

## TRUMP MADE MINNEAPOLIS INEVITABLE

di Joe Margulies

1. Friends in Italy and around the world gaze at what is happening in the United States with slack-jawed astonishment. Even those who have steeled themselves to the norm-shattering levels of gun violence that occur in the United States never thought they would see civilians murdered in the street by roving members of a heavily armed, federal militia, in broad daylight while cameras filmed from every angle. Less still did they imagine these murders would go unpunished and the killers go unnamed.

It may be too much to hope that I can make sense of what is happening in the United States for an Italian audience, but I think I can explain the contradictions within the Trump coalition that brought it all to pass. Within this explanation, I hope Italians find lessons for their own fights against the threat of totalitarianism, however advanced they think that threat may be in Italy.

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2. As much as anyone in recent U.S. history, Donald Trump thrives on demonization. In his 2024 presidential campaign, Trump's venom targeted a seemingly endless list of enemies—from so-called leftists to "elites"; from Muslims to immigrants—all of whom were supposedly hellbent on destroying America. But the most potent demon he conjured was the marauding invader, a bloodthirsty and rapacious savage who crosses the border illegally and preys on innocent Americans.

Trump's vow to quickly deport violent criminals who were in the United States illegally was one of his most popular campaign promises. At least in the abstract, American citizens broadly favor the deportation of foreign nationals who have committed acts of great violence, and support removing them from our communities. But it is one thing to promise that you will save the country from an imaginary demon and quite another to do it. As soon as Trump took office, he ran headlong into reality, and his response to this reality has exposed the contradictions in his campaign and the underlying ruthlessness within his administration.

To begin with, though a majority of Americans support the deportation of undocumented immigrants who have committed violent crimes, the number of immigrants in this category is a tiny fraction of the number that Trump vowed to deport during the campaign. Though he was characteristically vague about his intentions, there were roughly [14 million undocumented immigrants](#) in the United States at the end of 2023. But as with any group, the great majority of these people live their entire lives on the right side of the law — indeed, [even more so than U.S. citizens](#), “immigrants—including undocumented immigrants—are less likely to commit crimes than the U.S-born. This is true at the national, state, county and neighborhood levels, and for both violent and non-violent crimes.”

At the same, violent crime in the United States has been on a generational decline since the 1990s. Rates of violent crime spiked dangerously during the pandemic, for reasons we still don’t really understand, but in the last few years, they have [resumed their decline](#) and are now generally below pre-pandemic levels. Though final 2025 numbers aren’t in yet, it appears that [murder rates](#) in the United States have fallen to the lowest levels *ever recorded by law enforcement*, using data going back to 1900.

3. Taken together, this means that Trump’s campaign promise was always grotesquely out of sync with what a majority of Americans want. The number of people who Americans believe, at least in the abstract, should be deported has always been vastly smaller than the number Trump vowed to target.

But having campaigned on a promise to fend off the apocalypse, Trump could hardly declare on day one that the problem didn’t exist. He needed to behave, in other words, as though there were an existential threat not merely at our border, but already in our midst. And to some of his advisors—and [perhaps to Trump himself](#)—there is. Trump’s top advisors on immigration, and especially Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller, view immigrants as an [existential threat](#) to Western civilization. It was Miller, for instance, who [drafted](#) the language that Trump delivered in a 2017 speech to the people of Poland:

*The fundamental question of our time is whether the West has the will to survive. Do we have the confidence in our values to defend them at any cost? Do we have enough respect for our citizens to protect our borders? Do we have the desire and the courage to preserve our civilization in the face of those who would subvert and destroy it?*

Unlike the great majority of Americans, who tend to judge immigrants based on what they *do* rather than on the mere fact that they are immigrants, Miller and his nativist ilk do not make these distinctions. They do not distinguish between “good” and “bad” immigrants; to them, [they’re all bad](#), and they must

all be rounded up and booted out as quickly and as unceremoniously as possible. In his xenophobic hysteria, Miller has made the deportation of immigrants his highest priority. In May 2025, we learned that he established arrest quotas for ICE agents—[3000 arrests/day](#)—vastly more than ICE was making at the time. [Every day](#), he puts the enormous pressure of the White House on Homeland Security officials to get the job done, regardless of the human cost.

4. And so, it was always inevitable that a clash would take shape. The hardliners in the administration were always bent on mass deportation of, at a minimum, all undocumented immigrants, a policy vastly more draconian than what most Americans support. But two additional things have given this clash the particularly ugly form it now takes in places like Minneapolis.

4.1. First, though immigrants are vital to the entire U.S. economy and are spread widely across the nation, Trump does not target them everywhere. There is a reason, for instance, that we do not see major ICE operating in states led by Republicans.

Instead, Trump uses highly visible immigration enforcement as a form of payback to sow chaos in Democratic strongholds. Indeed, he is perfectly explicit about this. In January, 2026, *after* ICE agents in Minneapolis had murdered Renee Goode, Trump [promised](#) Minnesotans on his social media platform that “THE DAY OF RECKONING AND RETRIBUTION IS COMING!” (Needless to say, the capitalization and emphasis are all in the original.) Shortly after issuing what Trump surely thought was some sort of thunderclap from God, there followed the surge of ICE enforcement that led to the murder of Alex Pretti. In short, Trump uses immigration enforcement as a weapon of partisan advantage.

4.2. Second, Trump is a performative authoritarian. He loves muscular displays of military might, all for the purpose of bringing his detractors to heel. To submit. To bend. He does not simply want order, he wants obedience, even obeisance. And unfortunately, his most passionate supporters love him for this. They worship his strongman, womanizing, above-the-law persona. These are the people who cheer at the plunder of Venezuela, sneer at Europe, and stomp lustily at the thought of seizing Greenland. And they erupt in raucous applause whenever heavily armed ICE agents drag a Black or Brown woman from the seat of her car and throw her to the ground. Trump cannot survive without this portion of his electorate. They are more than his base; they are his lifeline. Because of them, and because they support Trump’s worst personality defects, it was always inevitable that ICE enforcement would be not simply heavy-handed. It would be fascistic.

In this way, the pieces were all in place for the chaos we now see unfolding in Minneapolis: A majority of Americans support a small, targeted program that deports people shown to have committed violent crimes; the administration supports mass deportation of immigrants whose only crime is that they came to the country illegally, perhaps decades ago, but who in the meantime have lived lawful, productive lives and have become embedded in their communities; in attacking these people, the administration uses the strongarm tactics of the police state; and it visits this horror selectively, using its brutal enforcement power as an unchecked political tool.

Under these circumstances, the uprising in Minneapolis was inevitable. It was inevitable that the Trump administration would be viciously and visibly over-aggressive in its politically-motivated enforcement, and that it would target people loved and embraced by their communities. And it was inevitable that Minnesotans would rise up to resist this aggression, as would the residents in any major American city. It was inevitable that Trump and his acolytes would misjudge this uprising and would try to crush it before they tried to understand it. And because all of that was inevitable, it was just a matter of time before ICE began shooting and killing innocent Americans.