

Immigrant Families Disengaged from Public Life and Essential Services Because of Immigration Concerns in 2025

Findings from the Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey

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In 2025, immigrant families experienced intensifying immigration enforcement actions that led to significant disruptions for many communities.¹ These actions included enforcement in places previously designated as sensitive locations, such as schools and health care settings; data sharing agreements between the Department of Homeland Security and public benefits programs; increased coordination between immigration authorities and state and local police; and expansion of detention capacity, all of which led to rapid deportations and concerns about due process (Altman, Broder, and D’Avanzo 2025; Chishti et al. 2026, Ruiz Soto 2025, Chishti and Putzel-Kavanaugh 2025). Media reports have also highlighted aggressive enforcement operations with surges of federal agents to several cities in the US.² Although undocumented immigrants are ostensibly the primary target of enforcement, green card holders and others with lawful immigration status, naturalized citizens, and US-born citizens have also been detained and affected in other ways.³

Some evidence suggests that ramped-up immigration enforcement has caused some immigrant families to avoid activities such as getting health care or going to work (Schumacher et al. 2025).⁴ Renewed proposals to change the “public charge” rule to deny green cards to applicants who participated in safety net programs and other restrictions of families’ access to these programs may cause some immigrant families to forgo programs for which they may be eligible, which could worsen already-high rates of material hardship among these families (Altman, Broder, and D’Avanzo 2025; Gelatt 2026; Bernstein et al. 2025; Gonzalez et al. 2025).⁵

In this brief, we use data from the Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey (WBNS), a nationally representative survey of adults (box 1), to assess disruptions to families’ activities and immigration-related concerns reported by adults in immigrant families (families in which one or more people living in the household were born outside the US, hereafter “immigrant families”). We present patterns overall and by reported citizenship and immigration status of family members living in the household (box 2)⁶ and awareness of local activity by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) or other immigration enforcement activity.⁷ These data were collected in December 2025, almost a year into the current administration and before the high-profile enforcement campaign and fatal shootings in Minneapolis.⁸ We find that in 2025, immigrant families did not participate in or were worried about activities such as sending their children to school, going to work, and visiting the doctor (hereafter “essential activities”), and avoided participating in safety net programs because of immigration concerns. Disengagement from public life and concerns were highest for mixed-status families (which include undocumented as well as lawfully present immigrants and/or US citizens) and respondents who reported ICE activity in their communities. Given that many immigrant families include children, especially mixed-status families, withdrawal from essential activities could result in harm to health, education, and economic well-being for these children (Allison et al. 2019; Howell and Kenney 2012; Wherry et al. 2016).

BOX 1

2025 WELL-BEING AND BASIC NEEDS SURVEY

The WBNS is a nationally representative, annual survey of adults that monitors individual and family well-being in the context of a changing safety net. Launched by the Urban Institute in December 2017, the WBNS provides timely information on the challenges that households face in meeting basic needs such as food, housing, and health care.

More than 10,000 adults ages 18 and older participated in the December 2025 round of the survey, which they could complete online in English or Spanish. Participants were sampled from the KnowledgePanel, a probability-based internet panel maintained by Ipsos that includes households with and without internet access. To assess experiences of adults in immigrant families, we oversampled noncitizens and constructed survey weights to produce nationally representative estimates for adults who were born outside the US or lived with a relative who was born outside the US. For this analysis, we examined the experiences of the 2,234 adults in immigrant families.

Immigrant Families, Especially Mixed-Status Families, Did Not Engage in Activities Essential to Well-Being Because of Immigration Concerns

In December 2025, about 1 in 5 adults in immigrant families (18 percent) reported that they or a family member had chosen not to do one or more of six activities in the prior year because of not wanting to draw attention to a family member's immigration status (figure 1). These included activities that could be essential to their ability to earn income, such as going to work (9 percent) and driving a car (11 percent). About 8 percent did not visit a doctor's office, clinic, or hospital, potentially leading to interrupted access to health care services. And 10 percent of immigrant families with children reported they did not take their children to school, child care, and/or after-school activities, places essential to children's development. Roughly 1 in 10 adults in immigrant families (9 percent) did not go to religious services or community events, and 11 percent reported avoiding talking to the police, factors that could increase social isolation, limit access to community services, and reduce reporting of crimes.

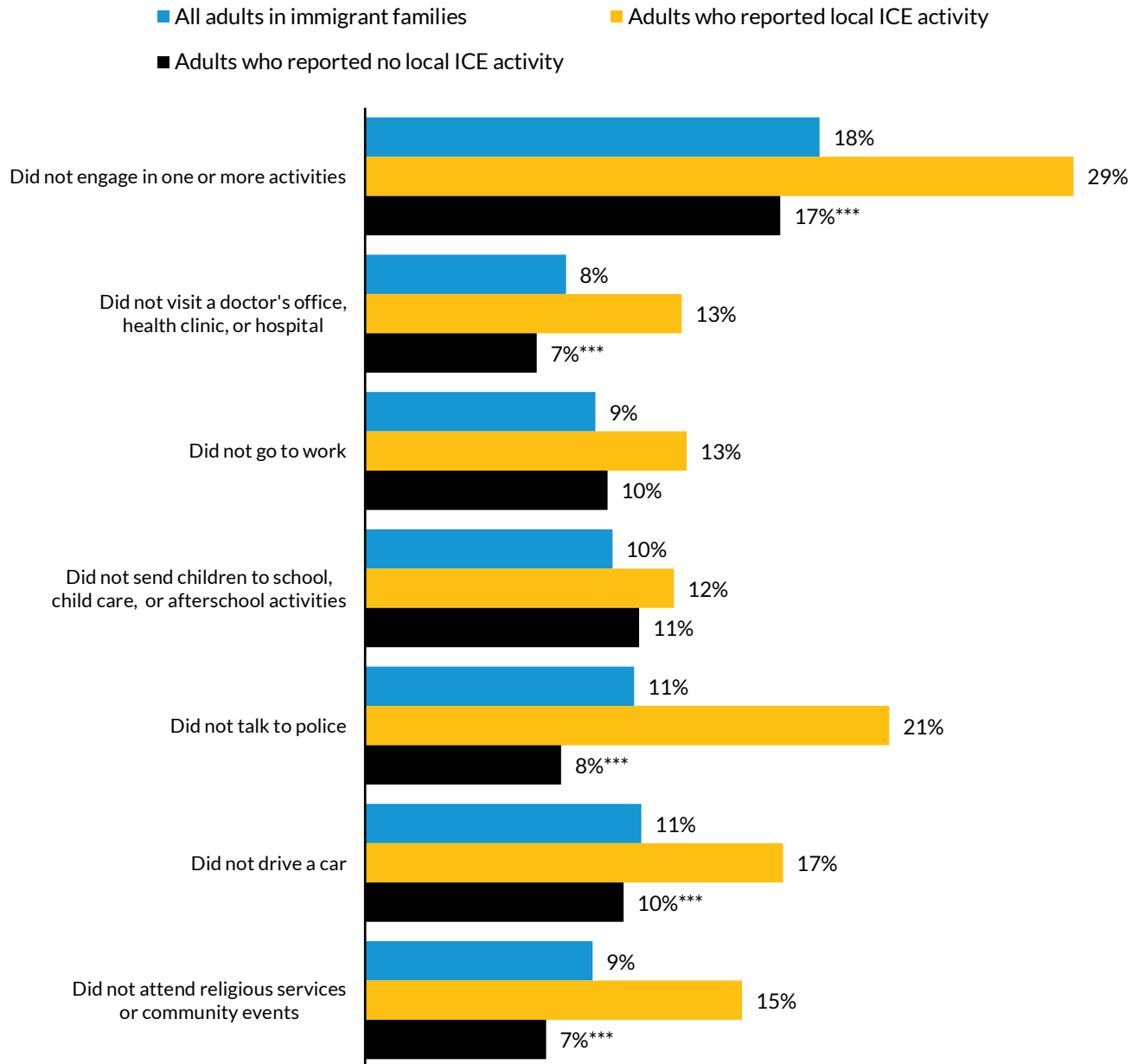
Immigrant families disengaged from essential activities in the context of broader immigration concerns. An accompanying analysis finds that working-age adults in immigrant families were more likely to report being worried about deportation in 2025 (39 percent) compared to 2024 (33 percent) and that 42 percent worried about being approached by ICE or other immigration authorities in 2025 (Bernstein et al. 2026). Figure 1 shows that adults in immigrant families who reported that an ICE raid or other immigration enforcement activity had taken place in 2025 in their area (i.e., where they live, work, shop, or regularly go) were more likely to report disruptions to essential activities (29 percent), although 17 percent of those who reported they were not aware of local ICE activity also avoided at least one activity. Immigrant families who were aware of local ICE activity were more likely than those not aware of such activity to report not visiting a health care provider (13 percent versus 7 percent), attending religious services or community events (15 percent versus 7 percent), talking to police (21 percent versus 8 percent), or driving a car (17 percent versus 10 percent).²

The measure of local ICE activity is self-reported and reflects a respondent's awareness of local enforcement activities, which may or may not be visible to or perceived by respondents (Bernstein et al. 2026). Awareness of enforcement activity does not necessarily mean that their locality has been targeted for a high-profile operation and could include a variety of activities such as traffic stops, arrests at home, or raids at worksites or other community spaces.

FIGURE 1

Almost 1 in 5 Adults in Immigrant Families Reported Their Families Did Not Engage in Essential Activities in 2025 Because of Immigration Concerns

In the past 12 months, was there a time when you or anyone in your family chose not to do any of the following activities because you did not want to draw attention to your immigration status or the immigration status of a family member?



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Source: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2025.

Notes: ICE = US Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The sample for the figure is adults in immigrant families ages 18 and older. Estimates for the measure “sending children to school, child care, or after-school activities” are limited to immigrant families with children under 19. The measure of local ICE activity is self-reported and reflects respondents’ awareness of any type of local immigration enforcement activities.

*/**/** Estimate differs significantly from adults who reported local ICE activity at the 0.10/0.05/0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

BOX 2

FAMILY CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION STATUS

Survey respondents reported immigration and citizenship status for themselves, spouses/partners, children under 19, and other relatives living with them. We classify survey respondents into the following household categories:

- **All-citizen immigrant families.** Households in which all family members are naturalized or US-born citizens
- **Green card and citizen families.** Households in which at least one family member is a permanent resident (i.e., a green card holder) and all other members are either naturalized or US-born citizens or permanent residents
- **Mixed-status families.^a** Households in which one or more family members are undocumented and all other family members either are naturalized or US-born citizens, are permanent residents, or have another lawful immigration status

^aOur definition of adults in mixed-status families excludes (1) adults living in households in which all family members who are noncitizens without a green card are living in the US with other lawful temporary immigration status and (2) adults in households in which everyone is undocumented. We include these two groups when providing estimates for all adults in immigrant families. We do not disaggregate data for these two groups because of small sample sizes.

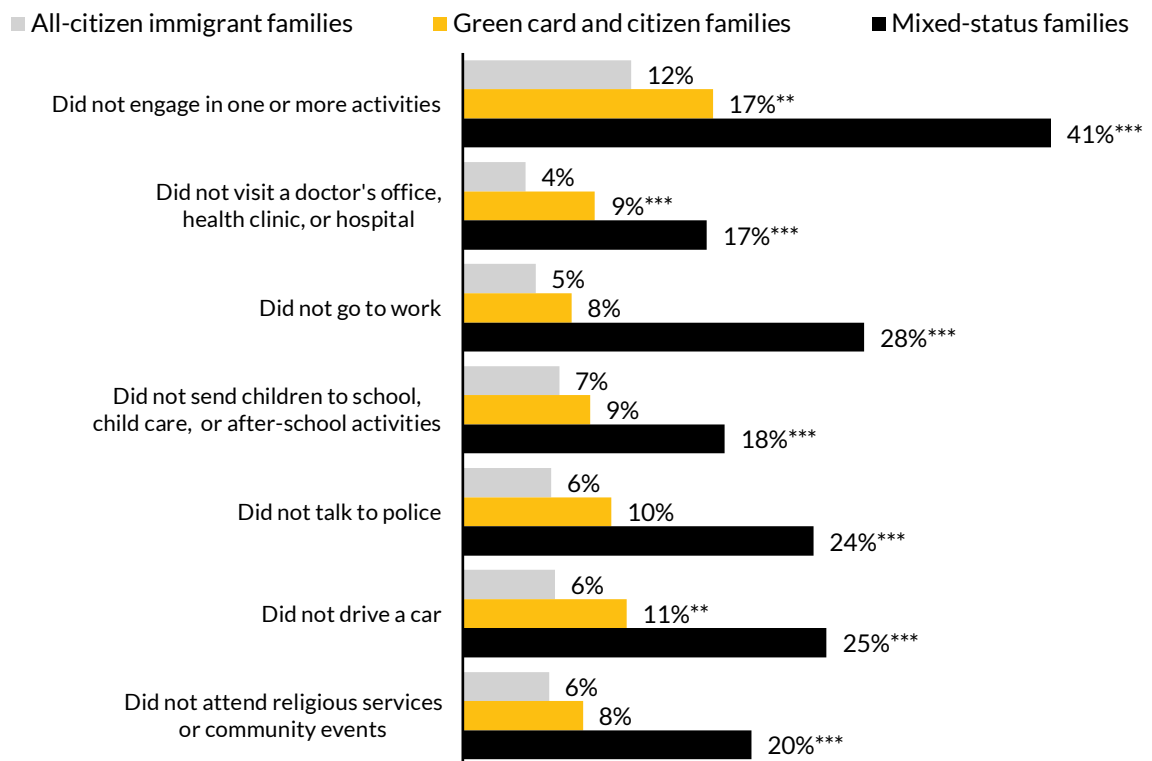
Mixed-status families chose not to engage in essential activities at particularly high rates: about 2 in 5 adults in mixed-status families (41 percent) reported not engaging in essential activities because of immigration concerns (figure 2). But adults in all types of immigrant families reported their families not taking part in one or more essential activities, including about 1 in 9 adults in immigrant families comprised entirely of US citizens (12 percent), and more than 1 in 6 adults in families made up of US citizens and green card holders (17 percent).

These patterns are consistent with patterns by family immigration status for adults worried about being approached by immigration authorities. Bernstein et al. (2026) found that 63 percent of adults in mixed-status families, 49 percent of those in families with US citizens and green card holders, and 30 percent of those in immigrant families with all US citizens reported being worried about being approached by ICE or other immigration authorities.

FIGURE 2

Adults in Mixed-Status Families Were More Likely Than Other Immigrant Families to Not Engage in Essential Activities in 2025

In the past 12 months, was there a time when you or anyone in your family chose not to do any of the following activities because you did not want to draw attention to your immigration status or the immigration status of a family member?



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Source: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2025.

Notes: The sample for the figure is adults in immigrant families ages 18 and older. Estimates for the measure “sending children to school, child care, or after-school activities” are limited to immigrant families with children under 19. Mixed-status families are families that include undocumented as well as lawfully present immigrants and/or US citizens.

*/**/** Estimate differs significantly from adults in all-citizen immigrant families at the 0.10/0.05/0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

Mixed-Status Families Were Most Worried About Engaging in Essential Activities, but Adults in Families Without Any Undocumented Members Also Reported Worries

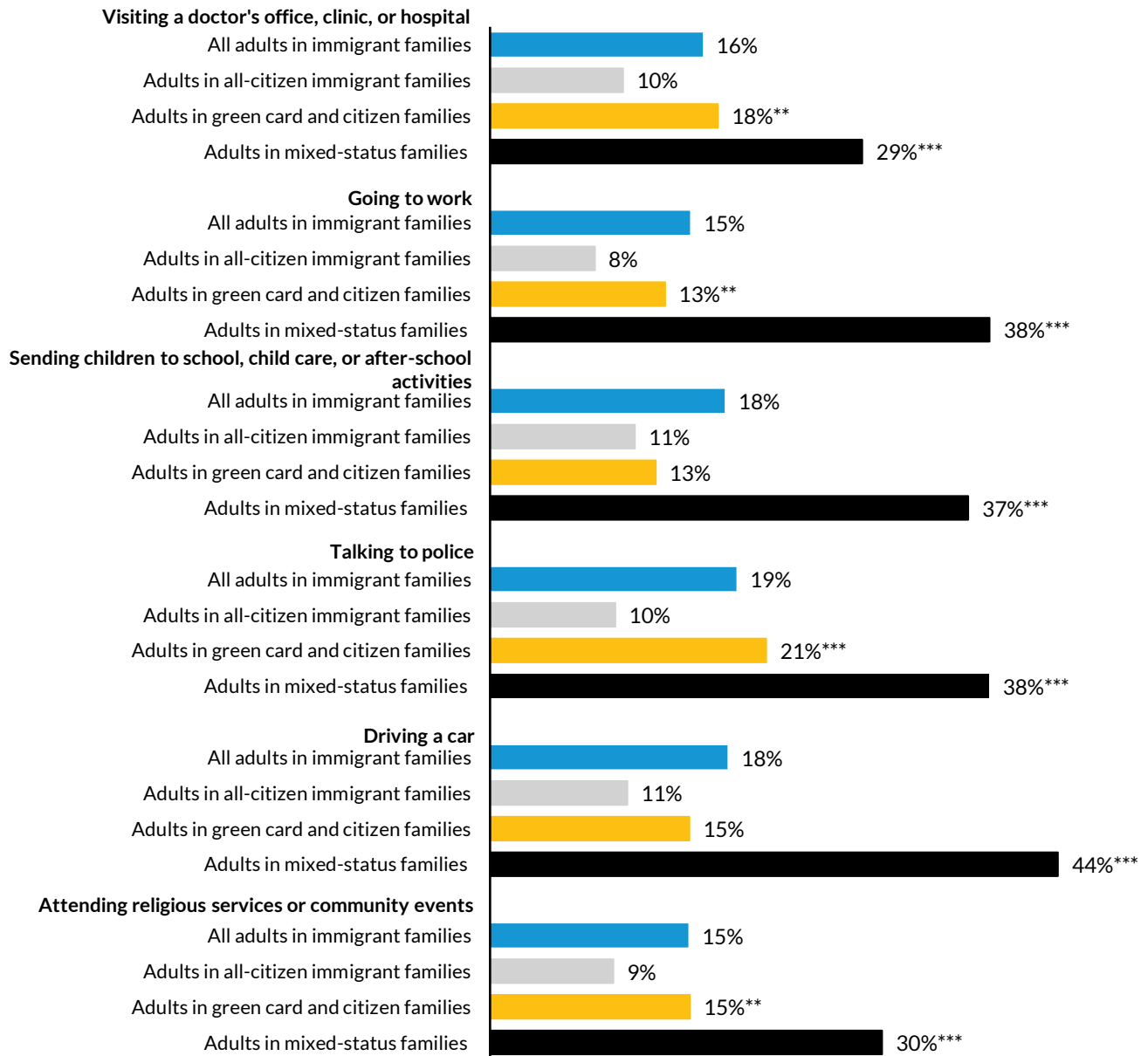
Overall, almost 3 in 10 adults in immigrant families (29 percent) worried “a lot” or “some” about engaging in one or more essential activities as of December 2025 (data not shown). Among working-age adults (ages 18 to 64) in immigrant families, the share reporting worry about engaging in these activities was similar to the share reporting worry in the December 2024 round of the WBNS.¹⁰

All types of immigrant families worried about engaging in essential activities, but those in mixed-status families reported the highest rates of worry (figure 3). Adults in mixed-status families were over twice as likely as those in all-citizen immigrant families to report worrying a lot or some about visiting a doctor’s office, clinic, or hospital (29 percent versus 10 percent), going to work (38 percent versus 8 percent), sending children to school, child care, or after-school activities (37 percent versus 11 percent), and talking to police (38 versus 10 percent). They were also much more likely to report worry about driving a car (44 percent versus 11 percent) and attending religious services or community events (30 percent versus 9 percent).

FIGURE 3

Three in 10 Adults in Mixed-Status Families Reported Worry About Essential Activities in 2025

Share of adults in immigrant families who reported worrying “a lot” or “some” about doing essential activities because of not wanting to draw attention to their immigration status or the immigration status of a family member



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Source: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2025.

Notes: The sample for the figure is adults in immigrant families ages 18 and older. Estimates for the measure “sending children to school, child care, or after-school activities” are limited to immigrant families with children under 19. Mixed-status families are families that include undocumented as well as lawfully present immigrants and/or US citizens.

*/**/** Estimate differs significantly from adults in all-citizen immigrant families at the 0.10/0.05/0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

Immigrant Families Avoided Safety Net Programs Because of Green Card or Data Sharing Concerns

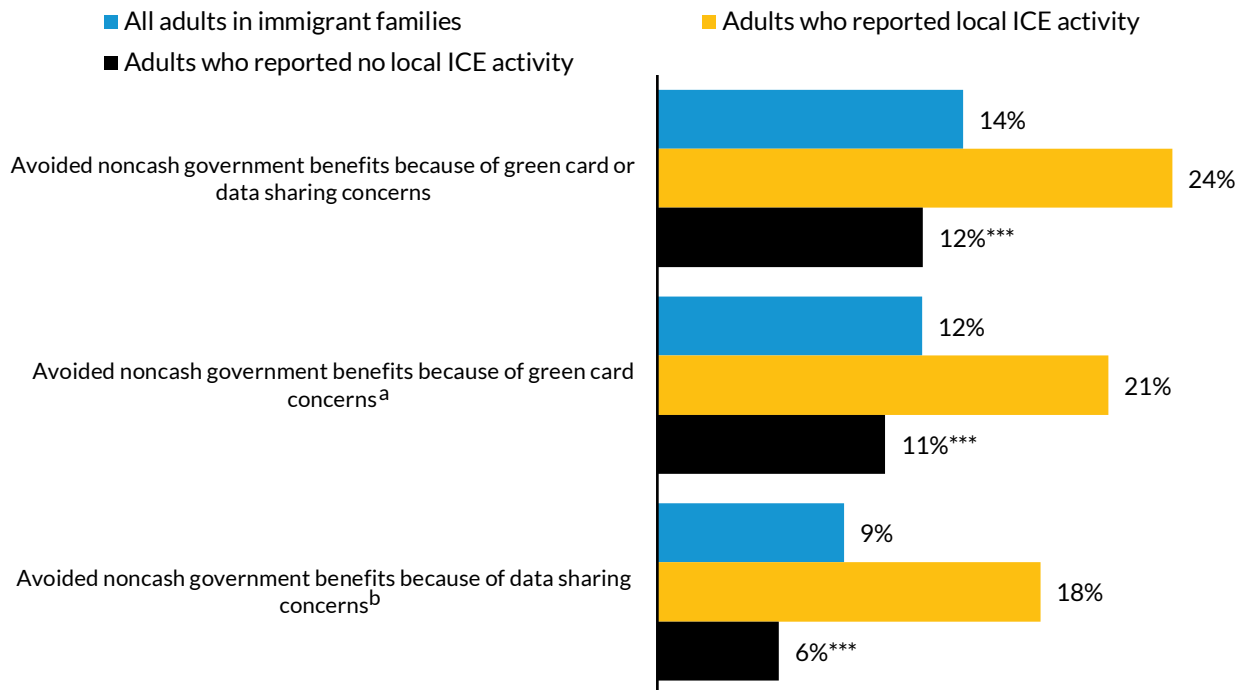
As shown above, immigrant families disengaged from activities that can help generate income—such as work and driving—because of immigration concerns, likely placing strains on family finances. Moreover, immigrant families faced renewed federal efforts to penalize green card applicants for using safety net programs and cuts to public programs that already had limited eligibility for immigrants (Altman et al. 2025; Gelatt 2025).¹¹ These compounding challenges likely create stress and hardship for immigrant families, especially if declines in income are not met with corresponding safety net program supports when families are eligible.

We found that 12 percent of adults in immigrant families avoided safety net programs such as Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program because of worry that it would disqualify them or a family member from obtaining a green card (i.e., chilling effects) (figure 4).¹² Almost 1 in 10 adults in immigrant families (9 percent) reported their family avoided safety net programs out of concern that personal information would be shared with immigration authorities. Just over 1 in 7 adults in immigrant families (14 percent) reported avoiding noncash government benefit programs in the past year because of one or both of these reasons.

Both adults who were and were not aware of local ICE activity reported chilling effects on program participation, but chilling effects were more prevalent among adults aware of local ICE activity. Adults in immigrant families who reported local ICE activity experienced chilling effects because of green card concerns at nearly twice the rate of other adults in immigrant families, 21 percent versus 11 percent. Additionally, adults in immigrant families who reported local ICE activity were about three times as likely to report they avoided safety net programs because of concerns about data sharing (18 percent versus 6 percent). These findings may mean that adults in immigrant families who are most attuned to local ICE enforcement activity are those who are also most worried about placing their families' future immigration status at risk.

FIGURE 4

One in 7 Adults in Immigrant Families Avoided Safety Net Programs Because of Immigration Concerns



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Source: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2025

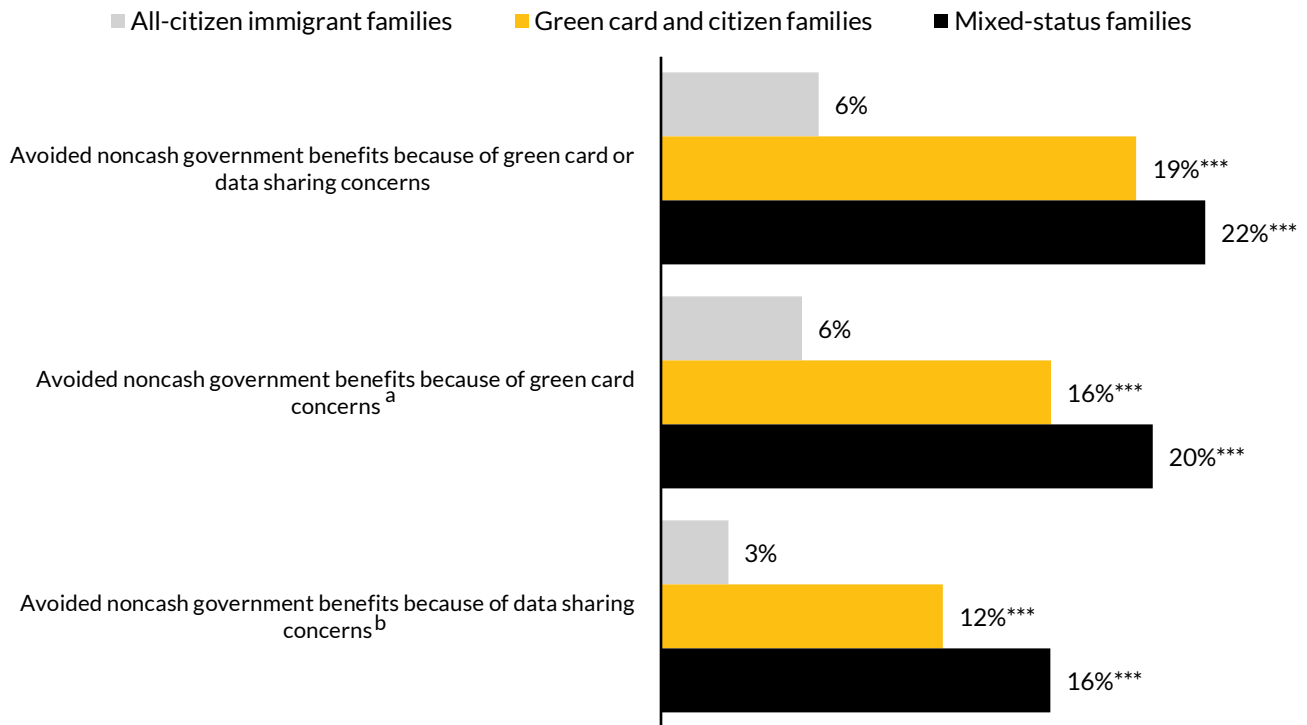
Notes: ICE = US Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Figure shows the share of adults in immigrant families ages 18 and older who reported someone in their family decided not to apply for and/or stopped participating in one or more noncash government benefits because of immigration concerns, which refer to (a) reporting yes when asked “Was there a time in the past 12 months when you or someone in your family decided not to apply for one or more noncash government benefits, such as Medicaid or CHIP, SNAP (or food stamps), or housing subsidies, because you were worried it would disqualify you or a family member or relative from obtaining a green card?” or when asked “Was there a time in the past 12 months when you or someone in your family stopped participating in any noncash government benefits, such as Medicaid or CHIP, SNAP (or food stamps), or housing subsidies, because you were worried it would disqualify you or a family member or relative from obtaining a green card?” and (b) reporting yes when asked, “Was there a time in the past 12 months when you or someone in your family did not apply for or participate in noncash government benefits because you were worried that your or your family member’s personal information would be shared with immigration authorities?” The measure of local ICE activity is self-reported and reflects respondents’ awareness of any type of local immigration enforcement activities.

*/**/** Estimate differs significantly from adults who reported local ICE activity at the 0.10/0.05/0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

Adults in mixed-status families and families with both citizens and green card holders were more likely than adults in all-citizen immigrant families to report not participating in safety net programs because of green card concerns (20 percent and 16 percent versus 6 percent; figure 5). Overall, 22 percent of adults in mixed-status families reported forgoing public programs because of immigration concerns. But nearly 1 in 6 families with a mix of green card holders and citizens also reported forgoing safety net programs because of green card concerns (16 percent), and 12 percent reported forgoing programs because of data sharing concerns.

FIGURE 5

Immigrant Families Avoided Safety Net Programs Because of Immigration Concerns in 2025



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Source: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2025

Notes: Figure shows the share of adults in immigrant families ages 18 and older who decided not to apply for and/or stopped participating in one or more noncash government benefits because of immigration concerns, which refer to (a) reporting yes when asked “Was there a time in the past 12 months when you or someone in your family decided not to apply for one or more noncash government benefits, such as Medicaid or CHIP, SNAP (or food stamps), or housing subsidies, because you were worried it would disqualify you or a family member or relative from obtaining a green card?” or when asked “Was there a time in the past 12 months when you or someone in your family stopped participating in any noncash government benefits, such as Medicaid or CHIP, SNAP (or food stamps), or housing subsidies, because you were worried it would disqualify you or a family member or relative from obtaining a green card?” and (b) reporting yes when asked, “Was there a time in the past 12 months when you or someone in your family did not apply for or participate in noncash government benefits because you were worried that your or your family member’s personal information would be shared with immigration authorities?” Mixed-status families are families that include undocumented as well as lawfully present immigrants and/or US citizens.

*/**/** Estimate differs significantly from adults in all-citizen immigrant families at the 0.10/0.05/0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

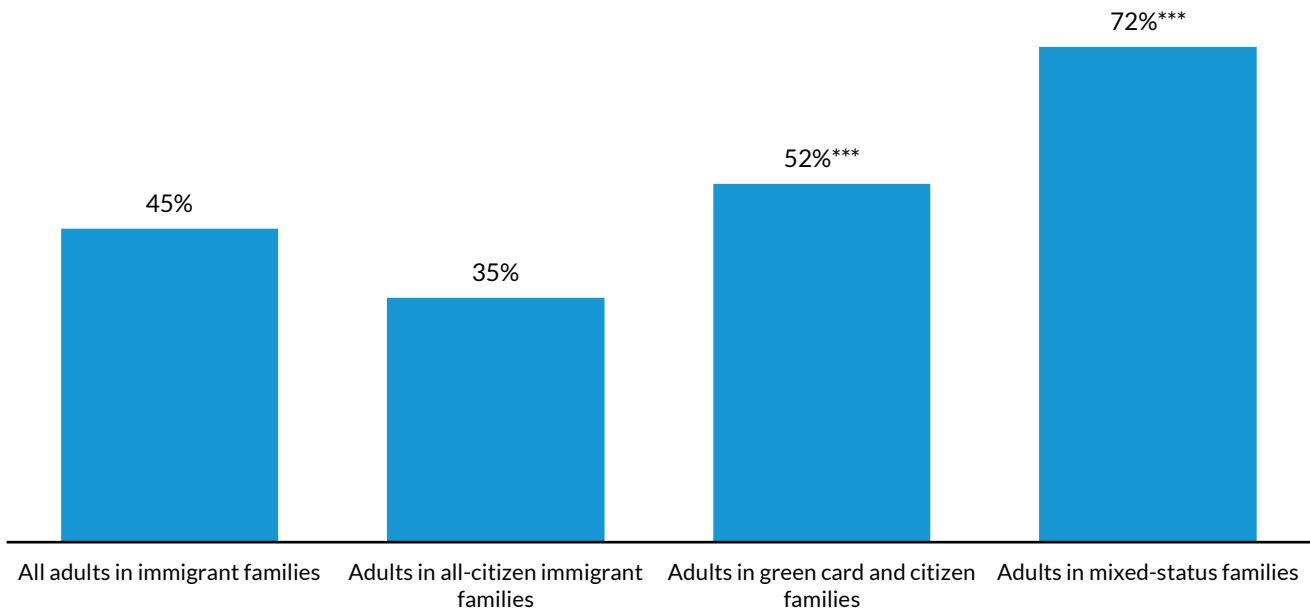
Most Mixed-Status Families Included Children

Disruptions to essential activities, worries, and avoidance of safety net programs among mixed-status families are of particular concern, given that according to the WBNS, over 7 in 10 (72 percent) of adults in mixed-status families lived with children younger than age 19, a share higher than that for adults in all-citizen immigrant families (35 percent) and those in green card and citizen families (52 percent).¹³ Thus, effects of disruptions to daily life and immigration-related worries could extend to children (Haley et al. 2026). Most children of immigrants are US citizens (Haley et al. 2025), which means that many of the children in mixed-status families could be eligible for safety net programs that their families are avoiding.

FIGURE 6

Over 7 in 10 Mixed-Status Families Include Children Younger than Age 19

Share of adults in immigrant families who reported living with children younger than age 19, by family citizenship and immigration status



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Source: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2025

Notes: The sample for the figure is adults in immigrant families ages 18 and older. Mixed-status families are families that include undocumented as well as lawfully present immigrants and/or US citizens.

*/**/** Estimate differs significantly from adults in all-citizen immigrant families at the 0.10/0.05/0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

Conclusion

One year into the implementation of a federal immigration agenda that has intensified enforcement policies, some immigrant families were not participating in their communities or accessing essential services because of immigration-related concerns. This disengagement occurred as adults in immigrant families expressed fears of being approached by ICE and concerns that they, a family member, or a friend would be deported (Bernstein et al. 2026). Fears and withdrawal from essential activities were highest among adults in mixed-status families and for respondents who reported being aware of local immigration enforcement activity. But withdrawal from essential activities was also reported among other immigrant groups, including families composed entirely of US citizens and green card holders, highlighting that impacts are being felt broadly. In addition, some immigrant families continued to avoid safety net programs because of immigration concerns. This avoidance was more prevalent in mixed-status families, 7 in 10 of which include children younger than age 19, placing safety net programs that help with food, health, and other basic needs out of reach and risking adverse health and well-being impacts for many children (AAP 2019; Haley et al. 2026; Howell and Kenney 2012; Wherry et al. 2016). Concerns may also have risen since these data were collected in December 2025.

Between withdrawal from public life and avoidance of programs important for meeting basic needs, immigrant families faced an array of intersecting vulnerabilities that likely caused significant stressors and hardships. As immigration enforcement continues to affect the lives of both immigrant and nonimmigrant residents (Bernstein et al. 2026), immigrant families are pulling back from essential activities, which risks reducing the vibrancy of communities, undermining local economies, and jeopardizing the health and well-being of all members of immigrant families, including US citizens and children.

Notes

- ¹ Jesus Jiménez, Jill Cowan, Hamed Aleaziz, Ana Facio-Krajcer, Gabriela Bhaskar, and Gabriela Bhaskar, “‘Completely Disrupted’: Fear Upends Life for Latinos in L.A.,” *The New York Times*, June 30, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/30/us/latinos-los-angeles-immigration.html>; “Beyond the Big Cities, ICE Is Rattling Small-Town and Exurban America,” *The New York Times*, February 13, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/13/us/ice-small-towns.html>.
- ² Tim Henderson, “States, Cities Are Hard-Pressed to Fight Violent ICE Arrest Tactics,” *Stateline*, January 22, 2026, <https://stateline.org/2026/01/22/states-cities-are-hard-pressed-to-fight-violent-ice-arrest-tactics/>.
- ³ Gustavo Solis, “ICE Agents Arrest Green Card Applicants in San Diego,” *KPBS Public Media*, November 25, 2025, <https://www.kpbs.org/news/border-immigration/2025/11/25/ice-agents-arrest-green-card-applicants-in-san-diego>; Marisa Lagos, “US Citizen, Army Veteran Detained by ICE Sues for Damages in Federal Court,” *KQED*, February 19, 2026, <https://www.kqed.org/news/12073728/us-citizen-army-veteran-detained-by-ice-sues-for-damages-in-federal-court>; Nicole Foy, “We Found That More Than 170 U.S. Citizens Have Been Held by Immigration Agents. They’ve Been Kicked, Dragged and Detained for Days,” *ProPublica*, October 16, 2025, <https://www.propublica.org/article/immigration-dhs-american-citizens-arrested-detained-against-will>; Miriam Jordan and Hamed Aleaziz, “They ‘Had Done Everything Right.’ ICE Detained Them Anyway,” *The New York Times*, January 26, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/26/us/politics/ice-minnesota-refugees.html>.
- ⁴ Didi Martinez, Julia Ainsley and Maura Murphy, “‘The Impact Has Been Real’: ICE Raid Fears Keep Students out of Classrooms,” *NBC News*, March 6, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/-impact-real-ice-raid-fears-keep-students-classrooms-rcna194562>; Kristen Schorsch, “Fearful amid ICE Crackdowns, Some Immigrants Are Skipping Health Care,” *NPR*, February 10, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/02/10/nx-s1-5290063/migrants-chicago-delayed-health-care-immigration-crackdown-fears>.
- ⁵ Public Charge Ground of Inadmissibility,” *Federal Register* 87 (174, September 9, 2022), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/09/09/2022-18867/public-charge-ground-of-inadmissibility>.
- ⁶ Survey respondents reported immigration and citizenship status for themselves, spouses/partners, children under 19, and other relatives living with them.
- ⁷ We asked respondents, “As far as you know, have there been any Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids or other immigration enforcement activity where you live, work, go shopping, or regularly go in the past 12 months?” Response options included yes, no, and don’t know.
- ⁸ Dan Berry, “A Shocked Nation Watches Minneapolis Killings: ‘Something Needs to Change,’” *New York Times*, January 27, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/27/us/alex-pretti-shooting-minneapolis-reaction.html>.
- ⁹ The association between avoidance of these activities and awareness of local ICE enforcement operations remained statistically significant and was only slightly attenuated when controlling for family immigration status (data not shown). These results suggest the relationship between higher rates of avoidance of activities and awareness of local ICE enforcement held independently after accounting for the types of immigrant families.
- ¹⁰ This trend over time held across all activities among adults ages 18 to 64, with some exceptions. Working-age adults in immigrant families reported greater worry about attending religious services or community events in 2025 compared with 2024 (19 percent versus 13 percent). Green card and citizen families were less likely to report worry about visiting a doctor’s office, clinic, or hospital in 2025 compared with 2024 (11 percent versus 15 percent). Mixed-status families reported greater worry about sending children to school, child care, or after-school activities (40 percent versus 25 percent), and greater worry about attending religious services or community events in 2025 compared with 2024 (34 percent versus 19 percent). Mixed-

status families were also less likely to report worry about talking to police in 2025 compared with 2024 (38 percent versus 49 percent).

¹¹ “Public Charge Ground of Inadmissibility,” *Federal Register* 87 (174, September 9, 2022).

¹² We compared the share of adults in immigrant families ages 18 to 64 who avoided noncash government programs because of green card concerns, overall and by family immigration status, and found that the share is comparable with estimates from prior years (Bernstein et al. 2025; Gonzalez et al. 2024. Gonzalez et al. 2023).

¹³ While this share is not directly comparable with estimates using census data, it is broadly consistent with findings that many mixed-status families include children (Lisiecki and Apruzzese 2024).

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