

Mass Deportation and the Asian American Community



Background

The Trump Administration has threatened to conduct mass immigration raids against undocumented immigrants and their families. While these raids are often framed as primarily or solely affecting Latine populations, Asian and Pacific Islander immigrants make up about 17 percent of the undocumented population. Half of this population lives in four states: California (26 percent), Texas (10 percent), New York (8 percent), and New Jersey (6 percent).¹ One out of approximately every eight Asian immigrants are undocumented, with 1.7 million undocumented immigrants coming from Asia, up from 1.4 million in 2010.²

Asians are the Fastest-Growing Undocumented Population in the United States

Since 1990, Asians have outpaced Mexicans and Central Americans as the fastest-growing segment of undocumented immigrants.³ In the wake of the 2009 recession, the U.S. has witnessed a net decline in the undocumented population from Mexico resulting from weakened labor demand.⁴

Asian-Origin Countries with the Largest Share of Undocumented Population⁵

India, China, the Philippines, and South Korea account for 75% of all undocumented immigrants from Asia.⁶

Country	Undocumented Population	% of Asian Undocumented Population	% of Total Undocumented Population
India	693,394	38.8%	6.3%
China	355,943	19.9%	3.3%
Philippines	154,776	8.7%	1.4%
South Korea	129,758	7.3%	1.2%
Vietnam	95,130	5.3%	0.9%
Rest of Asia	359,853	20.1%	3.3%

Ranked by Undocumented Population (2022)

Mass Deportation Harms the United States

Mass Deportation Harms the U.S. Economy and Creates Labor Shortages

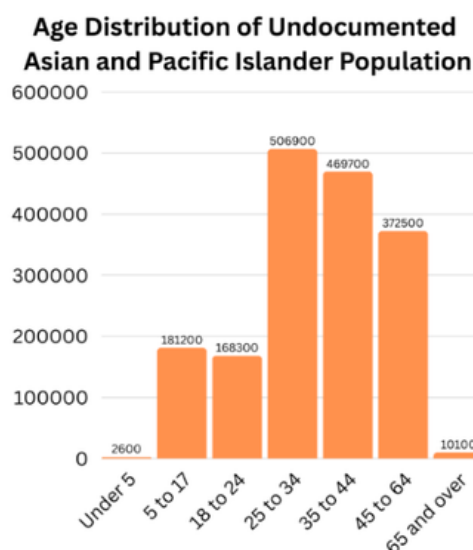
Undocumented immigrants are critical for our community and to the U.S. economy. 74 percent of undocumented workers are classified as “essential”—exceeding both the general immigrant population (69 percent) as well as native-born citizens (65 percent).⁷ Undocumented immigrants—including those from Asia and the Pacific Islands—work in nearly every sector of the U.S. economy. The importance of undocumented immigrants has only increased post-pandemic: approximately 8.3 million undocumented immigrants contributed to the U.S. workforce in 2022—up from 7.4 million just three years earlier.⁸

Mass deportations would also undermine the solvency of our social safety net.⁹ In 2022, for example, undocumented immigrants contributed \$22.6 billion to Social Security and \$5.7 billion to Medicare.¹⁰

The Asian and Pacific Islander Community

Asian and Pacific Islander undocumented immigrants are a very diverse population, with education level and occupation varying by country of origin. 74 percent of undocumented Asian and Pacific Islanders either have some college education, a college degree, or graduate-level education, and 53 percent are employed in management, business, science, and arts.¹¹ However, mass deportation of Asian and Pacific Islanders would affect many other industries, from service and sales to construction, production, transportation, and material moving.¹²

Moreover, the vast majority (90 percent) of the undocumented Asian and Pacific Islander population are of working age (between 16 and 64). 70 percent are of prime working age (25 to 54 years old), while nearly 30 percent are in the 25- to 34-year-old bracket—capable of contributing to the U.S. workforce for decades to come.¹³



Mass Deportation Harms Children and Families

Undocumented immigrants live in 6.3 million households that are home to more than 22 million people.¹⁴ Mass deportation would create tremendous emotional stress and economic strain for these households, including Asian households.¹⁵

5.5 million U.S.-born children reside with at least one undocumented parent, and 1.8 million have two undocumented parents.¹⁶ According to our estimates, one in three noncitizen Asian Americans is undocumented, with approximately 800,000 Asian American children living with at least one undocumented parent.¹⁷

Children are particularly hard-hit when a parent is detained or deported.¹⁸ Family separation can cause emotional distress¹⁹ and depression,²⁰ which can manifest behavioral problems²¹ and lead to poor educational outcomes.²² These childhood traumas can have debilitating long-term effects.²³ Moreover, the community effects of immigration enforcement are wide-ranging and devastating. Deportations eat away at collective trust.²⁴ Schools see declines in academic achievement and upticks in absenteeism.²⁵ Attendance drops at churches, parks, and libraries.²⁶ Children grow up in fear of law enforcement.²⁷ Public safety suffers.²⁸

Case Study: Lowell, Massachusetts

Heightened immigration enforcement has disproportionately targeted the Southeast Asian community, many of whom fled genocide and war as children to be resettled in poor, under-resourced urban areas as refugees.²⁹ Southeast Asian American immigrants are at least three to four times more likely to face deportation for old criminal convictions compared to other immigrant groups.³⁰ Under the first Trump Administration, the Cambodian American refugee community experienced a 279% increase in deportations from 2017 to 2018.³¹ Some Southeast Asian American refugees targeted by ICE had become pillars of the community, years (and sometimes decades) after serving out their convictions.³²

In the early 1980s, Southeast Asian refugees began to settle in Lowell, Massachusetts, just outside of Boston.³³ Based on 2020 Census data, 15 percent of the city's 115,500 residents are Cambodian. Even in 2008, there was a significant Cambodian community, which was devastated by ICE raids:³⁴

They came and took people away. In one night. So that really traumatized the Cambodian community. Now, they don't trust the local police. [...] What is needed is for people who know what's going on, to call the police and say: "Look, you know, I'm going to drop a dime. I am going to tell you what's happening." [...] They [the police] basically destroyed all their credibility in that night.³⁵

The ICE raids rippled well beyond those targeted. Violent crimes went unreported to the police, whom community members feared were collaborating with ICE.³⁶ One person was afraid to use an ambulance after being struck by a bus.³⁷ Fear of ICE enforcement has a "chilling effect" on immigrant communities, impacting local organizations and businesses and even prompting migrants to relocate to avoid becoming targeted in the future.³⁸

Mass deportation will harm the API community. Increasing funding for mass deportations would leave a terrible legacy of broken families, fractured communities, and a weaker country. While President Trump has made clear that he believes that that immigrants should not be in the U.S. at all, **we urge you to support immigrants and immigrant communities by opposing funding for mass deportation efforts.**



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