

ICE Presence in Minneapolis Polarizes

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I. Executive Summary

Operation Metro Surge reflects a broader shift toward large-scale, highly visible federal immigration enforcement that emphasizes deterrence through presence and pressure rather than narrowly targeted removals. This brief situates the operation within a historical pattern of U.S. immigration strategies. In Minnesota, the surge has produced widespread social, legal, and political consequences, including public protest, economic disruption, and challenges from state officials and the courts. The resulting backlash has intensified national debate over the scope and oversight of federal immigration enforcement and is likely to shape both future policy decisions and the political landscape leading into the 2026 midterm elections.

II. Overview

A. Context

The United States has a long history of using mass deportation efforts to shape immigration policy, often relying on fear and public pressure rather than just formal removals. In the 1930s, during the Great Depression, Mexican repatriation campaigns pushed hundreds of thousands of people out of the country, many of whom were U.S. citizens. In 1954, Operation Wetback under President Eisenhower used large federal raids and publicized arrests to force people to leave. These efforts were not just about enforcement, but about making people feel unsafe enough to self-deport. Trump's current immigration agenda, including Operation Metro Surge in Minnesota, reflects this same strategy. His 2025 campaign centered on mass deportation promises, and his administration is now using large-scale enforcement to fulfill them.

B. Background

Beginning in December 2025, Operation Metro Surge, an ongoing operation involving the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, also known as ICE, and Customs and Border Protection, arrived in the Twin Cities, Minneapolis and Saint Paul, with the purpose of apprehending undocumented immigrants and carrying out deportations. The operation was later expanded across all of Minnesota, and the Department of Homeland Security described it as the largest immigration enforcement operation ever carried out, involving the detention of U.S. citizens and the arrest of more than 3,000 people. The surge has been characterized by an escalation in ICE tactics, including harassment and threats toward observers. During the operation, federal agents fatally shot two civilians, both U.S. citizens, Renée Good and Alex Pretti, who were observing enforcement activities, and one individual detained during the operation died while in ICE custody. The operation has disrupted the economy and daily life in Minnesota, with many schools transitioning to remote learning and everyday business activity being interrupted due to immigration arrests. On January 28, 2026, a U.S. District Court judge in Minnesota found that ICE had violated numerous court orders since the beginning of the year. Thousands of people since then have protested in Minneapolis, and both the governor and the attorney general of Minnesota have challenged the operation, arguing that its primary purpose is retribution rather than immigration enforcement.

III. Policy Problem

A. Current Stances

Some proponents of increased ICE presence cite recent welfare fraud cases as evidence of the need for heightened enforcement, despite the absence of direct evidence linking immigration status to these schemes. Since 2021, welfare fraud has trailed Minnesota, evidenced through a number of

high profile, multi-million dollar scams by various community organizations including programs to house the disabled and elderly, to support families with autistic children, and — most recently — daycare centers. The latter has particularly garnered federal attention due to the debated connection between Minnesota's Somali immigrant communities and the fraudulent daycare centers. Consequently, this scheme has one driving factor for why some consider ICE agents to be necessary in Minnesota.

However, not all agree with this stance, particularly since the killings of Renée Good and Alex Pretti. On Jan. 7th, Good was present at a scene with ICE. While in her vehicle, she interacted with various ICE agents, began to drive her car and was subsequently fatally shot. Then, on Jan. 13th, Pretti was also shot during a protest against ICE presence. While the rationale of both shootings have been a subject of debate, the death in and of itself has led some to believe that ICE agents lack proper training and should be removed from Minneapolis.

Altogether, these incidents create a complicated picture of immigration enforcement in the Twin Cities. Stances from those at the federal government versus in Minneapolis vary wildly, and the consequences of the tensions between the different perspectives seem to be lasting for the time being.

B. Tried Policy

Led by the Trump Administration since January 2025, ICE crackdowns have been prevalently active throughout America. Minnesota is no exception. As arguably the largest immigration crackdown ever held, Operation Metro Surge follows the ordered national objective of the apprehension and deportation of undocumented immigrants through stormings and militarized raids. However, the recent critical incidents cause federal agents to take an alternative approach.

C. Policy Impact

Since the killings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti, White House Border Czar Tom Homan has announced the withdrawal of 700 immigration agents under ICE and CBP from Minneapolis to ease and calm these tensions, with the Trump Administration replacing Border Patrol commander Gregory Bovino after the tragedies. However, the agency stated that the operation will still continue in Minnesota. In reaction to the shootings, Congress displays a variety of reactions based on political standings. After proposing a different strategy for less ICE and CBP agents and a new lead for border enforcement, they aim to deescalate the risen crises and restore order. Additionally, Congressional Republicans have requested for a detailed investigation involving the shootings while demonstrating their support and defense for ICE agents. Senator Dave McCormick stated on X, "As I have often said, I support the Border Patrol, ICE, and the critical work they do to enforce our laws. Irresponsible rhetoric and a lack of cooperation from Minnesota's politicians are fueling a dangerous situation. I also agree with the NRA and others—we need a full investigation into the tragedy in Minneapolis. We need all the facts." Other following officials have expressed calls for an investigation, such as Lisa Murkowski and Senator Bill Cassidy. Conversely, Congressional Democrats are struck with outrage and horror. Ilhan Omar expresses that this recent shooting "appears to be an execution by immigration enforcement", while other Democrats deem the current federal administration responsible. As heated debates and opinions exchange and fluctuate, these events have intensified generational debates over the legitimacy, scope, and ethical limits of federal immigration enforcement.

IV. Policy Impact

In Minnesota, thousands of residents have taken to the streets in repeated demonstrations against the surge of federal immigration enforcement agents operating under Operation Metro Surge, a large-scale deployment initiated by the Trump administration in late 2025. The protests have been driven in part by outrage over the deaths of two U.S. citizens—Renée Nicole Good and ICU nurse Alex Pretti—who were fatally shot by federal officers during enforcement activity. These incidents have galvanized sustained opposition and mass demonstrations, even in sub-zero temperatures, with chants demanding ICE's removal and accountability for federal actions. The protests reflect broad public skepticism of federal tactics and a perception that civil liberties have been violated in the name of immigration enforcement.

V. Conclusions

Large-scale protests against immigration enforcement can significantly shape both future policy actions and the political landscape heading into the 2026 midterm elections by increasing public scrutiny, legal pressure, and political risk for federal agencies and elected officials. Sustained demonstrations often force enforcement agencies like ICE to adjust tactics such as scaling back operations, increasing transparency, or temporarily withdrawing personnel to avoid further escalation, lawsuits, or reputational damage. At the same time, protest-driven pushback elevates immigration enforcement into a central political issue, mobilizing immigrant communities, civil-rights advocates, and younger voters who may turn out in higher numbers to support candidates favoring oversight or reform. Conversely, hard-line enforcement stances may energize some voters but risk alienating moderates in competitive districts, making immigration policy a defining fault line of the 2026 midterms. As a result, continued protests could both constrain aggressive enforcement actions in the short term and influence electoral outcomes by shaping turnout, campaign messaging, and legislative priorities nationwide.