

ICE surged in Minnesota to arrest criminals. Many of them were already in jail. An analysis of the Trump administration’s “worst of the worst” list shows about half of the immigrants detained were not taken off the streets.



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Federal immigration officials inflated the number of dangerous criminals they claimed to have taken off the streets during Operation Metro Surge, a Minnesota Star Tribune analysis found. In some instances, they also made inaccurate claims about the criminal backgrounds of those on the list.

At the height of the surge, on Jan. 19, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem accused Gov. Tim Walz and Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey of failing to protect Minnesotans from immigrants in the country illegally who were “killing Americans, hurting children and reigning terror.”

Noem said immigration agents in the Twin Cities were arresting “vicious murderers, rapists, child pedophiles, and incredibly dangerous individuals.” She called the surge “a huge victory for public safety.”

Yet about half of the people Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) took credit for detaining in Minnesota, who are featured on a [Trump administration website](#) titled “worst of the worst,” were already in federal, state or county custody or had recently been released.

Of the remainder, just over half were accused or convicted of a violent crime, the analysis found. The most common charges the rest faced were drug crimes, theft and illegal re-entry into the country, a felony. Only a few had outstanding warrants and were actively wanted by police.

To justify sending thousands of agents to Minnesota, officials at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) have repeatedly pointed to their [“worst of the worst” website](#), which has listed more than 500 arrests in the state. That represents a fraction of the 11,000 people whom federal immigration officials claim were detained in Minnesota since the start of President Donald Trump’s second term.

The Star Tribune reviewed the criminal histories of nearly every immigrant detained in Minnesota who has been showcased on the DHS website and those identified in news releases. In several instances, the federal government listed inaccurate criminal histories, duplicated entries and people who have already been freed.

More than a third of those on the worst of the worst site for Minnesota were released from federal, state or county custody before the surge started in December.

“Everyone on this website was arrested under President Trump,” a DHS spokesperson said in a statement. “We never claimed everyone on the website or every arrest in Operation Metro Surge was made at large in the community.”

Federal officials recently acknowledged to CNN that their website was riddled with errors and inaccuracies. They said “a minor glitch was promptly resolved,” but the Star Tribune found significant errors remain.

The analysis comes as state and federal officials continue to spar over the number of alleged criminals detained during Operation Metro Surge.

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Minnesota Department of Corrections Commissioner Paul Schnell recently testified before the U.S. Senate Homeland Security Committee, challenging what he called the administration’s “false narrative” that Minnesota harbors criminals in the country illegally.

Schnell said that despite the rhetoric from the administration, state prison officials have always cooperated with ICE, and county sheriffs turn over immigrants who are the subject

of judicial warrants. Like other local leaders, Schnell disputed that the immigration crackdown made Minnesota safer.

“They just ran roughshod over the community, and then cried foul when they ended up killing two Minnesotans and creating havoc wherever they turned,” Schnell said in an interview. “Then they complained that [local police] were not protecting them. It is absurd.”

Who is on ICE’s list

The largest group on the DHS “worst of the worst” website is federal prisoners, most of whom have no ties to Minnesota other than serving time behind bars in the state. More than three-quarters of the prisoners detained by ICE from prisons in Sandstone, Rochester and Waseca committed crimes in other states and were in ICE custody before the surge started on Dec. 1.

Corrections officials said ICE has also taken credit in news releases for dozens of arrests of people released to federal custody before Trump’s first term. In several cases, they were from countries such as Laos, Myanmar and Sierra Leone that did not accept deportees until recently.

About two dozen others were arrested at Fort Snelling Immigration Court.

Dozens more on the ICE list were recently released after serving short sentences in county jails. Access to county corrections facilities has long been a point of contention between federal and local law enforcement.

Border czar Tom Homan said “significant” cooperation from county sheriffs was key to his decision to wind down the immigration enforcement surge. But none of the sheriffs who responded to a survey from the Star Tribune said they had changed their policies.

Inaccurate criminal histories

About 45% of the immigrants on the worst of the worst list were accused or convicted of violent crimes.

In several instances, ICE data conflated criminal charges with convictions and misdemeanors with felonies. In other instances, the claims were inaccurate.

One case is that of Mariama Sia Kanu, a Brooklyn Park woman from Sierra Leone whom ICE claimed was arrested for vehicular homicide. Neither the Star Tribune nor state corrections officials could verify a homicide conviction in Kanu’s past.

State records instead show Kanu was convicted of “criminal vehicular operation” after she caused a car crash while intoxicated, a collision that left the other driver with injured ribs. Federal records show Kanu remains in ICE custody, but it is unclear where she is being held.

Arrests continue

Federal officials say their immigration enforcement operation will continue in Minnesota on a smaller scale. They've provided few details about thousands of detained people who are not highlighted on the DHS website or in news releases.

As the Star Tribune reported in January, nearly everyone on the list has gone through the court system and served time for their crimes. In some instances, the Star Tribune could not find court records for the individuals.

State officials estimate about 100 immigrants wanted by ICE are serving time in Minnesota. County attorneys have asked federal agents to stay away from courthouses so ongoing criminal cases can continue unimpeded.

State and county officials say that ICE's interest in detaining noncitizens being released from custody has ebbed and flowed over the years. Sheriffs have said that immigration agents did not always pick up people who had detainer requests.

Homan says federal agents will now be strategically positioned around the state to quickly retrieve immigrants being released from local jails.

Local law enforcement leaders say the tactics of Operation Metro Surge eroded trust in federal agencies.

"The outcomes, I think, were at some level predictable — when you don't have good command and control, when you don't have good supervision and oversight," Schnell said.

Tom Nehil of the Minnesota Star Tribune contributed to this story.

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