ICE raids harmful to our communities

Last week, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) carried out one of its largest raids in years, arresting more than 140 people in Ohio. But raids and family separation are only part of the total impact ICE has on our communities. The Trump administration has attempted to justify aggressive immigration enforcement by claiming it helps make our cities safer, yet the opposite may be true.

Immigration advocates have raised concerns about public safety based on ICE’s track record of abuse, militarized operations and propensity to identify themselves as the police. So far this year, seven immigrants have died while in ICE custody, with reports citing lack of medical care as a main factor. The cavalier attitude with which ICE conducts operations should be a cause of concern for us all, especially given that ICE has negligently detained or deported more than 20,000 U.S. citizens since 2003.

The terror that ICE raids sow in our communities affects us all. Increased fear in immigrant communities often results in a reluctance to call the police, cooperate with authorities or show up to court, the effects of which have already started to show. In 2017, sexual assault reports by Latinos in Los Angeles fell by 25 percent, while domestic violence reports declined by 10 percent. In Denver, following ICE arrests in the local courthouse, prosecutors reported that victims of domestic violence have refused to testify because of fear of being arrested.

The threat to our collective security extends to public health as well. Widespread fear has led to immigrants forgoing health care for themselves and even their U.S. citizen children, increasing health risks for all. There are also direct and tangible effects of the ICE violence. A 2017 study by the University of Michigan documented the health effects following a 2008 ICE raid in Iowa. The study found that Latina women, including those who were citizens, were more likely to have low-weight or premature babies following the raid.

While the immediate effects on health and safety have been documented, the long-term effects will take decades to fully understand. This includes not only the significant trauma inflicted on children separated from their parents while in immigration custody, but the devastating disruption ICE raids can have on their education. After raids took place in eastern Tennessee earlier this year, more than 500 children missed school the following day.

The fear and instability that accompanies these raids have thrust school officials into a role that has now become all too common for teachers, health care professionals and social workers attempting to provide some sense of guidance and reassurance in a time of immense uncertainty. A survey of 5,400 teachers, principals and counselors conducted by the Civil Rights Project at UCLA found that 68 percent of administrators cited absenteeism among immigrant students as a problem, and 70 percent of principals and counselors reported an academic decline among immigrant students.

These collateral consequences are rarely cited in conversations on immigration and enforcement, but they highlight the human costs that we collectively pay. The United States detains more immigrants than any other country in the world, and ICE’s ballooning budget and expansive detention policies run the risk of reshaping the character of our country.

Evidence documenting the destructive effects of ICE enforcement paints a clear picture as to the devastating toll these policies are taking on our society. We must stand together to protect our communities and call for an end to destructive policies that separate our families and destroy the social fabric of our communities.

Hamid Yazdan Panah
Justice & Diversity Center of the Bar Association of San Francisco
San Francisco, Calif.
via mediaforum.org