



IMMIGRATION

Aggressive Immigration Raids Are Breaking Up Families and Scaring Longtime Residents

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Lawyers, activists, and undocumented immigrants are already gearing up for the next wave of crackdowns.

As she curled beneath a fleece blanket on her couch—where she now sleeps since she can't bear to be in bed without her husband—Patricia Ribera Sanchez, a lifelong Texan, recalled the morning she lost her "other half."

"Cesar got in the truck with his boss for work last Friday, and as soon as they turned the corner immigration officers stopped them, said they were looking for another man," Sanchez, 49, told me in her Austin apartment. "Then they asked if Cesar had papers, and he said no—he'd never lie to them. They handcuffed him and put him in their van. It's just so hard. I'm going to fall apart if he doesn't come back."

Sanchez's husband, Cesar Sanchez Ramirez, was one of **about 700 immigrants** detained last week in the **first Immigration and Customs Enforcement** (ICE) raids of the Trump



administration. Given Trump's harsh anti-immigrant rhetoric and his signing of an executive order focused on **making life harder for undocumented immigrants** on US soil, it's no surprise that these raids were controversial. ICE has **said** the raids targeted dangerous people, announcing in a press release that 75 percent of those arrested had criminal records. But agents arrested many residents for merely being undocumented, people like Cesar. In Washington State, authorities picked up one man **who was protected** by an Obama-era order shielding those who came to the US as children; in Arizona, **protesters attempted to stop** the deportation of a mother who authorities had previously allowed to stay.

In the wake of the raids, shattered families are grieving the loss of loved ones, while immigrants around the country scramble to prepare for more crackdowns.

"What has become clear here and around the country is that many people were picked up without a criminal history or an order of deportation," said Stephanie Gharakhanian, legal director for the Austin immigrant advocacy organization Workers Defense Project, who has met with families of the raid victims. "They were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time."

In the past few years, the Obama administration prioritized deporting only immigrants with criminal records or who recently entered illegally. But under Trump, virtually any undocumented immigrant can be deported, as these recent raids made all too obvious.

"You can't look at these incidents in isolation from the much bigger sea change around ICE activity and priorities and their mandate that is completely revamped under the executive order," Avidah Moussavian, policy attorney for the National Immigration Law Center, told me. "These enforcement actions are happening when the administration is moving in a direction to triple resources for ICE personnel... There's a cumulative effect of all these factors coming together."

The raids have particularly rattled Austin, a liberal mecca currently **fighting** Texas to remain a sanctuary city. Officials here say ICE's recent moves are unprecedented. The Workers Defense Project delivered ICE a **Freedom of Information Act Request** to determine if the agency targeted Austin for its pro-immigrant policies, and Austin's mayor issued an **open letter** claiming the raids caused "disproportionate harm." Latino businesses shuttered their doors Thursday, and people took to the streets, protesting the raids as part of the nationwide "Day Without Immigrants."

That anxiety is palpable in the undocumented community. Many children of immigrants have stayed home from school, and individuals have called Austin's deportation alert hotline frequently to report suspicious cars or to ask for advice. Meanwhile, at least one family has fled the home they own: A single Mexican mother with several children who



are US citizens cowered when ICE agents knocked on her door last week, and since then has gone into hiding.

"She's been in the country many, many years and has no criminal record whatsoever. She's worked at the same job for decades and owned her own home. She's basically like a perfect citizen, but she's a noncitizen," an advocate helping the family who asked to remain anonymous told me. "She's taking it day by day, and many people in the community are supporting her. It's a terrible situation because she has several children in the school system, and these poor kids are being displaced."

Though Austinites say they've never witnessed such a barrage of raids, the national pace of ICE pickups last week did not exceed that of the Obama administration, immigration attorney Jeremy McKinney told me.

"If you annualize last week's numbers, the current administration would not exceed the number of removals from the Obama administration," said McKinney, a North Carolina-based member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association. "But, since Obama's directive in November 2014, the operations had specific targets, and if other people around were undocumented and they didn't fall within the administration's priorities, they were not taken in."

Now, McKinney said, ICE has "returned to collateral damage," meaning the agency will pick up anyone in the process of seizing their target—just as they did prior to November 2014.

"I can tell you in my region in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia enforcement is always intense, so what we're seeing so far is nothing new to us," he said. "It's very consistent with the way things were up until we had this brief moment of clarity saying we need to fill [immigrant detention] beds with people with felony convictions."

ICE claimed it apprehended 51 immigrants in the Austin area, but the Mexican consul general, Carlos Gonzalez Gutierrez, told me 53 Mexican nationals were detained Thursday through Sunday, with 30 picked up last Friday alone—nearly ten times the typical daily number. Advocates estimate that at least a dozen Central Americans were also detained.

"A significant number of the people we interviewed were caught in the process of ICE detaining some other target," Gutierrez said, noting that colleagues in his office had not seen such a "significant spike" in the past 15 years. "I saw hardworking people detained who have been living in this country for many years with established roots and children."

Cesar Sanchez Ramirez was one of those hardworking people. Patricia described her husband, who came to the States at age 18, as industrious or compassionate. He has held



the same job doing electrical repairs for the past seven years and supported her through surgery and sickness.

"I'm in and out of the hospital because of diabetes, and I just had five hernias removed in May. My husband had to take care of me—he even had to change my diapers. I was out of work, and he paid for everything," Sanchez told me. "He's so sweet. He draws pictures for me of hearts and of my name in his name. He's never been in trouble. We just work all week, go to the grocery store on the weekend, go to church on Sunday, and then get ready to work again."

He has also become like the father of her two children.

"We met at a club in Austin, and he kept asking me to dance again and again," reminisced Sanchez, recalling the black-and-white sparkly top she wore that Saturday night eight years ago. "He was very nice and respectful and walked me to my car... I was abused as a child, and then my son's father was abusive. Then that night I was finally blessed with a good man. But now he's not here."

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