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Democrats: Abolish ICE Abuses— Not ICE

The killing of Renee Nicole Good, a US citizen shot during an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) operation in Minneapolis, is horrific. Not only because a life was lost, but because it was foreseeable. It was the product of an enforcement approach that rewards escalation over restraint—and unless that approach changes, tragedies like this will happen again.

Since President Trump took office, his all-out push to increase immigration enforcement has been defined by excess, escalation, and lawlessness. Administration leaders have celebrated aggressive tactics and rushed to frame victims as enemies and agents as heroes, even when serious questions surround the use of deadly force against a US citizen. This is a public-safety and leadership failure—one that signals lethal outcomes will be tolerated and invites further violence.

Moments like this can and should provoke anger and demands for dramatic action. In the wake of Good's death and a growing number of disturbing immigration enforcement incidents, calls to abolish ICE have once again surged on the left. The impulse is emotional. The slogan is simple. But politically, it is lethal.

Every call to abolish ICE risks squandering one of the clearest opportunities in years to secure meaningful reform of immigration enforcement—while handing Republicans exactly the fight they want.

This piece argues for a harder and smarter approach: abolish abuses, not ICE. End masked squads roaming American streets. End unaccountable uses of force. End an enforcement system so opaque that families lose loved ones into a bureaucratic black box. Build an immigration enforcement system that is professional, transparent, restrained, and humane. The goal is not to eliminate enforcement. It is to ensure enforcement is lawful, targeted, and worthy of public trust.

Voters Know Bad Enforcement Is the Problem—Not Enforcement Itself

The Trump administration has empowered ICE and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to pursue interior immigration enforcement in ways that are not just harsh, but increasingly lawless. Masked officers in unmarked vehicles are smashing car windows, pulling people—sometimes US citizens—from their cars, and detaining individuals without identifying themselves, explaining the reason for arrest, or providing any clarity about where those detained are being taken or how they can secure release.

Even more disturbing is that these actions are not in response to a specific or imminent public safety threat. Instead, they are justified as the result of a divined political mandate—

voters' frustration with perceived uncontrolled migration under the Biden administration. But the Trump administration has treated that frustration as a blank check—pulling every government lever available to maximize interior enforcement, regardless of the consequences for civil liberties or individual security.

While the current moment is shocking in the degree to which enforcement has become untethered from restraint, it is not entirely new. Long before Donald Trump returned to office, bipartisan critiques—including judges, lawmakers, and legal experts—raised alarms about ICE detention conditions, weak accountability for abuse, and an internal culture that too often prioritized arrest numbers over professionalism. These concerns predate Trump. What he has changed is the scale and visibility. He has also exposed the extent of the dangers of the broad immigration enforcement discretion granted to the executive.

That history matters. But that does not mean immigration enforcement itself is the problem.

Immigration laws are meaningless if they are not enforced. And they *can* be enforced in ways that protect public safety, respect legal norms, and uphold civil liberties. Voters understand this. They responded strongly to what they saw as a lack of enforcement under President Biden. But they are also recoiling from Trump's excessive force. Public polling shows declining support for the president's approach to interior enforcement.

Our own recent focus group reflects this same tension. Voters expressed relief that enforcement is finally happening after Biden's failure, but also deep discomfort with how it is being done. One two-time Trump voter in our focus group captured it best, *"The harassment and bullying factor is ridiculous. Police officers have to ID themselves with name and badge number if asked. ICE agents should not be masked at all and have to carry themselves with a code of honor and integrity also."*

The message from this voter is emblematic of tens of millions of other voters. Don't abolish ICE, but fix it. Enforce our immigration laws, but end the abuse, overreach, and fear.

Abolish ICE: Emotionally Satisfying, Politically Lethal

Democrats have seen this movie before with calls to "defund the police" after lethal, law enforcement abuses that stoked racial tensions. We know how this movie ends.

Calls to abolish ICE follow the same script. It would be a tragedy built upon a tragedy if Democratic overreach allowed the inexcusable killing of Renee Good at the hands of ICE to be used to the advantage of Donald Trump and a Republican Party that is sympathetic to its

excesses. Republicans understand this. They have deployed the “Abolish ICE” phrase to their advantage before and will use it as a political lifeline again.

In the 2024 election cycle, Republicans spent a \$741 million on immigration-related smear ads that devastated Democrats. Attacking these Democratic calls was central to the success of much of that advertising, both against Democratic candidates who openly called for ICE’s abolishment, and even against those who never did.

In 2020, widespread outrage over police violence created a genuine opening for accountability reforms, including changes to qualified immunity. But that opening narrowed—and ultimately closed—when “defund the police” became the dominant frame. The slogan was easy to weaponize. It hardened opposition. And it helped preserve the very systems reformers sought to change.

The lesson is clear: when the debate sinks into polarizing slogans that read as anti-law or anti-safety, space for practical reform disappears.

Public Opinion Shows a Window—Not a Wave—for Change

Public opinion underscores both the opportunity and the risk.

Polling shows significant American concern with how ICE is viewed today, but not support for abolishing the agency outright:

- Last week, Civiqs found 50% of voters oppose abolishing ICE, 42% support—though support has grown since 2018, it still remains 8 points underwater today.
- In June of 2025, before the height of this currently emotional moment, YouGov found only 27% of Americans supported abolishing ICE, including only 35% of Independents.

Even among Democratic primary voters, Third Way’s own polling shows a clear preference for a balanced approach over abolition, 65% to 35%.

But there is no doubt that Americans are dissatisfied by what they’re seeing. Recently, a YouGov poll found 52% of Americans disapprove of the way ICE is handling its job. And in August 2025—before the most recent events—Pew Research found ICE to be the second to least popular government agency.

These numbers show openness to change, but not an endorsement of abolition.

The current moment has opened a rare window to challenge the status quo in immigration enforcement. Democrats can leverage this moment to push for real, structural improvements that improve public safety for all—but only if they avoid playing into abolitionist frames that opponents will weaponize.

Conclusion: Reform, Not Abolition

The killing of Renee Good demands accountability. It demands reform.

Democrats should channel legitimate outrage into meaningful reforms that confront ICE abuses directly. They should be explicit about where responsibility lies—President Donald Trump, Secretary Kristi Noem, and senior officials who have encouraged escalation without accountability.

Democrats can and should be relentless in condemning unconstitutional tactics, demanding transparency and accountability, and insisting on professional standards. Enforcement must be lawful, professional, and targeted—not theatrical, indiscriminate, or cruel. Protect civil liberties. Put public safety and transparency first. That is not a retreat from enforcement. It is a defense of American values and institutions. At the same time, they need to reassure Americans that there will be vigorous enforcement of all laws at the border and in the interior.

ICE, in theory, exists to protect the integrity of the immigration system. When it operates without restraint or respect for rights, it undermines that mission. The task ahead is not to eliminate enforcement, but to reclaim it from those who are abusing it for political gain.

Americans want balance: accountability without cruelty, enforcement without lawlessness, and a system that works as intended. Democrats should not cede that ground. They should claim it—and make clear that defending the rule of law means defending people, too.
