ICE Detention of Asians: Increased Numbers and Hardships Under Trump

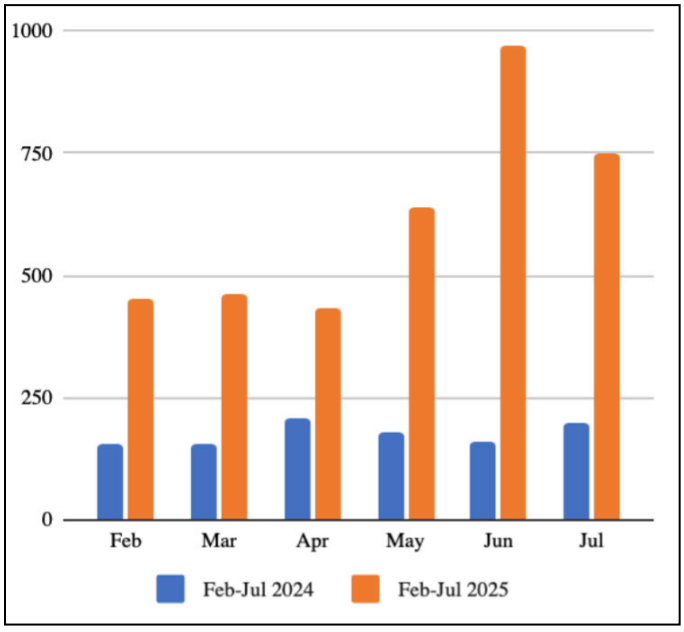
UCLA Asian American Studies Center
ASIAN AMERICAN & PACIFIC ISLANDER POLICY INITIATIVE

Introduction

The number of Asians arrested and detained by ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) surged during the first half year of President Trump's administration, particularly the latter part of this time period.[1] Many of those arrested are the type of immigrants that an overwhelming majority of Americans believe are a "good thing…for this country today" and should have a path to citizenship.[2] Administrative ICE records provide insights into the magnitude of Trump's deportation initiative and the characteristics of those affected.[3] ICE is responsible for enforcing immigration laws within the interior of the United States. This research brief reports and compares tabulations for February to July 2025 with those for the equivalent time period during the previous year under the Biden Administration.

The number of Asians arrested more than tripled since Trump took office, increasing from 1,054 during the February to July 2024 time period to 3,705 during the same months in 2025.[4] Arrests started to surge in May, likely due to the ambitious goal of a million deportations per year.[5] The arrests peaked in June, and declined in July, perhaps due to increasing opposition, court rulings against the administration and overworked ICE staff.[6] (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1: ICE Arrests of Asians



Detentions

Ninety-six percent of Asians arrested under Trump were placed in detention centers, compared to 88% in the previous year.[7] Figure 2 presents the number of arrestees by the month when they were first detained, a pattern that parallels the trend in arrests. The number of new detainees grew significantly in May, peaked in June and then declined. Crowding at many of the facilities became prevalent as the total number of all detainees (Asians and non-Asians) increased cumulatively.[8]

Figure 2: Initial Detention of ICE Arrestees

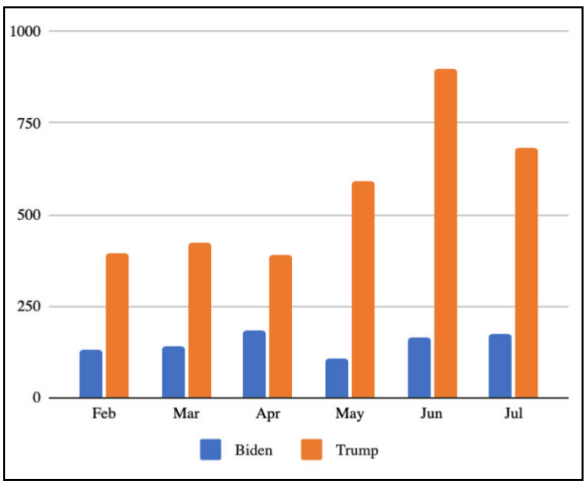
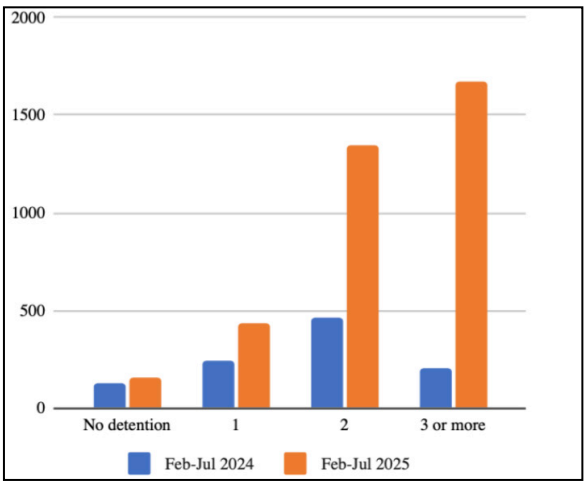
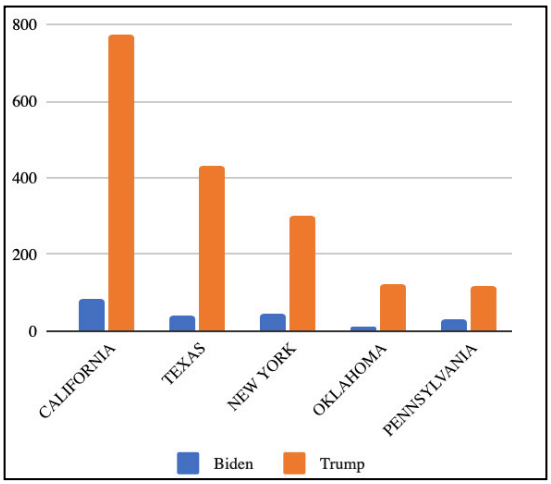


Figure 3: Number of Detention Centers Per Arrestees



One difference between those detained under Biden and Trump is the number of times they were moved from one detention center to another. (See Figure 3.) During February to July the mean average in 2024 was 1.9, and 2.8 in 2025 for the same period. Among those arrested in California, at least 400 were subsequently moved to facilities out of state. The increase placed more hardship on the detainees as they were moved from one facility to another, made it difficult for relatives and friends to locate those arrested, and created barriers to secure adequate legal representation. Moreover, the Trump administration might have relocated detainees to jurisdiction with more friendly judges, where they can pick the court where they want deportation cases to move forward. Although that is difficult to determine definitively.[9]

Figure 4: Asian Detainees by State Arrested

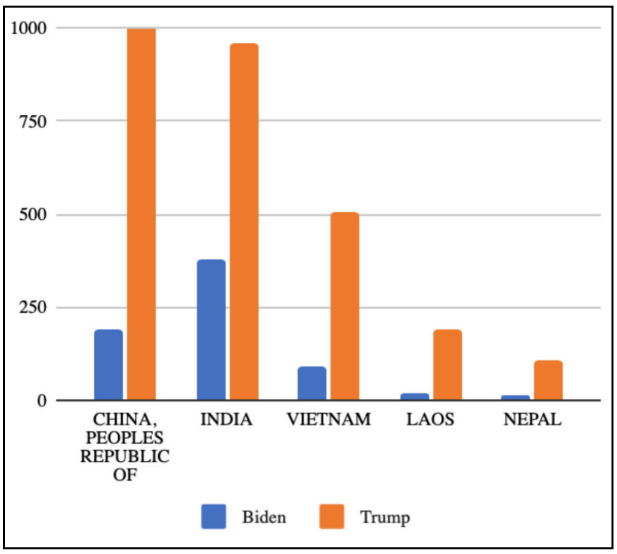


Based on records with information on the location of arrests, the top five states accounted for over half of all detainees (57%). (See Figure 4.) A quarter of (25%) detainees in 2025 were from California, followed by Texas (14%) and New York (10%). The total number in the five states was eight times the number during the Biden months, indicating that the Trump surge was disproportionately concentrated in those places. In California, for example, there were over nine times more Asians detained in 2025 than in 2024.

Detainee Characteristics

The top five countries made up over four-fifths (82%) of the Asian detainees during the Trump period. (See Figure 5.) Over a thousand from China (PRC) were detained in 2025, over five times as many as during the Biden months and accounted for 30% of the 2025 detainees. Slightly less than a thousand were from India during the Trump period, accounting for 28% of the detainees. Vietnamese made up 15%, followed by Laos and Nepal (6% and 3%). While the latter two are relatively small in absolute terms, their 2025 numbers were over nine times as many as during the Biden months.

Figure 5: Asian Detainees by Citizenship Country



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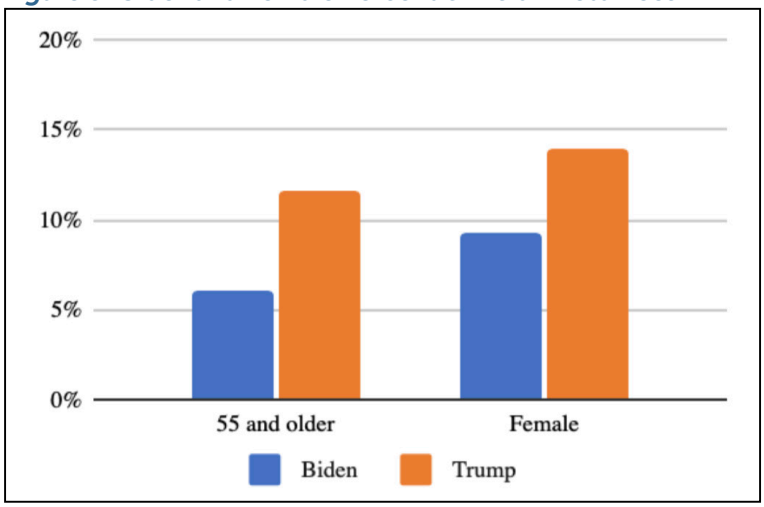
There was a shift in the relative demographic composition of Asian detainees. (See Figure 6.) The median age went from 35 to 40. The number of older detainees (55 years and older) increased from 55 to 391, pushing their share of detainees from 6% to 12%. Females were a minority but their numbers jumped from 83 during the Biden months to 474 during the Trump months, increasing by 471% compared with 255% for males. Consequently, females as a percent of Asian detainees climbed from 9% to 14%.

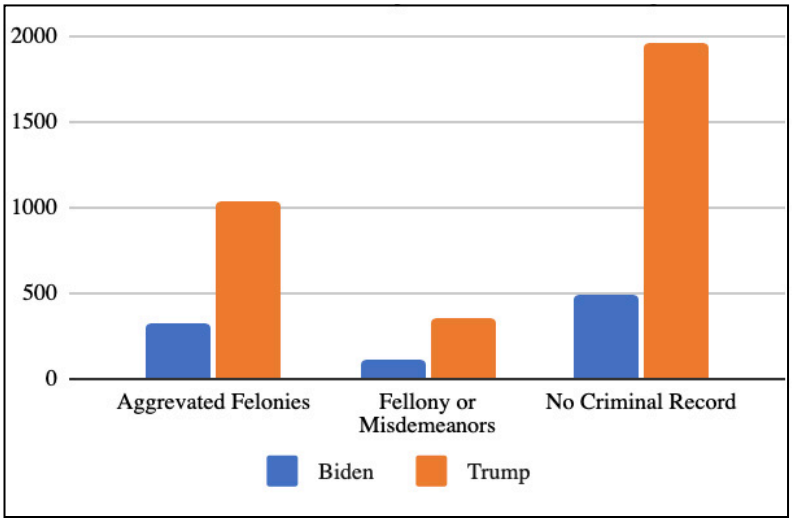
Figure 6: Older and Female Percent of Asian Detainees



Criminal and Non-Criminal Record

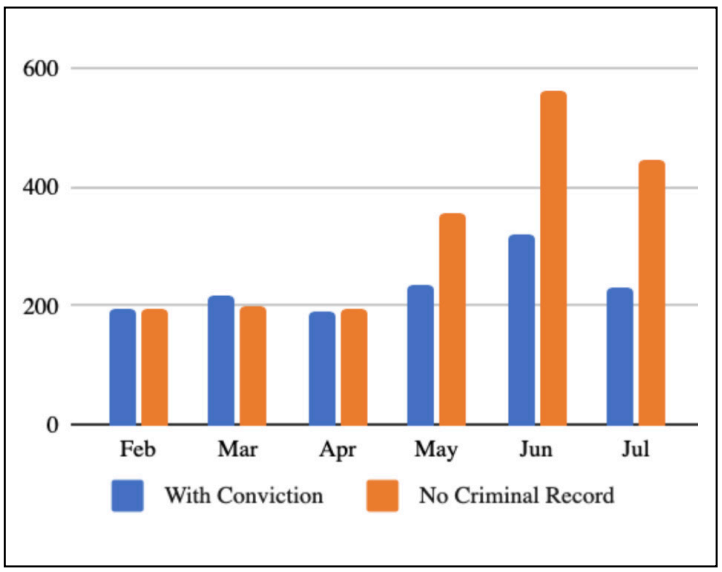
The majority of detainees do not have a criminal record. (See Figure 7.) ICE ranks detainees by threat level based on criminal records.[10] The percent in the "worst of the worst" category (those with felony convictions) was lower under the Trump administration than the Biden administration (31% versus 35%). Moreover, the number with no conviction record grew at a faster rate than the "worst of the worst" (increasing 307% versus 230%).

Figure 7: Asian Detainees by Criminal History



During the Trump period, the number of detainees with no criminal record surged in the most recent three months for which data is available. (See Figure 8.) From February to April, 2025, the detainees were roughly equally split between those with and without a criminal record. However, after pressure on ICE to dramatically increase arrests, those without a criminal record outnumbered those with. In June and July, there were approximately twice as many without a criminal record as those with.

Figure 8: February 2025 to July 2025 Asian Detainees



Conclusion

Candidate Donald Trump ran on a campaign promise to deport the "worst of the worst." While the analysis finds that ICE arrested and detained many Asians convicted of violent crimes, the results also reveal a much broader dragnet that captured even more who had no criminal record. Many of these were productive members of society searching for a path to become legal immigrants, the type that most Americans support. Unfortunately, it is likely that the arrest and detention of those in similar circumstances will not abate and may increase. Moreover, targeting Asians appears to have move to a new stage marked by the September 4th raid on the Hyundai electric-car manufacturing plant in Georgia, resulting in the detention of about 300 South Koreans.[11] While those arrested were working in the country without legal documents, the event may be a harbinger of a more aggressive and broader approach to other Asian immigrants under different circumstances. The dragnet is expanding as the Trump administration hires more ICE agents, builds additional detention centers and has a freer hand to make indiscriminate stops that include elements of racial profiling.[12]

Footnotes

1. Jonathan Ong and Paul Ong, "ICE Arrests of Asians Tripled from 2024 to 2025," UCLA Asian American Studies Center, July 2025, https://www.aasc.ucla.edu/resources/policyreports/ICE_ arrests_Ong_Ong_2025.pdf, accessed September 7, 2025.
2. Lydia Saad, "Surge in U.S. Concern About Immigration Has Abated," July 11, 2025, Gallup News, https://news.gallup.com/poll/692522/surge-concern-immigration-abated.aspx, accessed September 7, 2025.
3. ICE arrest records are provided by the Deportation Data Project at UC Berkeley Law School, https://deportationdata.org/index.html, accessed August 23, 2025.
4. These are based on unduplicated counts. A few were arrested more than once.
5. Stuart Anderson, "Stephen Miller's Order Likely Sparked Immigration Arrests And Protests," June 09, 2025, Forbes,https://www.forbes.com/sites/stuartanderson/2025/06/09/stephen-millers-order-likely-sparked-immigration-arrests-and-protests/, accessed September 7, 2025.

6. See for example: Wendy Fry and Sergio Olmos, "Judge says immigration agents must stop 'roving patrols' that have upended Southern California," July 11, 2025, Cal Matters, https://calmatters.org/justice/2025/07/la-immigration-restraining-order/; Patrick Smith, Mirna Alsharif, Gary Grumbach and Dennis Romero, "As immigration raids continue, ICE protests spread coast to coast," June 11, 2025, NBC News, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/anti-ice-protests-held-coast-coast-l-unrest-national-movement-grows-rcna211980; Ted Hesson, Tim Reid and Nicole Jeanine Johnson. "ICE agents face burnout and frustration amid Trump's aggressive enforcement," Sept. 1, 2025, USA Today, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2025/09/01/aggressive-immigration-enforcement-burnout-ice-agents/85859330007/. Accessed September 7, 2025.
7. The information on detainees is based on their first detention during each of the time periods.
8. TRAC Immigration, Syracuse University, "ICE Contractual Capacity and Number Detained: Overcapacity vs. Overcrowding," July 8, 2025, https://tracreports.org/reports/762/, accessed September 7, 2025. The number of ICE detainees increased from 14,882 on January 26, 2025 to 44,811 on August 10, 2025. TRAC Immigration, Syracuse University, "ICE Detainees,"https://tracreports.org/immigration/detentionstats/pop_agen_table.html, accessed September 7, 2025.
9. Eric Levenson and Gloria Pazmino, "Why ICE is really moving detainees over a thousand miles from where they were arrested," April 10, 2025, CNN, https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/10/us/immigration-detainees-trump-ice-students-visa,https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/10/us/immigration-detainees-trump-ice-students-visa, accessed September 7, 2025.
10. "Level 1 offenders: aliens convicted of aggravated felonies, as defined in § 101(a)(43) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, or two or more crimes each punishable by more than one year, commonly referred to as "felonies"; Level 2 offenders: aliens convicted of any felony or three or more crimes each punishable by less than one year, commonly referred to as "misdemeanors"; and Level 3 offenders: aliens convicted of crimes punishable by less than one year." /https://www.ice.gov/doclib/news/releases/2011/110302washingtondc.pdf. When no threat level is reported, then it "indicates that ICE has no record of a criminal conviction."https://deportationdata.org/docs/ice.html. Accessed September 7, 2025.
11. "The ICE raid at Hyundai was a massive own goal," September 10, 2025, The Economists, https://www.economist.com/united-states/2025/09/10/the-ice-raid-at-hyundai-was-a-massive-own-goal,accessed September 10, 2025.
12. See for example: Brittny Mejia, "ICE is hiring 10,000 agents. Some unexpected people want to join the Trump crackdown, Aug. 29, 2025, Los Angeles Times, https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-08-29/ice-hiring-expo; Lauren-Brooke Eisen, "Budget Bill Massively Increases Funding for ImmigrationDetention," July 3, 2025, Brennan Center for Justice, https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/budget-bill-massively-increases-funding-immigration-detention; and John Fritze and Hannah Rabinowitz , "Supreme Court allows Trump to continue 'roving' ICE patrols in California," September 8, 2025, CNN, https://www.cnn.com/2025/09/08/politics/supreme-court-ice-patrols-california. Accessed September 8, 2025.

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