

Opinion: I witnessed ICE's militarized raid in Denver. It was cruelty unchecked.

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Federal law enforcement officers conduct an immigration enforcement operation at the Cedar Run Apartments on S. Oneida St. in Denver on Wednesday, Feb. 5, 2025.

ICE raids were conducted at multiple apartment buildings across the metro area.

(Photo by Hyoungh Chang/The Denver Post)

By Juan Peña | Guest Commentary

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At 7:45 a.m. on Wednesday, my wife called me. She works at a Denver public school and had just read a breaking news alert: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was conducting raids in Aurora and Denver. I asked her to find out where. Minutes later, she told me — an apartment complex off Oneida Street.

My heart sank.

For the past two years, our church has welcomed and supported newcomers to our city. We've helped over 100 families transition from city-run shelters into permanent housing and provided legal aid to more than 6,000 immigrants seeking work permits. Many of these families live near Oneida Street. They are our neighbors, our friends. I knew I had to go.

When I arrived, the scene was surreal.

The sprawling apartment complex, home to dozens of immigrant families from Venezuela, Colombia, Haiti, and Central America, was on lockdown. Officers with ICE and the FBI stood guard, heavily armed. Some wore face masks. Dozens of trucks — including armored vehicles resembling tanks — blocked the area, making it look more like a war zone than a Denver neighborhood.

Residents were too afraid to step outside.

One family from our church said ICE pounded on their door so hard they thought it would break down. Ten people lived in that small unit, including several children. They asked to see a warrant. The officers ignored them and continued yelling in English, refusing to answer.

Another congregant, Rosana, shared how the raid impacted her own family, but asked that her last name not be used out of fear of immigration officials: “I couldn’t send my daughter to school. We couldn’t go to work. Now we feel we are trapped in our home. We have our documents, thank God, and thanks to the church that has helped us. But even with papers, we are afraid to step outside.”

For four hours, families huddled in fear as ICE swept through their homes and neighborhood. I only saw them physically arrest one person — a young man who looked like a teenager. But on the ICE bus parked nearby, I could see at least three or four other detainees inside.

This was not a response to an active shooter. There was no dangerous fugitive. Law enforcement wasn’t chasing criminals or protecting the public. Instead, they carried out a military-style operation against families— — wasting taxpayer resources that should be focused on real threats. The FBI, tasked with investigating violent crime, human trafficking, and national security risks, was instead deployed for this show of force.

This was not just enforcement; it was purposeful, targeted, intimidation.



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Raids like this are not about public safety. They are about sowing terror in immigrant communities—punishing people for seeking a better life, for working hard, for trying to provide for their children. Many of the families ICE targeted have been living here legally, building their lives, paying taxes, and contributing to the community. Others are still navigating a complicated and backlogged immigration system.

The Bible calls us to welcome the stranger and defend the vulnerable. As a pastor, I have spent countless hours sitting with families who never wanted to leave their homes but had no choice. They fled not only unimaginable violence but also the crushing reality of being unable to feed their children or send them to school. I have seen the relief in their eyes when they finally feel safe. And now, I have seen that relief shattered — the terror returning as armed federal agents storm their homes at dawn.

Even if you do not share my faith, ask yourself: Will we stand by as the federal government uses our taxpayer dollars to rip apart families and terrorize communities? Will we allow resources to be diverted from real threats so ICE can chase down parents and workers?

And what happens next? When immigrants — our neighbors, employees, and students — are too afraid to call the police when they witness a crime, what does that mean for all of us?

These are not faceless strangers. They are part of our communities. And if we do not take a stand now, we are complicit in allowing this cruelty to continue.

As an American, my heart is broken. Our country was built on the promise of justice and liberty for all, yet this week, that promise was shattered. This is not the America we aspire to be — this is cruelty, it is inhumane, and it cannot go unchecked. It must end now.

We must stand together against these acts of federally sanctioned fear and violence. We must demand answers from our elected leaders, from law enforcement, and from ICE itself. And we must ensure that no child has to wake up to the sound of a federal official banging on their door ever again.

Juan Peña lives in Denver and is a pastor at Providence Bible Church.