and detained him.” (A DHS spokesperson wrote in a statement that “our officers verbally identify themselves” and wear badges and vests that display their agency name.)

His dad, a roofer, [had been swept up in one of the first large-scale workplace raids](#) of the new Trump administration. It was the beginning of a role reversal for Ayala, his college-age sister and his brother, a high school senior. All citizens, they would be the ones supporting their parents. Their mom had been forced to leave the country after an immigration arrest over a decade ago, Ayala said, but officers didn’t arrest his dad at the time because there were young children in the home. His dad was found guilty of reckless driving in 2015 but had no other criminal convictions that we could find in the United States. But now, as the siblings entered adulthood, their dad would be deported, too.

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Callejas' boyfriend was deported. She and her older son, Edwin, were held in family detention, where he said he was stressed because it felt like a prison. He said he lost 10 pounds in a week after he got sick. He was so despondent, his mother said, that she felt her only option was to allow them to be sent back to El Salvador, a country Edwin left when he was 5. (ICE has said conditions in its facilities are safe for families and that everyone is provided proper medical care.)

Callejas said she agreed to return to El Salvador only because she understood that her 6-year-old and 4-year-old would be allowed to join her and their older brother.

The kids' father had previously pleaded no contest to domestic battery and had a restraining order placed against him, which allowed brief supervised visitation. (Attorneys for both parents said Callejas allowed him to spend time with the kids despite the order.) When he found out their mom had been deported, he opposed the children leaving the country and decided to fight for custody. Since Callejas' deportation, the children have been with a caretaker, and a judge has allowed their father more time with them, according to lawyers for both parents. The result: a monthslong battle in a Los Angeles court — with Callejas attending hearings virtually from El Salvador.



Israel and Raysa Vázquez check in at the passport agency in Miami, seeking an emergency infant passport for Briany. Jennifer Ortiz for ProPublica

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Meanwhile, the girls' parents bounced among hold rooms, jails and detention centers. In detention, Flores said, she began to suffer a painful swelling, which she believed could have been mastitis brought on by her inability to nurse her baby. Her chest became hot to the touch, her whole body feverish. The fever lasted a week.

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The couple wanted to do whatever they could to make the girls feel at home. But they also wanted to make sure the girls could be reunited with their parents. If Flores and Velasquez were going to be deported, the pastors wanted the girls to go with them. And to go with them, Briany would need a passport. The pastors would have to get both parents' signatures while they were in detention.

Briany was sitting on Raysa's lap as they watched TV in the living room, babbling along as she listened to the couple talk, when Israel's phone rang. It was an ICE deportation officer. He said Flores would be removed from the country soon and the window for getting her daughters on a plane with her was closing. He offered to help the Vázquezes get the parents' signatures and said ICE would bring Flores to Tampa.

The next day, they drove to a government office in Tampa to get Flores' signature, where the girls were allowed to see and hug her. She let out a loud scream and started weeping at the sight of the children. In Mississippi, volunteers rushed to the detention center where Velasquez was being held and got his signature, too.

The couple drove Briany to Miami a few days later and picked up her passport. Then they brought the girls to the Tampa airport.

They met Flores at the terminal. She was clad in a sweatshirt and bleary from the early hour. Israel handed over the diaper bag he'd been carrying around and the baby's bottles. Flores' fiance would be deported a few weeks later on a separate flight to Honduras. Her eldest child, a son from a previous relationship who had to go live with his father after she was arrested, would remain in the U.S. So for now it was just Flores and the two girls. They posed for a photo, then said goodbye.

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Briany's family is now back together and living in the town of San José in rural Honduras. Daniele Volpe for ProPublica

The family now lives at Velasquez's father's house in the town of San José, deep in rural Honduras. The baby no longer breastfeeds. She hasn't since the night deputies separated her from her mother. "I brought her to my breast," Flores said, "but she doesn't want it anymore."

Briany's preferred formula costs too much for the family to afford. To keep the baby fed, they rely again on their church. A box of it recently arrived, enough to last several weeks, sent by the Vázquezes and their Lakeland congregation.

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Doris Flores with Briana and Briany at their new home in Honduras Daniele Volpe for ProPublica

How We Measured Separations of Families with U.S. Citizen Children

Ours is the most detailed accounting to date of the U.S. citizen children whose immigrant parents have been arrested, detained and in many cases deported. Underlying the analysis is a database of ICE I-213 records obtained by the University of Washington. Immigration agents fill out Form I-213 when they arrest someone alleging they are in the country without permission. Among other pieces of information, it records the citizenship and number of minor children of each arrestee.

The data appears to contain arrests only by ICE and does not cover arrests by Customs and Border Protection. It covers late 2021 to mid-August 2025. We used this data to calculate the number of parents of U.S. citizen children arrested each day.

To learn what happened to parents after they were arrested by ICE, including detention, final release from ICE custody in the United States or removal from the country, we combined the I-213 data with records from the [Deportation Data](#)

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We used the overlapping 85% to make statements about the number of U.S. citizen children who had a parent arrested and detained by ICE since Trump returned to office and about the criminal status of their parents. We also used these combined records to compare how their mothers were treated differently by the Trump and Biden administrations.

To calculate that more than 11,000 U.S. citizen children had a parent arrested and detained by ICE, we counted only children of fathers. We did this to avoid double-counting children in cases where both parents were detained, and fathers made up a large majority of the parents detained. We were limited to the first seven months of Trump's second term, the time period covered in the I-213 data. If a father was arrested and detained more than once under Trump, we counted that father's children only once. All other calculations were performed at the arrest level, meaning that in a very small number of instances, the same parent could be included more than once for each time they were arrested, detained, released or removed.

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The government cannot legally detain U.S. citizen children with their parents or deport them. According to immigration experts and current and former officials, the arrest and detention of parents of U.S. citizens often leads to a family separation, even if it's brief.

We counted a parent as having been detained by ICE if they were booked into a facility for any length of time according to the Deportation Data Project's detention records. In a very small minority of cases during the Trump administration, parents were released from ICE custody in less than a few days. This was more common under Biden. When we calculated the criminal history of parents arrested and detained by ICE, we relied on the criminal charges in these detention records.

To calculate that Trump has deported mothers of U.S. citizen children at four times the rate that Biden did, we calculated the total number of mothers removed under each administration in the period covered by our data and divided by the number of days each president was in office during that period. We used the period from November 2023 through mid-August 2025 to minimize undercounting at the start and end of our detention dataset. We also compared equivalent seven-month periods in 2024 and 2025, which produced a similar result. For the purposes of our analysis, we counted a small number of detained mothers who agreed to leave the country voluntarily as having been deported.

Validating Our Approach

We verified our matches between the two data sources in several ways. First, there were three fields in the I-213 data that were in other parts of the Deportation Data Project data but not used as part of the linkage process: marital status, processing disposition and date of entry. For records we linked that contained values in those fields (some were empty in one or both datasets), we found that those data points matched more than 98% of the time.

Next, we checked to make sure that there were no systematic differences in which ICE arrests appeared in the I-213 dataset compared to those contained in the Deportation Data Project records. We checked to make sure that women and men were equally represented, the different ICE field offices were equally represented, nationalities were equally represented, etc. We found no appreciable difference between the two datasets.

We also compared records for which we found a match between the two datasets to records that had no match and found no strong patterns suggesting systematic differences between the two.

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We ran our findings and methodology by Phil Neff, a researcher at the University of Washington Center for Human Rights and Joseph Gunther, a mathematician who researches immigration-related datasets and former ICE officials.

We also were able to link some of the data to leaked ICE flight manifests, which allowed us in some cases to find the full names — redacted in most of the other data — of some of the deported parents. In a handful of those cases, we found their phone numbers or those of family members, and we reached out to hear their stories.

We conducted interviews in Spanish and English with close to two dozen detained or deported parents or their relatives or lawyers. We also spoke with nonprofits like the American Friends Service Committee and Each Step Home, which assist immigrant families — including Flores' family — after they are separated.

The parents we followed through the arrest process were originally from a range of mostly Latin American countries: Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico and Ecuador. They and their children had made lives in all corners of the United States, including California, Washington state, New York, Massachusetts and Florida. Most of the parents we interviewed were moms.

Graphics by [Chris Alcantara](#). [Al Shaw](#) contributed data reporting.

Jeff Ernsthause



I am a reporter who specializes in using data analysis and code to find stories.

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I'm interested in tips about the immigration system, government contracting and ways that the wealthy shield themselves from taxes. If you have data that you think could be analyzed for the public benefit, I'd also like to hear from you.



Mario Ariza



I cover Florida for ProPublica.

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Contact me via email or Signal about big systemic harms happening in Florida or emanating from it. Tell me stories that powerful people or organizations don't want told.



McKenzie Funk



I cover immigration, privacy and climate change from my native Pacific Northwest.

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I'm eager to hear from anyone connected to the business of immigration enforcement: technologists, data brokers, activists, airplane pilots, private-prison officials and insiders at ICE, CBP and DHS writ large.



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I am interested in tips on anything related to immigration, the American Southwest and the U.S.-Mexico border.

What We're Watching

During Donald Trump's second presidency, ProPublica will focus on the areas most in need of scrutiny. Here are some of the issues our reporters will be watching — and how to get in touch with them securely.



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