

- NINA MOINI:** In early January, at the peak of what the Trump administration called Operation Metro Surge, two Target employees in Richfield were pinned to the ground and aggressively detained by federal agents. They are US citizens and were eventually released but suffered injuries during the arrest. They're among the more than 500 US citizens who were detained and held during this administration, as it carried out its immigration enforcement agenda.
- 15% of those people are Minnesotans. That's according to a new investigation by ProPublica. And for more on what was found, we're joined now by one of the reporters on this story, Liliana Michelina. Thank you very much for being with us.
- LILIANA MICHELENA:** Thank you, Nina, for having me.
- NINA MOINI:** We appreciate you sharing your reporting with us, because as I'm sure you can imagine, Minnesotans and people beyond have really been wondering about, where are the numbers, and what does everything really look like. And is there consistency between what is being told to people by the federal government and what people are seeing on the ground? What did this investigation uncover in terms of how many people and who-- I gave some numbers off the top, but just remind us.
- LILIANA MICHELENA:** Yeah, for sure. What we have is that the government doesn't track how often immigration agents detain US citizens. So we did. We found 506 Americans held against their will between January 2025 and September 2026. And we're pretty sure that's an undercount.
- NINA MOINI:** Yeah, an undercount. Yeah. And what makes you think that there was even more to find? Tell us a little bit about how you began to track this, and where there's more room to keep looking?
- LILIANA MICHELENA:** Yeah, we only counted people we could individually identify with at least two sources. So, say, in one Idaho raid, witnesses estimated that around 200 citizens were detained. We could only name 30.
- Similar things happened in different states. In Minnesota, there's a count from ICE itself that says at least 130 citizens were detained for things like assaulting officers or what they claim it was assaulting officers, but we could only identify 70 of those cases. So we're pretty sure there's more out there. We just couldn't quite be sure about it enough to put it in our database.
- NINA MOINI:** And you talked to some folks who were able to give some perspective on even this 500 number and how that is a lot of US citizens.
- LILIANA MICHELENA:** Yeah, yeah, for sure. Honestly, it's just unclear what-- we have our own methodology to identify them, but it's unclear what is driving DHS to do this. We have run into lawsuits and claims.
- Some plaintiffs are in class actions trying to stop the policies themselves, like warrantless home entries. We have people arrested. We have one person who was a citizen detained and deported to Mexico. And he was only able to come back into the country after he sued.
- NINA MOINI:** What do these cases show about how the administration may be violating the rights of US citizens?

LILIANA Yeah, well, we consulted with DHS. We sent them every case. And they say they are not arresting citizens by mistake and that operations are highly targeted. They defended the agents.

But in case after case, the person had said that they were a citizen, and agents held them anyway. So like you see in the investigation we actually opened with the video that you mentioned from Richfield and what we hear is, I'm a citizen, and that doesn't seem to matter.

NINA MOINI: Are there legal grounds, though, on which federal agents can detain citizens? Tell us about the reasonable suspicion under the Fourth Amendment?

LILIANA Yeah, give me a second. Yeah, reasonable suspicion doesn't really cover-- wait, I'm sorry. I got a little lost there.

NINA MOINI: That's OK. So we're talking about some of the--

LILIANA There's a lot of information here. Yeah, no. And I encourage everyone to check out the report. There are so many interactive, different elements to it, and videos, and photos. But the idea of looking into this is to assess whether US citizens' constitutional rights have been violated and then to what degree and how often. And part of that is just the way that the administration or the courts are interpreting different language under, say, the Fourth Amendment. So what did the administration say in response to these findings?

LILIANA The administration said they are not arresting citizens by mistake, so they are saying they are mostly arresting citizens who assaulted officers. But later, many of those charges are not holding up in court. And many of those get dropped. We have found cases where there were citizens that actually assaulted officers, as in they threw cinderblocks at them. And of course, that gets sorted out later in a judicial process.

But other times, you run into cases where what is described as an assault is more of a hat that brushed someone's face. So it seems like these things-- the people are getting arrested first, and then all of these things are getting sorted out.

So in terms of the constitutional protections that citizens have, I mean, it doesn't account for being held on the floor, handcuffed behind their backs for many minutes or even hours, or being detained but later released without charges. So there is a gray area there that seems to have been exploited.

NINA MOINI: And some people, when that happens, when the charges against them are dropped-- we've talked to some people on our program, too, who actually felt, again, that they were handled roughly or their rights were violated within that interaction with federal agents, and some of them have taken legal action. Can you tell us about any, maybe, different trends that you saw in terms of how people are taking legal action against the administration, if they were US citizens who were detained?

LILIANA Yeah, for sure. So there are cases where-- there's a whole issue with filming immigration agents when they are in action. So many times courts have interpreted the First Amendment to protect recording in public. We have found at least 63 citizens detained while recording. There's a whole issue there of what is protected and what is not. And that is what some of the citizens who have been arrested or roughed up have brought up, as in, this was not an infringement of anything. And on the other hand, it was unconstitutional to grab me for just filming.

NINA MOINI: Liliana, what do you think was your biggest takeaway from this reporting that you would want people to know?

LILIANA MICHELENA: I would say my biggest takeaway is well, first, this is like an extreme undercount. I do think that there's so many cases out there, and we did compile this list by reviewing and verifying reports of citizens detained in court records, agency reports, local news, internal use of force records, lawsuits, and many, many, many interviews.

But it just still seems that we have only tapped the surface of the problem. There are so many US citizens that are being detained, really, every month, if you see our count. And it's unclear what they can do, what they cannot do. We have found a pattern of profiling in the sense that some people are being arrested.

And the agents claim, in what we see later in video taken by the person who was arrested, or someone surrounding them, or the body cams themselves, yeah, it doesn't matter, because you have an accent. So that's why we're arresting you, or--

NINA MOINI: Some of the allegations of racial profiling, yeah.

LILIANA MICHELENA: You look foreigner. Yes. So that is definitely, I would say, the main pattern that we're finding here.

NINA MOINI: Well, thank you so much for continuing to follow all of this and sharing your reporting with us. And we hope that you'll share more once you learn. Thank you so much, Liliana.

LILIANA MICHELENA: Thank you.

NINA MOINI: Liliana Michelena is a journalist who worked on the ProPublica investigation into US citizens being detained and held.