

## Was anyone actually helped by ICE's mass crackdown on undocumented Mississippi laborers?

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Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents descended on Mississippi yesterday in a massive raid. The Aug. 7 crackdown was the largest single-day act of immigration enforcement in American history, with nearly 700 laborers detained in raids that targeted seven food processing plants.

The normal justifications were made. According to NBC News, U.S. Attorney Mike Hurd said, "While we are a nation of immigrants, more than that, first and foremost, we are a nation of laws. They have to come here legally or they shouldn't come here at all." Hurd also indicated that this was part of a wider crackdown targeting businesses that employ illegal immigrants.

Hurd's sentiments are understandable, and the rule of law is of course important. But all laws call for sensible, compassionate enforcement, and a crackdown on undocumented laborers who aren't hurting anyone causes needless pain to both immigrant families and American businesses — to no one's benefit.

Most of those detained are probably harmless laborers, who haven't done anything wrong other than, at some point, entering the country illegally. It would be a far better use of taxpayer dollars and ICE resources to target raids at those illegally residing here who also have committed violent crimes or other serious offenses.

It seems that's not, largely, who worked at these plants.

One U.S. citizen who worked alongside many of the detained illegal immigrants told the *Washington Post* that the food processing companies were not refuges for criminals but "work sites for people who came to this country to work, who came to fight for their family."

These raids pose a troubling question: Who is actually helped by the mass deportation of undocumented laborers?

Certainly not the American companies they work for, which now face crisis. In this instance, the target was Koch Foods, which generates over \$3 billion in revenue and employs 13,000 people nationwide. Indiscriminate immigration enforcement is incredibly disruptive for the economy: There's a reason the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, while it supports border security, also insists that we must treat undocumented workers fairly and offer many a path to legal residency.

Additionally, these Mississippi laborers were likely paying at least some taxes in the form of assessments for Social Security, even though they will never see the benefits unless they become American citizens.

And it's not as if many American workers are really harmed by undocumented competition. After all, there are currently more open jobs in the country than people seeking work, with extremely low unemployment to boot. The argument that illegal immigrants are taking Americans' jobs has never been less relevant.

Plus, American family members are often affected by the unnecessary deportation of their undocumented relatives. This latest round of raids led to the detainment of countless undocumented immigrants with native-born American children. The *Washington Post* told the story of one such child, a girl named Angie:

Angie's mother was one of [those detained]. Friends of Angie's mother brought the 12-year-old girl to the food-processing plant to say goodbye before agents loaded her onto a bus with dozens of other immigrants. Angie is teary-eyed in a video of an encounter with an ICE agent but also seems confused about what was going to happen next.

It's important to keep the interests of Americans such as Angie in mind when we're shaping our immigration policy, which must be both just and compassionate.

I spoke with Alex Nowrasteh, director of immigration studies at the libertarian Cato Institute. He told me "Past raids like this usually have either no impact because companies hire other illegal immigrants to replace those deported, or they devastate the town when its economy collapses."

And, he said, this harsh enforcement "does nothing to make Americans safer. These raids leave many American kids to go on welfare without a parent around to survive, to say nothing of the psychological cost."

Nowrasteh is exactly right.

We should focus our efforts on securing our border, weakening the grip cartels have on our immigration system, and deporting dangerous people who have managed to enter our country. Nobody's interests are truly served by rounding up otherwise law-abiding laborers, even if it makes for a dramatic PR stunt for hawkish politicians.