



Responding to ICE and Countering Authoritarianism

Framing Guide

We need to build public resistance to the rise of authoritarianism in the United States. To do that, we must first understand how people are already thinking about things like democracy, authoritarianism, and the rule of law. Then, we can navigate these common assumptions and build public demand for a better, stronger democracy.

This framing guideline outlines how the U.S. public is thinking about the deployment of ICE and protests in communities across the country. It then walks through four framing strategies for countering ICE, building support for immigrant justice, and making deeper connections to authoritarian encroachment.

THREE THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT HOW PEOPLE ARE THINKING ABOUT ICE IN

FEBRUARY 2026:

1. People see ICE as lawless.

They have an intuitive sense that ICE's actions violate the rule of law (though they don't use that term). That's good news, both because it leads to widespread denunciation of ICE and because it offers a resonant way to talk about authoritarian encroachment. But the focus on ICE as lawless can also lead people to treat enforcement of existing immigration law as straightforwardly "right" rather than questioning it or thinking about how it needs to be changed.

2. The spotlight on ICE focuses attention on the enforcement of immigration law, not its faults.

This reinforces the distinction between "legal" and "illegal" immigration. There is a bright spot, though: people's focus on fair enforcement of the law brings into view the arbitrariness of changing rules (e.g., around temporary protected status and asylum), which opens space for talking about the rules themselves as being unfair.

3. People generally support the right to protest ICE, but that support isn't unconditional.

While protest is understood as a fundamental right that should be protected, people don't always support protest that obstructs law enforcement. And their fear of chaos can lead to "both sides" thinking and the idea that protestors are fueling disorder.

HOW CAN FRAMING HELP IN RESPONDING TO ICE AND COUNTERING AUTHORITARIANISM?

We recognize that there may be significant tensions between short- and long-term goals in this moment—for example, effective tactics for countering ICE now may be in tension with longer-term goals to overhaul our immigration system. The framing guidance that follows attempts to bridge those tensions.

To do this...	Try this:
<p>To build support for countering ICE in the immediate term...</p>	<p>Frame ICE as acting outside the law.</p> <p>Use phrases like “above the law,” not “lawless,” to cue thinking about unfair power dynamics and to avoid cuing thinking about “legal vs. illegal immigrants.”</p> <p>What this might look like:</p> <p><i>“ICE is acting as if it’s above the law.”</i></p> <p><i>“ICE isn’t following our laws—just following any orders they get.”</i></p>
<p>To support immigrant justice in this moment...</p>	<p>Connect critiques of ICE with the need and ability for us to change our immigration laws.</p> <p>Don’t treat the law as set in stone.</p> <p>What this might look like:</p> <p><i>“If we want a country that lives up to our values, we need to make sure we’re treating everybody with dignity and respecting every person’s humanity. The laws we put in place should reflect our values. But right now, our immigration laws are anything but moral or humane, and the people tasked with enforcing them are acting as if they’re above the law. ICE is indiscriminately grabbing people off the street and using force against people who don’t pose a threat. We demand changes to our immigration laws. And in the meantime, we demand an end to the unlawful, inhumane treatment of our neighbors at the hands of ICE.”</i></p>

<p>To build support for protest...</p>	<p>Connect protest to core democratic values, like <i>freedom from domination</i> and <i>popular self-government</i>.</p> <p>Consistently position protest as a key component of a strong democracy.</p> <p>What this might look like:</p> <p><i>“We reject attempts to silence our voices. We demand laws that will protect protestors from violent retaliation.”</i></p> <p><i>“From the Boston Tea Party in 1773 to the March on Washington in 1963, protest has always been how we the people express our will. That’s not something to suppress—it’s something to celebrate.”</i></p>
<p>To broaden and deepen understanding of authoritarian encroachment...</p>	<p>Connect ICE to other violations of the rule of law.</p> <p>Instead of using the phrase “rule of law,” use examples to illustrate the idea of being equal under the law, or appeal to the Constitution.</p> <p>What this might look like:</p> <p><i>“ICE doesn’t get to choose which people have constitutional rights and which people don’t. Neither do presidents.”</i></p> <p><i>“If we care about equality under the law, we can’t let our leaders direct ICE agents to avoid following the law.”</i></p> <p><i>“We believe that no one should be above the law—not ICE agents, and not our elected officials.”</i></p>