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Masked ICE agents open the door to abuse. We need accountability to create trust | Opinion

What ICE is doing under the cover of anonymity — raiding homes, detaining workers, separating families — does more than harm immigrant communities. It damages the very fabric of public trust.

Mark Proctor Guest Columnist

July 23, 2025, 10:20 a.m. CT

Key Points AI-assisted summary ⓘ

Unidentified ICE agents operating in communities raise concerns about transparency and accountability in law enforcement.

The author argues for ICE agents to wear standard uniforms, display identification and be subject to the same scrutiny as local law enforcement.

The lack of transparency and accountability for ICE agents creates a dangerous environment for both immigrants and the general public.

During my decades in law enforcement, I arrested violent felons — drug traffickers, armed robbers and repeat offenders. I worked the streets, knocked on doors and faced danger head-on. And I did it all with my nameplate and badge on my chest, my face uncovered and my identity known to the communities I served.

I didn't have the luxury of anonymity because in professional policing, accountability isn't optional. It's the foundation of public trust.

That's why I'm deeply concerned by the rise of masked, unidentified federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents operating in our communities. These agents — often in plain clothes, with covered faces and no visible identification

— are detaining immigrants, raiding homes and workplaces, and making arrests without offering the most basic form of transparency: telling the public who they are.

U.S. Sen. Marsha Blackburn’s recent proposal to criminalize the public release of information about federal officers — [so-called “anti-doxxing” legislation](#) — misses the point entirely. No officer should be threatened or harassed, but secrecy is not the same as safety. Shielding government agents from identification during public enforcement operations erodes the integrity of law enforcement and opens the door to abuse.

Let’s call this what it is: state power without a name. And that is dangerous — not just for immigrants, but for our democracy.

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ICE agents should abide by the same rules as local officers

Some argue that ICE agents must hide their identities for protection. I understand the risks. But local and state officers face danger every single day.

I arrested individuals wanted for murder, carjackings, and armed assaults — people who had far less to lose than the average undocumented immigrant. Yet I never once covered my face. If your role requires you to remain anonymous to the public you serve, perhaps the mission — not the visibility — needs to be reexamined.

Others claim that ICE operates under a different federal mandate. That may be true in terms of jurisdiction, but not in principle. Whether enforcing municipal laws or immigration codes, government power must remain transparent and accountable to the people.

Here’s another key difference: Most local and state law enforcement officers today wear body cameras. They’re filmed by dash cams, surveillance systems and the cell phones of everyday citizens. They perform their duties knowing that every interaction may be recorded, scrutinized and made public. That’s not a burden, it’s a safeguard. It protects officers and civilians alike and reinforces accountability.

Opinion: America's immigration approach is hypocritical. It's time to put people first

Yet ICE agents rarely have body cams, are rarely scrutinized and are rarely held accountable in the same way. They operate in the shadows while beat cops and troopers operate in the light. That disparity undermines trust and invites misconduct.

ICE leadership must implement and enforce a clear, consistent policy requiring agents involved in field operations to wear a standard uniform, clearly display their name and badge number and carry visible credentials. This is not an unreasonable demand, it is a baseline expectation in modern law enforcement. Uniforms protect the public, clarify authority and protect officers themselves from mistaken identity or accusations of misconduct.

If ICE wants the same respect as local and state law enforcement, they must follow the same rules.

Allowing ICE agents to operate in secrecy opens the door to abuse

Some supporters of ICE's tactics argue that internal oversight within the Department of Homeland Security is sufficient. However, without names or badge numbers, there's no realistic way for individuals to report misconduct, challenge abuse or even confirm who was at their door. That's not oversight. That's impunity.

Another argument says, "Illegal immigration is still illegal." Yes, crossing or overstaying in the U.S. without authorization violates federal law. But there's a wide gap between enforcing immigration laws and normalizing secretive, extrajudicial enforcement. An undocumented person working to support a family is not equivalent — morally or legally — to a masked officer pulling someone from their home or workplace without accountability.

And let's not ignore the broader danger this creates for everyone, not just immigrants. Criminals have long impersonated law enforcement to commit robbery, extortion and assault. When legitimate agents operate in plain clothes, with no

visible ID, and refuse to identify themselves, civilians can't tell the difference between lawful authority and criminal deception. We are blurring a critical line — and that puts the public at serious risk.

Local police departments should treat any unidentifiable person claiming to be ICE — and attempting enforcement — as a potential impersonation case. If someone shows up wearing tactical gear that anyone can buy online and refuses to provide ID or credentials, they should be investigated. Public safety depends on clear, verifiable authority, not secret policing.

Opinion: [Trump's handling of Epstein files isn't the transparency he promised](#)

Finally, I've heard the claim that criticizing ICE undermines law enforcement. I reject that entirely. Law enforcement's legitimacy doesn't come from its power, it comes from its discipline, transparency and professionalism. I wore the badge proudly and publicly because I was accountable to the people I served. That visibility made me better at my job, and it made my community safer.

What ICE is doing under the cover of anonymity — raiding homes, detaining workers, separating families — does more than harm immigrant communities. It damages the very fabric of public trust. It creates fear, undermines cooperation with local police and sets a dangerous precedent in which government agents operate without name, badge or responsibility.

We don't fix that with more secrecy. We fix it with accountability.

If ICE agents want the public's trust — the same trust that every beat cop, trooper and deputy must earn every day — they need to operate in the same manner: show your face, wear your name and stand by your actions.

That isn't weakness. It's professionalism, and it's integrity.

Anything less isn't justice. It's unchecked power. And that should concern every American — no matter your politics.

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