

Henry Nadel

MS 148: Surveillance and the Media

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## ICE's New Surveillance Technology: Information Collection for an Immigration Crackdown

From April through September of 2025, the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) spent \$42.35 million on contracts for technological services from five separate companies: BI2 Technologies, Clearview AI, Paragon Solutions, Penlink, and Palantir. With tools ranging from biometric identification to web scraping, all revolve around the collection and linking of private information. From there, all data is input into Palantir's new ImmigrationOS system, where it can be linked, bound, and analysed. By creating a platform that specializes in identification and sorting, ICE is moving to a model of preemptive targeting, backed by information collection that raised a slew of privacy concerns. While highly concerning in the context of immigration, looking at its broader applications, the new infrastructure created by ImmigrationOS opens the door to what could become a whole new strategy for governance and policing. Backed by an automated enforcement apparatus, this tech can be understood more generally as the first step into a reorganization of state power to surveil and police the American public.

In January of 2025, the start of President Trump's second term marked a shift in both the scale and manner in which ICE operates. Data from the Immigration Research Initiative shows that the agency jumped almost immediately from a steady baseline of about 200 daily arrests throughout 2024 to roughly 600 per day after the inauguration.<sup>1</sup> This surge did not just increase totals; it changed who ICE arrested. Between October 2024 and mid-June 2025, at least 65 percent of people arrested had no criminal record, a 500 percent increase in non-criminal arrests compared to Trump's first term.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Immigration Research Initiative. (2025, July 23). *Who is ICE arresting?* <https://immresearch.org>

<sup>2</sup> Bier, D. J. (2025, June 20). *65 percent of people taken by ICE had no convictions, 93 percent no violent convictions.* Cato Institute.

<http://www.cato.org/blog/65-people-taken-ice-had-no-convictions-93-no-violent-convictions>

The administration has stated its aligned ambitions openly. In May, White House deputy chief of staff Stephen Miller announced a goal of “a minimum of 3,000 arrests for ICE every day.”<sup>3</sup> By late summer, ICE detention reached a record high, with 61,226 people in custody on August 23.<sup>4</sup> Importantly, this escalation occurred without the agency having received any new funding. That changed in July, when the administration’s “Big Beautiful Bill” allocated \$75 billion to ICE over the following 3 years.<sup>5</sup> This increase in funding enables a mass expansion of ICE’s detention capabilities, which once developed, will be able to support a looming increase in arrests powered by the ImmigrationOS software.

### **Biometric Surveillance:**

The first category of ICE’s new immigration enforcement apparatus is biometric surveillance, enabling the identification of people through data taken directly from their bodies. On September 9, 2025, ICE finalized a \$3.75 million contract to use Clearview AI’s facial recognition platform,<sup>6</sup> built using over 60 billion images, all scraped from social media and the open web.<sup>7</sup> If you’ve ever had a photo posted online, odds are that Clearview has it. With a single photo, ICE can use Clearview’s tech to link someone’s physical appearance to any other images in its database, along with any attached personal information. Once deployed in the field, the tool will enable the identification of individuals in real-time during patrols and while making arrests.

ICE is also expanding biometric surveillance into its detention centers. On August 6, 2025, ICE signed a \$4.6 million contract with BI2 Technologies for its iris recognition system and jail management

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<sup>3</sup> Miller, S. (2025, May 29). *Trump administration sets new goal of 3,000 illegal immigrant arrests daily* [Interview]. Fox News. <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/trump-administration-aims-3000-arrests-illegal-immigrants-each-day>

<sup>4</sup> Migration Policy Institute. (2025). *U.S. immigrant detention grows to record heights under Trump administration*. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/trump-immigrant-detention>

<sup>5</sup> Brennan Center for Justice. (2025, August 13). *Big Budget Act creates a “Deportation-Industrial Complex”*. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/big-budget-act-creates-deportation-industrial-complex>

<sup>6</sup> Federal Procurement Data System. (2025). *ICE contract with Clearview AI facial recognition*. <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/reported-ice-contracts-with-clearview-ai-for-facial-recognition-technology/#/tab-policy-documents>

<sup>7</sup> Clearview AI. (n.d.). *Clearview 2.0*. <https://www.clearview.ai/clearview-2-0>

software, IMATS™.<sup>8</sup> BI2's technology uses the detailed patterns of a person's iris to conduct constant surveillance of inmates across detention facilities.

### **Information Collection:**

Beyond biometrics, ICE's next two surveillance technologies revolve around the collection of personal information through the infiltration of personal devices and web scraping. First was the purchase of Paragon Solutions' spyware platform, Graphite, for two million dollars in September of 2024.<sup>9</sup> Graphite contains powerful spyware software that can break into smartphones remotely, even when locked, and extract everything on the device, including messages inside encrypted apps. It pulls texts, photos, GPS files, app data, and social media content without requiring a single touch of the phone's screen.<sup>10</sup> In effect, Graphite provides ICE with an interior view of someone's life, revealing their conversations, movements, and interpersonal networks, allowing the government to now purchase personal information once believed to be private.

ICE expanded this capability on September 25, 2025, when it purchased Penlink's Tangles and Weblocs platforms for two million dollars.<sup>11</sup> Penlink collects data from the open web, deep web, and dark web, including tools for location tracking.<sup>12</sup> In the context of ICE's enforcement system, Penlink can be used for its location tracking feature, and ability to build an individual's profile with information scraped from the web. Together, Graphite and Penlink allow ICE to merge internal and exterior data on a person's life into a single profile.

With the amount of information being collected by these technologies, ICE's emerging surveillance apparatus not only raises issues about privacy, but also the quantification of individuals.

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<sup>8</sup> U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. (2025, August 6). *Notice of intent to sole source – Bi2 Technologies, LLC* [Contract solicitation]. SAM.gov.

<https://sam.gov/workspace/contract/opp/53dc2fa997954c1d8acf888fd8f0b56/view>

<sup>9</sup> Federal Procurement Data System. (2024). *Contract award 70CTD024P00000012: Paragon Solutions*.

[https://www.fpdss.gov/ezsearch/search.do?q=70CTD024P00000012+7012++UEI\\_NAME%3A%22PARAGON+SOLUTIONS%28US%29+INC%22&s=FPDS\\_GOV&templateName=1.5.3&indexName=awardfull](https://www.fpdss.gov/ezsearch/search.do?q=70CTD024P00000012+7012++UEI_NAME%3A%22PARAGON+SOLUTIONS%28US%29+INC%22&s=FPDS_GOV&templateName=1.5.3&indexName=awardfull)

<sup>10</sup> Washington Post. (2025, September 2). *ICE Paragon spyware ban lifted*.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2025/09/02/ice-paragon-spyware-ban-lifted/>

<sup>11</sup> USA Spending.gov. (2025). *Contract award: ICE – Penlink Tangles and Weblocs data systems*.

[https://www.usaspending.gov/award/CONT\\_AWD\\_70CMSD25P0000138\\_7012\\_-NONE\\_-NONE-](https://www.usaspending.gov/award/CONT_AWD_70CMSD25P0000138_7012_-NONE_-NONE-)

<sup>12</sup> Penlink. (n.d.). *Penlink platform: Open source intelligence and data analysis*.

<https://www.penlink.com/platform/open-source-intelligence/>

When paired with predictive models, this technology flattens indeterminacy by treating fixed data on someone's past as a complete representation of who they are. Seen in this light, Paragon and Penlink's tools do not merely extend ICE's investigative capacity, they enable a logic that treats data traces as a stand-in for real people, and uses those traces alone as justification for intervention.<sup>13</sup>

## **ImmigrationOS:**

On April 17, 2025, ICE contracted Palantir Technologies for \$30 million to develop ImmigrationOS, an information-processing system built to tie together and analyse the full scope of ICE's data collection.<sup>14</sup> ImmigrationOS is designed to ingest the totality of data collected through ICE's recent purchases and merge the information into thousands of individualized profiles. This means that once identified by one of the surveillance technologies, ICE can associate a person with the rest of the information held on them. But, the real power of this software comes with Palantir's AI-driven analytics that, after the stage of data collection, will parse these profiles to identify patterns, link individuals to one another, and highlight enforcement targets.<sup>15</sup> Being the infrastructure to bring all these tools together, ImmigrationOS serves as the analytical backbone of ICE's surveillance apparatus.

With the newfound ability to not only obtain personal information but also to automate the analytics process, ImmigrationOS brings ICE an enforcement model of predictive policing fully informed by algorithmic bias. Oscar Gandy's theory of the panoptic sort helps clarify the implications of this shift, outlining a conceptual surveillance apparatus that sorts people by information gathered on them and affects individual life outcomes. Gandy describes the panoptic sort as "primarily a defensive technology" aimed at filtering out those deemed undesirable.<sup>16</sup> In his book, Gandy sends a clear warning of how the harms of mass information collection extend beyond privacy, but to a restructuring of opportunity, risk,

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<sup>13</sup> Hildebrandt, M. (2019). Privacy as protection of the incomputable self: From agnostic to agonistic machine learning. *Theoretical Inquiries in Law*, 20(1), 83–121.

<http://www7.tau.ac.il/ojs/index.php/til/article/download/1622/1723>

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Customs and Border Protection. (2025, April 11). Office of Acquisition Management. SAM.gov. <https://sam.gov/opp/f71acee6010c423db4902446a59a690c/view>

<sup>15</sup> Stewart, J., Du, M., & Turner Lee, N. (2025, October 6). How tech powers immigration enforcement. *Brookings Institution*. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-tech-powers-immigration-enforcement/>

<sup>16</sup> Oscar H. Gandy Jr., *The Panoptic Sort: A Political Economy of Personal Information* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 32.

and life chances across society. Seen through this lens, ImmigrationOS is not simply a tool for organizing information. When it identifies targets, maps associations, or generates clusters for enforcement, it's making tangible decisions affecting thousands of people on American soil. ImmigrationOS brings algorithmic categorization and bias to the center of a crucial decision of who is and is not permitted to remain in this country.

### **Beyond Immigration:**

With the establishment of algorithmic policing for the tracking and removal of immigrants already in motion, ICE has mentioned increasing its scope to include tracking members of ANTIFA and anti-ICE protesters. Shortly after a number of large anit-ICE protests to disrupt arrest efforts in Chicago, ICE director Todd Lyons said, "We are gonna track the ringleaders" of these demonstrations.<sup>17</sup> In this interview Lyons announces an expansion of focus for ICE, from strictly immigration into the sphere of American protest movements. Understanding the crucial role that ImmigrationOS has in ICE investigations, this statement expands the scope of ICE's surveillance apparatus to include Identifying American citizens.

The scale and design of ICE's new surveillance system points far beyond immigration, when considering the tools of ImmigrationOS such as continuous data ingestion, association mapping, and predictive targeting. The threat is not limited to ICE's ability to detain more efficiently. The greater danger is the growing potential for function creep, where the expansion of a technology's use is justified by the fact that it already exists. Applied here, the danger is that applying the tools of ImmigrationOS elsewhere in society would normalize a mode of governance where algorithmic sorting becomes a routine component of public life. Embedding these tools into state operations will shape who is visible to the state, who is targeted, and who is afforded the right to move through society without friction.

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<sup>17</sup> Lyons, T. (2025, September 6). Interview with ICE Director Todd Lyons [Video]. The Glen Beck Podcast, Facebook. <https://fb.watch/DYbgSngJ6Q/>

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