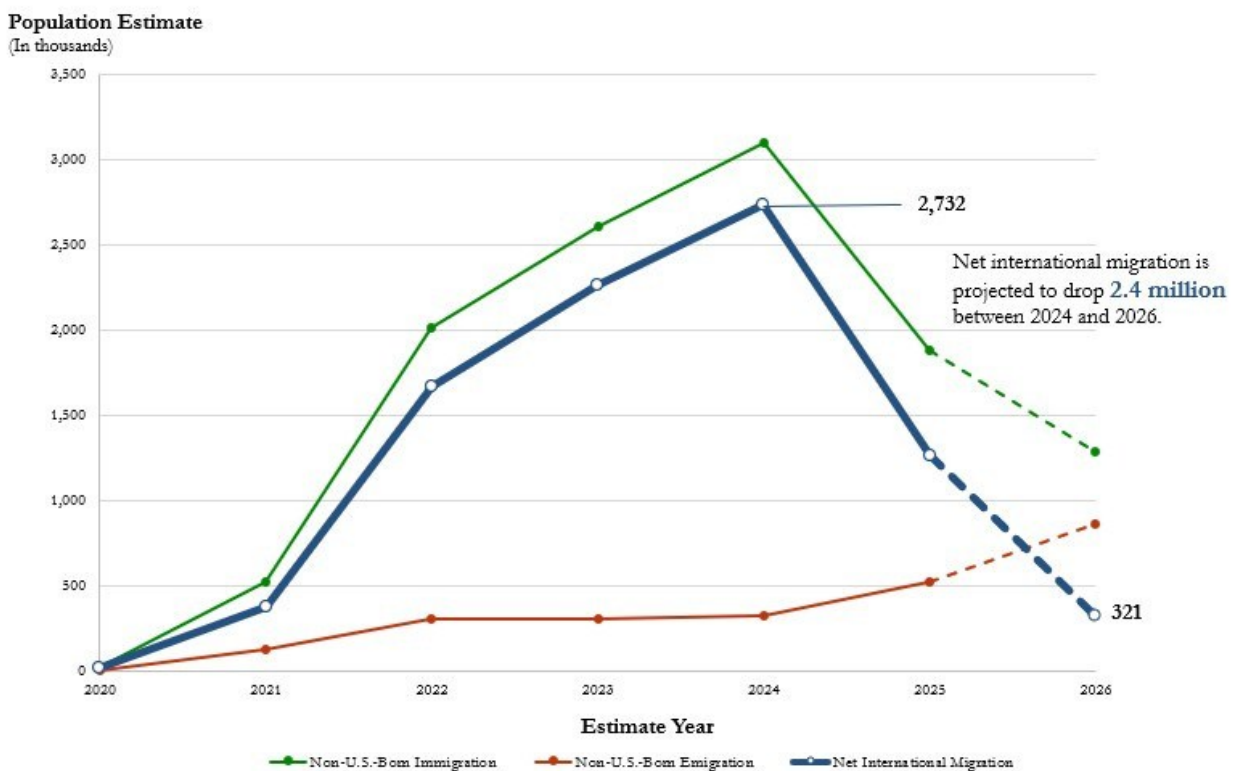


The End of Immigration

di Paul Krugman

Figure 1. Estimates of Net International Migration Components: 2020 to 2026



Note: The dashed line from 2025 to 2026 indicates a projection.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Vintage 2025 Population Estimates.

Donald Trump’s impulsive decision to deploy large numbers of ICE agents to hang out at America’s airport Cinnabons — there’s no indication that they are actually helping demoralized, unpaid TSA employees deal with long lines at airport security — may have unintended political consequences: it will remind Americans about how much they dislike ICE and the great harm that it’s doing. Nonetheless, recent data show that

the administration’s crackdown on immigration is working. Immigration to the United States is plunging and may be about to go into reverse.

And that plunge is making America poorer and weaker – now and in the long-run.

Trump believes, or pretends to believe — it’s impossible to tell the difference — that ICE is popular, posting on Truth Social that

The Public is loving ICE. They are Great American Patriots, they just happen to have much larger, and harder, muscles than most — which is what they’re supposed to have.

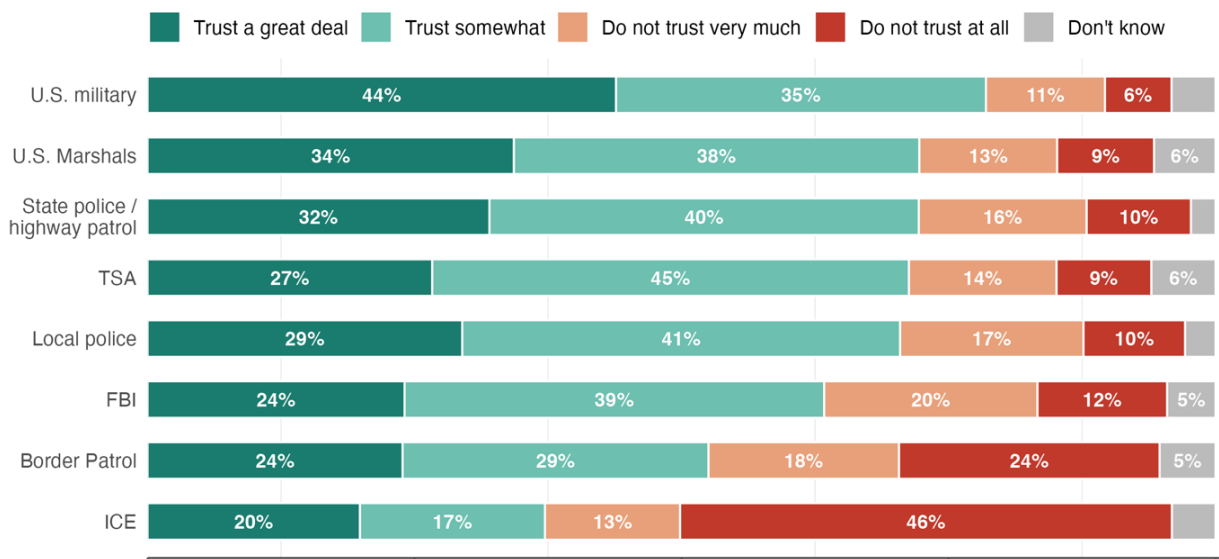
Ahem. Anyway, two new polls show how delusional it is to assert that the public is “loving ICE.”

First, [G. Elliott Morris](#) reports that ICE commands so little public trust and respect that “it’s in a category of its own”:

ICE is the least-trusted federal law enforcement agency

Percent of U.S. adults.

Q: How much do you trust each agency to act professionally and follow the law?



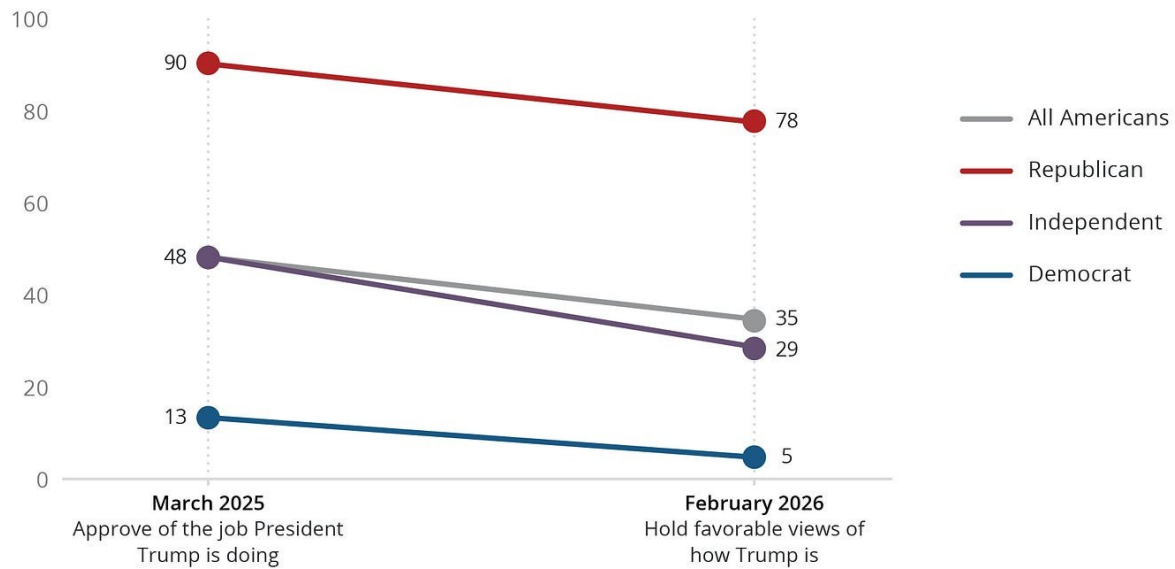
Source: Strength In Numbers/Verasight poll of 750 U.S. adults, March 24-25, 2026.

And a new [PRRI poll](#) shows that public support for Trump’s anti-immigration agenda, which was never particularly strong, has cratered as the public sees the cruelty and

destructiveness of that agenda in action. It finds sharply declining approval of Trump's handling of immigration, even among Republicans:

FIGURE 1. Views on Trump's Handling of Immigration, 2025 and 2026, by Party

Percent who _____ handling immigration:

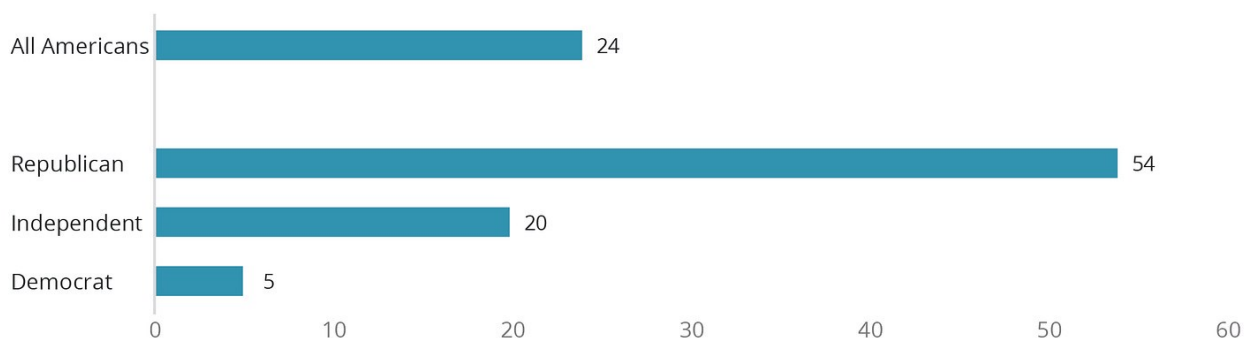


Source: PRRI Surveys, 2025 and 2026.

And the PRRI poll shows very little public support for ICE's tactics, such as its habit of hanging out near schools looking for parents (and sometimes children) to arrest:

FIGURE 8. Allowing ICE to Conduct Surveillance at Sensitive Locations, by Party

Percent who favor allowing ICE officers to regularly conduct surveillance and arrests at sensitive locations like schools, hospitals, places of worship, and social service locations:



Source: PRRI Immigration Survey, Feb. 10-18, 2026.

A casual observer might look at this polling and imagine that the crusade against immigrants was faltering, especially when one takes into account the effectiveness of the popular resistance in Minnesota and a string of legal defeats for ICE. Most recently Trump officials [admitted](#) that their claims that ICE had the right to make arrests at immigration courts were based on “a material mistaken statement of fact,” which is known in plain English as a “lie.”

But the reality is that as unpopular as the administration’s actions have been, they have “succeeded” in essentially stopping immigration into the United States. The chart at the top of this post shows the latest [estimates from the Census Bureau](#) of movements of people into and out of the U.S., where “2026” actually refers to an “estimates year” that runs from July 2025 to June 2026. The numbers for calendar year 2026 will almost surely be lower. The Census declares that

Currently, the estimates of NIM [net international migration] are trending toward negative net migration [that is, more people are leaving than entering the country]. If those trends continue, it would be the first time the United States has seen net negative migration in more than 50 years.

Why is this happening? After all, to look at a seemingly analogous case, Trump’s tariff policy, which is similarly chaotic and has been reeling from legal challenges, has failed to cause any significant decline in net imports, aka the [trade deficit](#). Why, then, has the

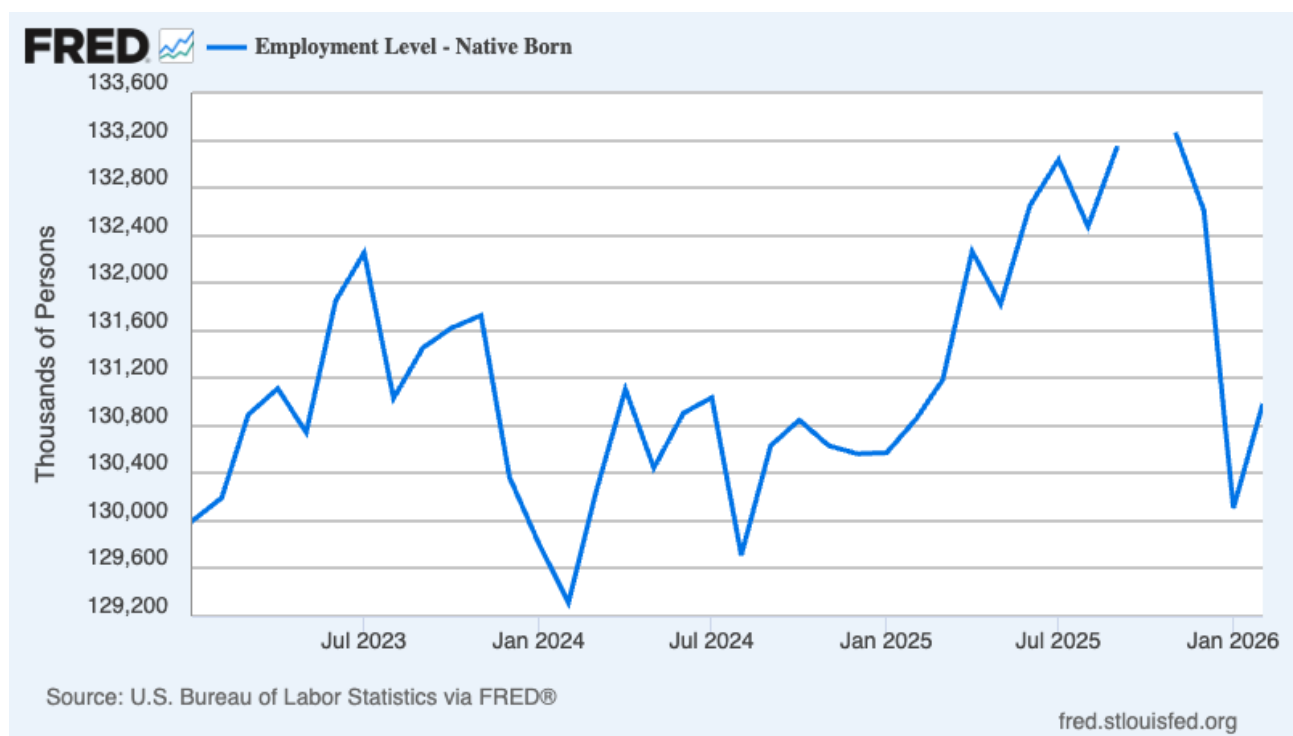
Stephen Miller/Trump attack on immigrants been so successful at ending immigration inflows?

Because imports aren't people, but immigrants are. Now, for those immigrants that are already here, it's unlikely that we will actually deport a large percentage. And while thousands have been sent to America's new gulags — sorry, but that's what ICE detention centers are — their number *probably* won't rise into the millions. But millions of potential immigrants are being deterred by the fear of detention, deportation, and the breakup of families.

And this will hurt all of us. There has already been a thorough debunking of the false claims that immigration hurts the native born. But I will add two more points.

First, let me address the claim that Trump's anti-immigrant vendetta led to a surge in native-born employment. As everyone who actually understood the numbers realized from the beginning, this surge wasn't real — there was a quirk in the way the numbers were estimated that created a phantom bulge in native-born employment that would vanish once new Census estimates were in. [Justin Fox](#) has a good explanation.

And sure enough, official numbers show a plunge in native-born employment over the past few months. Both the surge and the plunge were statistical artifacts, not reality:



This didn't happen

So, no – waging war against immigrants is not resulting in higher employment of the native-born. In fact, it's contributing to a stalling of the economy in construction and in the service industries. And even the Trump administration has [admitted](#) that the immigration crackdown is hurting America's farmers and the food supply.

Second, let me say a word about the fiscal impacts of immigration. Trump officials have said remarkable things about that— remarkable in their falsity and their unadulterated xenophobia. Stephen Miller recently [asserted](#) that

The extraction of wealth from American taxpayers to people who don't belong here is the primary cause of the national debt.

But, aside from the raw nastiness of this statement, it's helpful in prompting us to think about the fiscal impact of immigration. It's useful to recognize that the federal government is, in a widely used expression, basically an insurance company with an army. Specifically, the federal government largely collects taxes from working-age adults to pay either for defense or for social programs that spend most of their money on the elderly — that is, Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

Immigration expands the base of taxpayers, which means more people to share the burden of paying taxes to pay for defense. This includes undocumented immigrants, because their employers collect payroll taxes out of their wages, with the added fiscal payoff that they will never collect benefits. And because immigrants are relatively young and healthy, they increase the amount going into government coffers while having a delayed impact on outlays. The Social Security Administration does [sensitivity analysis](#) of factors affecting its projections, and consistently finds that higher immigration improves the system's financial health, while lower immigration worsens it.

I could go on and on, but the point should be clear. Trump, Miller and company are succeeding in their anti-immigrant crusade, despite many failures of implementation, because they are managing to scare away millions of people who wanted to live and work in the United States, contributing to our society. And this “success” will leave us poorer and weaker.