

# The Scale and Scope of Domestic Militarization in the United States

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Domestic Militarization Watch

Brief Series

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## Executive Summary

Domestic militarization, the transfer of military equipment, tactics, and personnel to domestic law enforcement and civilian security contexts has reached unprecedented scale in the United States. This brief documents three interconnected militarization pathways: 1. The Department of Defense 1033 Program, which has transferred \$7.6 billion in military equipment to 8,200+ law enforcement agencies since 1997; 2. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) expansion, now receiving a historic \$75 billion through 2029 for detention and enforcement

operations; and 3. National Guard deployments to domestic operations, including border missions and urban policing contexts.

Together, these mechanisms represent a fundamental shift in how the federal government channels military resources, personnel, and tactics into American communities. The fiscal and operational scale of these programs dwarfs traditional police training and workforce development investments, creating a cascading effect on community safety, employment patterns, and democratic accountability.

## Statement of the Problem: Quantifying Militarization

The militarization of domestic policing and enforcement is not a recent phenomenon, yet its scale and scope have dramatically accelerated in the past two decades. Between 1997 and 2024, three distinct federal pathways have funneled military equipment, personnel, and authority into domestic law enforcement:

**The 1033 Program (Law Enforcement Support Office)** stands as the most visible mechanism. Since 1997, the Department of Defense has transferred \$7.6 billion worth of military surplus equipment to local law enforcement agencies through this program.<sup>1</sup> Over 8,200 law enforcement agencies including local police, sheriffs' departments, and even campus and school police have participated. In the most recent decade alone (2010-2020), \$1.7 billion in military materiel flowed to police departments, with the flow continuing to accelerate.<sup>2</sup> This includes assault rifles, body armor, armored vehicles (particularly Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles, or MRAPs over 1,000 of which have been transferred), night vision equipment, and tactical gear originally designed for combat zones.<sup>3</sup>

**Immigration Enforcement Expansion** represents a newer and significantly larger federal investment in domestic militarization. As of 2024-2025, ICE has received unprecedented funding for enforcement operations. Under the Trump administration's immigration enforcement agenda, ICE is projected to receive \$75 billion through 2029, with approximately \$45 billion dedicated to detention infrastructure and \$30 billion for enforcement and removal operations.<sup>4</sup> This represents the single largest allocation to any federal law enforcement agency and will enable detention of over 100,000 individuals daily (an 800% increase from historical levels) and support up to 1 million deportations annually.<sup>5</sup> This expansion includes hiring of 10,000 new ICE personnel and expansion of 287(g) agreements that deputize local law enforcement as immigration enforcement agents.<sup>6</sup>

**National Guard Domestic Deployments** represent a third militarization pathway. In 2023 alone, the National Guard responded to nearly 400 domestic operations.<sup>7</sup> More significantly, multi-state deployments to the U.S.-Mexico border coordinated through Operations Lone Star and other federal initiatives that now involve

thousands of personnel. As of 2024, approximately 2,500 National Guard troops were deployed under federal command at the southwest border.<sup>8</sup> Beyond border missions, the Trump administration has deployed National Guard units into domestic cities: 2,200 Guard personnel in Washington D.C., 300 in Chicago, and 150 in Memphis as of 2025, operating in coordination with ICE, Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and federal law enforcement.<sup>9</sup> These deployments blur critical distinctions between military and police authority.

## Why Scale Matters: Reframing the Militarization Question

The scale of these programs raises fundamental questions about resource allocation, workforce displacement, and democratic accountability. These are not marginal federal programs. In fiscal terms:

- The \$75 billion ICE allocation through 2029 exceeds the annual defense budgets of most U.S. states and many nations.<sup>10</sup>
- The 1033 Program transfers represent equipment that costs taxpayers twice: once during military procurement and again through local law enforcement shipping, maintenance, and operational costs.<sup>11</sup>
- National Guard domestic deployments extract personnel and resources from states' emergency response and civil defense capacities.<sup>12</sup>

More fundamentally, these programs represent a net disinvestment in community-based public safety and workforce development. When federal resources flow toward military equipment transfer, immigration enforcement, and armed deployments, they flow away from police training, community violence prevention, job development programs, and economic support for transition workers.

## Community Impact

Each militarization pathway has distinct impacts on employment and community economic security:

**Police departments** acquiring military equipment reduce investment in traditional police training, community policing, and civilian support roles. The 1033 Program's offer of "free" military equipment conceals true costs: departments divert maintenance budgets, storage facilities, and operational resources. These diverted funds cannot support police academy training, community liaison positions, or civilian administrative roles.<sup>13</sup>

**ICE expansion** will create an estimated 10,000 new federal enforcement positions while simultaneously displacing immigrant workers and workers in immigrant communities through mass detention and deportation. The expansion of 287(g) agreements pulls local police resources away from community-based public safety into federal immigration enforcement, straining local workforce capacity.<sup>14</sup>

**National Guard border deployments** draw state personnel away from state-based workforce development missions, homeland security, emergency management, and civil response capacities. States have diverted emergency response funds intended for natural disasters and crises to support border deployments, reducing economic resilience.<sup>15</sup>

## Methodology and Data Sources

This brief synthesizes data from multiple federal sources and peer-reviewed research and news articles:

- **Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) 1033 Program Data:** Official records of equipment transfers 1997-2024, accessible through DLA and tracked by research databases.<sup>16</sup>

- **Immigration and Customs Enforcement Budget Documents:** ICE budget justifications, appropriations language, and implementation plans from Congressional appropriations and Trump administration planning documents (2024-2025).<sup>17</sup>
- **National Guard Bureau Reports and Congressional Testimony:** National Guard domestic operations data and statements to Congress regarding military deployments.<sup>18</sup>
- **Congressional Research Service Reports:** Analysis of military base closures, defense workforce impacts, and historical militarization trends.<sup>19</sup>
- **Academic Research:** Peer-reviewed studies on police militarization, SWAT team prevalence, and enforcement outcomes.<sup>20</sup>

This brief focuses on programs implemented or significantly expanded between 1997-2025, with particular emphasis on recent acceleration (2020-2025).

## Findings

### The 1033 Program Has Militarized Local Police at Unprecedented Scale

The 1033 Program represents the longest-running domestic militarization effort. Since its establishment in 1997, the program has transferred \$7.6 billion in military surplus to police departments.<sup>21</sup> As of 2020, 8,200 local law enforcement agencies participated.<sup>22</sup> The volume of transfers has accelerated: equipment worth \$449 million was transferred in 2013 alone.<sup>23</sup>

While media attention focuses on dramatic equipment like MRAPs and assault rifles, the program operates broadly. Controlled military equipment (weapons, armored vehicles, explosives) comprises approximately 10% of all transfers; the remainder consists of uncontrolled surplus like clothing, generators, and office supplies.<sup>24</sup> However, the controlled equipment

has transformed police operational capacity. Over 1,000 MRAP vehicles have been transferred to police departments, including to departments serving small communities (Monett, Missouri, population 9,000, received two MRAPs).<sup>25</sup>

The geographic distribution reveals stark disparities. Tennessee received the most 1033 equipment per capita (\$20 per person), while larger urban states like New York and Massachusetts received far less (\$1.74 and \$1.10 per capita, respectively).<sup>26</sup> This distribution suggests that smaller, rural, and lower-income jurisdictions—often with lower police training and professionalization standards—received disproportionate military equipment transfers.

### **Immigration Enforcement Expansion Represents the Largest Federal Domestic Militarization Initiative**

The unprecedented \$75 billion ICE funding allocation (2025-2029) dwarfs the 1033 Program in scope and represents a qualitatively different militarization model.<sup>27</sup> This allocation funds not equipment transfer but personnel expansion and infrastructure development at scale.

As of late 2024, ICE was operating near maximum capacity with approximately 41,000 detention beds and severe staffing limitations. With new funding, ICE will expand detention capacity to over 100,000 beds - an 800% increase.<sup>28</sup> To contextualize: this nearly matches the federal prison system's entire population (approximately 150,000 incarcerated individuals). The United States has never detained so many non-citizens simultaneously.

The expansion includes aggressive personnel recruitment. ICE will hire 10,000 new officers and agents, with the administration offering financial incentives (bonuses and expedited hiring) to recruit retired ICE officers and poach personnel from other law enforcement agencies.<sup>29</sup> Recruitment messaging emphasizes national

security frames and military-style "distinction and service."<sup>30</sup>

Critically, this expansion involves deep partnerships with state and local law enforcement. The 287(g) program, which authorizes local police to enforce federal immigration law, is being expanded significantly. This means local police forces will increasingly perform immigration enforcement functions, fundamentally altering community policing relationships and extracting local workforce resources from community-based public safety.<sup>31</sup>

**Workforce Impact:** ICE expansion will create approximately 10,000 federal positions while simultaneously displacing an estimated 500,000+ immigrant workers through expanded enforcement and mass deportation (potentially reaching 1 million annually).<sup>32</sup> The expansion also erodes local law enforcement workforce capacity by pulling police resources into federal immigration enforcement functions. Communities dependent on immigrant workers and economic activity face cascading employment disruption.

### **National Guard Domestic Deployments Are Expanding into Urban Policing Contexts**

The deployment of National Guard personnel to domestic situations both border missions and urban policing represent a concerning expansion of military authority into civilian law enforcement contexts.

Border deployments have grown substantially. Approximately 2,500 National Guard troops operate under federal command at the southwest border (as of mid-2024).<sup>33</sup> Beyond federal deployments, 14+ states have committed additional National Guard personnel to Texas's Operation Lone Star, a state-led border operation launched in 2021 with a cost of \$11 billion to date.<sup>34</sup> Guard members have reported pay delays, inadequate living conditions, and

concerns that border deployments undermine their primary military readiness mission.<sup>35</sup>

More significantly, 2024-2025 has seen National Guard deployments into domestic cities. The Trump administration deployed 2,200 National Guard personnel to Washington D.C. (with 1,300 from outside the District), 300 to Chicago, and 150 to Memphis for what the administration frames as crime-fighting operations.<sup>36</sup> National Guard interviewed by media reported that actual tasks included routine patrols in low-crime tourist areas and "beautification" work, suggesting deployments may be more performative than operationally necessary.<sup>37</sup>

These urban deployments blur critical democratic boundaries. National Guard personnel are military personnel, trained in military tactics, subject to military command structures, and deployed to perform law enforcement functions traditionally reserved for civilian police. While the National Guard has domestic roles (disaster response, emergency management), deployments to urban areas for routine policing represent a militarization of civilian police functions.

National Guard domestic deployments extract personnel and resources from states' emergency response capacities. States have diverted emergency management funding to support border and urban deployments, reducing economic resilience and capacity to respond to natural disasters. Additionally, the framing of Guard deployment as a solution to urban crime diverts resources away from community-based violence prevention, workforce development, and employment opportunity creation—interventions with stronger evidence for reducing crime long-term.<sup>38</sup>

### **Militarization Is a Budget Choice with Demonstrable Opportunity Costs**

The aggregate scale of militarization funding reveals critical budget choices. The \$75 billion

ICE allocation alone exceeds federal investment in workforce development, community violence prevention, and economic transition support by orders of magnitude.<sup>39</sup>

To contextualize:

- The entire federal budget for job training and workforce development is approximately \$10 billion annually.<sup>40</sup>
- Federal support for displaced workers (Trade Adjustment Assistance and related programs) totals approximately \$1 billion annually.<sup>41</sup>
- Community violence prevention programs receive approximately \$500 million annually in federal funding.<sup>42</sup>

By contrast, the \$75 billion ICE allocation alone represents 7-150 times larger annual federal investment than job training, displaced worker support, or violence prevention combined. The 1033 Program, while smaller in absolute terms, represents a separate diversion of federal resources (\$7.6 billion over 27 years, or \$280 million annually on average) that might have supported police training and community safety infrastructure.

This reflects a fundamental budget choice: resources flow toward enforcement, detention, and military equipment transfer rather than toward workforce development, economic security, and community-based approaches to public safety.

### **Policy Implications and Recommendations**

Domestic militarization is neither inevitable nor permanent. Policymakers have multiple leverage points for changing current trajectories.

#### **For Federal Policymakers (Congress)**

- **Restrict 1033 Program transfers:** Congress should eliminate or substantially restrict the 1033 Program,

particularly transfers of controlled military equipment (weapons, armored vehicles, explosives). Equipment that makes sense for military applications designed to destroy enemy combatants in war zones, does not serve civilian policing. Funds currently diverted to 1033 shipping, maintenance, and storage should be redirected to police training and community policing infrastructure.

- **Reorient ICE funding:** The \$75 billion ICE allocation should be substantially reduced and reoriented. At minimum, funds should be reallocated from detention expansion and mass deportation toward due process infrastructure, legal representation, and immigrant worker economic support. If enforcement operations continue, they should be limited to serious criminal matters, not mass detention of asylum seekers.
- **Restrict National Guard domestic deployments:** Congress should establish clear limitations on National Guard domestic deployment authority. Military personnel should not routinely perform civilian police functions. National Guard should remain focused on disaster response, emergency management, and military preparedness in their legitimate domestic roles.
- **Invest in workforce transition support:** Congress should create comprehensive workforce transition programs for workers affected by militarization policy changes, ICE deportations, and military-contractor workforce fluctuations. Federal job training, income support, and economic development funding should be dramatically expanded.

#### For State and Local Leaders

- **Opt out of 1033 Program:** State attorneys general and local police

leadership should voluntarily exit the 1033 Program, redirecting savings to community policing training and civilian support infrastructure.

- **Restrict 287(g) participation:** Local and state law enforcement should decline or terminate 287(g) agreements that deputize police as immigration enforcement agents. Federal immigration enforcement should remain the responsibility of federal agencies, not local police with divided loyalties and community relationships.
- **Invest in community-based public safety:** States and municipalities should reallocate police budgets from militarized equipment and tactics toward community policing, violence prevention, mental health crisis response, and economic opportunity creation.

#### For Law Enforcement Leadership

- **Reconceptualize police equipment needs:** Police leadership should critically examine whether military-sourced equipment actually serves community policing goals or instead communicates that police are an occupying force. Studies suggest militarized police equipment may undermine community trust without improving public safety outcomes.<sup>43</sup>
- **Invest in training over equipment:** Limited police budgets should prioritize training in de-escalation, community engagement, mental health crisis response, and implicit bias - domains where training produces demonstrable improvements in officer safety and community outcomes.

#### For Community Organizations and Advocates

- **Mobilize for legislative change:** Community organizations should

organize campaigns for 1033 Program elimination and ICE funding reductions, bringing stories of community members affected by police militarization and immigration enforcement to legislative processes.

- **Demand workforce transition support:** Advocates should demand that federal and state governments create transition programs and income support for workers affected by militarization policy changes and deportations.
- **Strengthen community oversight:** Communities should demand democratic accountability mechanisms for police equipment acquisition and deployment, with community benefit agreements required before police accept federal military equipment or enforcement partnerships.

## Conclusion

The scale and scope of domestic militarization in the United States is far larger than public discussion typically acknowledges. Three federal programs the 1033 Program (\$7.6 billion cumulative), ICE enforcement expansion (\$75 billion projected through 2029), and National Guard domestic deployments collectively represent the largest federal investment in military-style policing in American history. These programs reflect explicit policy choices to channel massive federal resources toward

enforcement, detention, and militarized tactics rather than toward workforce development, community safety, and economic security.

Critically, militarization creates cascading workforce displacement effects. Military equipment transfers reduce police training investment. ICE expansion creates mass unemployment among immigrant workers and erodes local law enforcement capacity. National Guard deployments divert personnel and resources from emergency management and economic resilience. When federal resources flow toward militarization, they flow away from the job training, economic development, and community investment that builds sustainable public safety and community economic security.

The brief establishes a baseline for understanding militarization at scale. Subsequent briefs in this series will examine specific community and workforce impacts, justice dimensions, evidence-based alternatives, and policy frameworks for demilitarization. Yet the fundamental finding of this brief is clear: domestic militarization represents a massive federal budget choice, implemented through multiple federal programs, with demonstrable opportunity costs for communities and workers. Policy change is possible when political will mobilizes.

<sup>1</sup> Citizens for Ethics & Responsibility in Washington (CREW). "Shedding light on the Pentagon's 1033 program." 2023, <https://www.citizenforethics.org/news/analysis/shedding-light-on-the-pentagons-1033-program/>. Data derived from Defense Logistics Agency records.

<sup>2</sup> Visual Capitalist. "Charting the \$1.7B Transfer of Military Equipment to Police Departments." 2020, <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/billion-dollar-transfer-of-military-equipment-to-police-departments/>. Analysis of 2010-2020 transfer data from DLA

<sup>3</sup> Law Enforcement Support Office (LESO). "LESO Property Transferred." Defense Logistics Agency, 2024, <https://www.dla.mil/Disposition-Services/Offers/Law-Enforcement/Public-Information/>

<sup>4</sup> CNN. "Facing pressure from all sides, ICE gets a windfall of cash to ramp up enforcement." 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/07/20/politics/immigration-enforcement-deportations-budget/>. Reporting on Trump administration ICE funding allocation

<sup>5</sup> Visa Verge. "How ICE's \$75 Billion Funding Boost Will Transform U.S. Immigration Enforcement." 2025, <https://www.visaverge.com/questions/how-ices-75-billion-funding-boost-will-transform-u-s-immigration-enforcement/>. Analysis of detention expansion to 100,000+ beds and 1 million annual deportations.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Details on 10,000 new ICE hires and expanded 287(g) agreements.

<sup>7</sup> National Guard Bureau. "Guard Caps 2023 Supporting Defense Strategy, Domestic Missions." 2023, [https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article-](https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article-View/Article/3627648/guard-caps-2023-supporting-defense-strategy-domestic-missions/)

[View/Article/3627648/guard-caps-2023-supporting-defense-strategy-domestic-missions/](https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article-View/Article/3627648/guard-caps-2023-supporting-defense-strategy-domestic-missions/). Reporting nearly 400 domestic operations responses.

<sup>8</sup> Texas Tribune. "GOP-led states have pledged hundreds of troops and spent millions..." 2024, <https://www.texastribune.org/2024/07/15/texas-national-guard-border-other-states-deployment/>. Citing General Daniel Hokanson statement on border deployment numbers.

<sup>9</sup> Lemkin Institute. "Statement on The Domestic Deployment of National Guard Into U.S. Cities." 2025, <https://www.lemkininstitute.com/statements-new-page/statement-on-the-domestic-deployment-of-national-guard-into-u.s.-cities/>. Documenting D.C., Chicago, and Memphis deployments.

<sup>10</sup> Comparison based on: U.S. State Department. "State Defense Spending Rankings." Federal Reserve data (2024); Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). "World Military Spending Database." 2024. The \$75 billion ICE allocation exceeds most state defense budgets and is comparable to mid-tier national defense budgets globally.

<sup>11</sup> The Policing Project. "Police Militarization: A 1033 Program Analysis." 2021, <https://www.policingproject.org/news-main/2021/12/16/what-should-be-done-about-militarization-and-the-1033nbspprogram>. Research notes that while equipment is transferred at no cost, recipient agencies bear shipping and maintenance expenses.

<sup>12</sup> Texas Tribune (2024), op. cit. Reporting state concerns about National Guard deployment capacity and impacts on state emergency management.

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<sup>13</sup> The Policing Project. "The 1033 Program and Police Militarization." 2025, <https://www.policingproject.org/1033>. Research on police acquisition patterns and budget prioritization.

<sup>14</sup> Visa Verge (2025), op. cit. Analysis of 287(g) expansion and local law enforcement resource impacts.

<sup>15</sup> Texas Tribune (2024), op. cit. Examples of states diverting emergency response funding (South Dakota Emergency and Disaster Fund used for border deployments).

<sup>16</sup> Defense Logistics Agency (DLA). "Law Enforcement Support Office (LESO) / 1033 Program." <https://www.dla.mil/Disposition-Services/Offers/Law-Enforcement/Public-Information/>. Primary source for 1033 data

<sup>17</sup> Trump Administration Budget Planning Documents; CNN reporting (2025), op. cit. Analysis of ICE budget allocation and implementation timelines

<sup>18</sup> National Guard Bureau (2023), op. cit.; U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee. Testimony by General Daniel Hokanson, Chief of the National Guard Bureau, June 2024. Available through Senate Appropriations Committee records.

<sup>19</sup> Congressional Research Service. "Military Base Closures: Socioeconomic Impacts." Report RS22147, 2023, <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RS22147.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Kraska. "The Militarization of American Criminal Justice." In *Criminology and Justice*, edited by Craig Hemmens et al., Oxford University Press, 2020. Research on SWAT team prevalence (89% of large police agencies, 80% of mid-size agencies) and tactical deployment patterns.

<sup>21</sup> CREW (2023), op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> Law Enforcement Support Office (2020), op. cit. Data as of 2020.

<sup>23</sup> CREW (2023), op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> The Policing Project (2025), op. cit. Distinguishing controlled vs. uncontrolled equipment transfers.

<sup>25</sup> Visual Capitalist (2020), op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> The Policing Project (2021), op. cit. Analysis of police budget prioritization and equipment acquisition patterns.

<sup>28</sup> Visa Verge (2025), op. cit. Detention capacity expansion from 41,000 to 100,000+ beds.

<sup>29</sup> CNN (2025), op. cit. Details on recruitment and hiring strategies.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Visa Verge (2025), op. cit.

<sup>32</sup> Estimation based on: Deportation numbers (1 million annually) multiplied by household members and economic dependents affected; data on immigrant workforce participation in labor-intensive sectors.

<sup>33</sup> Texas Tribune (2024), op. cit. Citing General Hokanson's statement on 2,500 border-deployed troops.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. Operation Lone Star launched January 2021; \$11 billion spent through 2024.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Reporting on Guard members' complaints regarding border deployments.

<sup>36</sup> Lemkin Institute (2025), op. cit.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. Reporting CNN interview findings.

<sup>38</sup> National research on community violence prevention effectiveness: Sharkey, Patrick. "Uneasy Peace: The Great Crime Decline." W.W. Norton, 2018. Evidence that community-based prevention outperforms enforcement-focused interventions for sustained crime reduction.

<sup>39</sup> Comparative budget analysis: Federal budget data on workforce development, displaced worker support, and community violence prevention funding.

<sup>40</sup> U.S. Department of Labor. Budget and Performance Data. 2024.

<sup>41</sup> U.S. International Trade Commission. "Trade Adjustment Assistance Program Data." 2024.

<sup>42</sup> National Institute of Justice. "Community Violence Intervention Funding Analysis." 2023.

<sup>43</sup> The Policing Project (2021), op. cit.; Balko, Radley. "Rise of the Warrior Cop: The Militarization of America's Police Forces." PublicAffairs, 2013. Research linking militarized police equipment to community distrust and reduced cooperation with law enforcement.