



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on October 23, 2025

ICE Arms Up: Weapons Spending Jumps Sevenfold

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has sharply increased spending on weapons in 2025, according to the new investigation by [Popular Information](#), led by Judd Legum. The records from the Federal Procurement Data System (FPDS) quoted in the report show that spending in the “small arms, ordnance, and ordnance accessories manufacturing” category surged by roughly 700 percent compared to 2024 levels.

From January 20 through October 18, ICE spent approximately \$71,515,762 on small arms. By contrast, during the same period in 2024, the spending was only about \$9,715,843. According to the report,



AP Images

ICE agents detain a protester in Little Village neighborhood of Chicago

Most of the spending was on guns and armor, but there have also been significant purchases of chemical weapons and “guided missile warheads and explosive components.”

Just on September 29, ICE made a purchase of \$9,098,590 from [Geissele Automatics](#). The company manufactures and sells AR-15-style semi-automatic rifles, ammunition, and tactical gear.

The analysis points out that the scale of this year’s weapons spending far exceeds anything seen in recent history:

Spending by ICE on guns and other weapons this year not only dwarfs spending during the Biden administration but also during Trump’s first term. In 2019, for example, ICE spent \$5.7 million on small arms through October 18. Average ICE spending on small arms during Trump’s first four years was about \$8.4 million.

Official Response and Justification

ICE’s leadership pushed back on several of the report’s findings — particularly the jarring procurement records referencing missiles. Tricia McLaughlin, assistant secretary at the Department of Homeland Security for ICE, described claims that the agency’s spending included guided missile warheads and explosives were false. *WIRED* [reported](#) that the procurement record described the payment as “multiple distraction devices” for ICE operations, and the supplier’s CEO said the missile label “appears to be an error.”

According to [The Independent](#), ICE framed the uptick a routine extension of its mission,

“ICE buying its law enforcement officers guns and non-lethal resources is a non-story,” she said. “It should come as no surprise that we purchase and acquire firearms for law enforcement — especially amid the increased onboarding of 11,000 agents thanks to



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President Trump's Big Beautiful Bill.

The assistant secretary also stressed the increasingly risky nature of the ICE agents' jobs:

McLaughlin urged the press to cover “the 1,000 percent increase in assaults against law enforcement including terrorist attacks, cars being used as weapons, and officers having rocks and Molotov cocktails thrown at them.”

If ICE's \$71.5 million in small-arms spending is divided among its 31,000 active and newly recruited agents, it amounts to roughly \$2,300 per person. The agency officials insist such purchases are “no surprise.”

Escalation and Oversight Gaps

Popular Information points out that the same surge in weaponry has coincided with a wave of violent encounters between ICE officers and civilians. That sparked lawsuits, local investigations, and growing public backlash.

Calls for greater oversight — including mandatory body cameras — are now gaining traction. At a recent congressional hearing, ICE Deputy Field Office Director Shawn Byers acknowledged the concerns. He [told lawmakers](#) that Congress should provide more funding to expand body-camera coverage.

The tension between ICE's expanding arsenal and its shrinking oversight mechanisms came to a head in Chicago. After a series of violent clashes between ICE agents and protesters — including verified instances of tear gas and pepper-ball rounds fired into crowds and vehicles — a federal judge intervened. As reported by [Verge](#) last Thursday,

The decision is an expansion of a [temporary restraining order](#) issued by [Judge Sara L. Ellis of the Federal District Court for the Northern District of Illinois] last week, limiting the use of certain dispersal tactics, including the use of riot control weapons like pepper spray and tear gas. These tactics were reportedly being routinely [used against protesters and journalists](#) in a troubling pattern of a [crackdown](#) on [free speech](#) and the [press](#). Ellis said she was “profoundly concerned” that her order was not being followed.

Elsewhere, similar confrontations have unfolded in Portland, Los Angeles, and other cities. Local reports describe federal agents firing chemical munitions and projectiles during protests, with allegations that journalists, clergy, and bystanders were among those injured.

Public frustration has also been fueled by the growing gap between rhetoric and reality. Despite Trump's assurances that enforcement would target the “worst of the worst” — hardened criminals and gang members — [federal data](#) show that the overwhelming majority of those detained by ICE have no criminal convictions. Certainly, crossing the border without authorization violates [8 U.S.C. § 1325](#), which is a misdemeanor offense. While unlawful, it is far removed from the violent crimes the administration cites to justify a militarized response. At the same time, some [media reports](#) and [Democratic lawmakers](#) have accused ICE of wrongfully arresting and, in some cases, deporting U.S. citizens.



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A Military in All but Name

This rapid escalation in weaponry by ICE dovetails with major budget expansions. Under the “One Big Beautiful Bill,” signed in July, funneled a whopping \$170 billion into ICE through 2029, multiplying its former \$8 billion annual budget more than twentyfold.

In These Times [report](#) put it in perspective:

If the immigration enforcement apparatus of the United States were its own national military, it would be the 13th most heavily funded in the world. This puts it higher than the national militaries of Poland, Italy, Australia, Canada, Turkey and Spain — and just below Israel.

The analysis notes that the new funding includes \$45 billion to expand detention capacity and nearly \$30 billion for ICE removal and enforcement operations. These cover new staff, transport infrastructure, and logistics. The latter allocation alone raises ICE’s detention budget to about \$14 billion per year. That figure now surpasses the total military spending of more than 120 countries, including Norway, Pakistan, Denmark, Greece, and Iran.

Much of the new funding is directed not only toward weapons and personnel but also toward surveillance infrastructure. As reported by [Biometric Update](#) in June,

More than \$5.2 billion within ICE’s share is dedicated to infrastructure modernization, including \$2.5 billion specifically for artificial intelligence systems, biometric data collection platforms, and digital case tracking.

These systems are not vaguely defined. [Department of Homeland Security] officials familiar with the bill’s intent say the funds are aimed at expanding ICE’s access to mobile biometric tools, integrating facial recognition into field operations, automating risk scoring for individuals in deportation proceedings, and accelerating case processing through AI-driven platforms.

To assume that such tools will remain confined to their stated mission would be naïve — dangerously so.

Ever-expanding Police State

Of course, the Constitution grants the federal government authority to secure the nation’s borders and regulate immigration — powers derived from Congress’s control over naturalization and foreign affairs, and the executive’s duty to enforce the law. But the framers never envisioned those powers exercised through a standing domestic police force with open-ended jurisdiction inside the country. Today, under the banner of immigration enforcement, the government expands this authority into an apparatus with unprecedented militarized and digital capabilities. The Founders would have recognized that not as protection, but as consolidation, the very concentration of power the Republic was designed to prevent.

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