

Southeast Asian Deportations: Trends and Policy Implications

KEY TAKEAWAYS

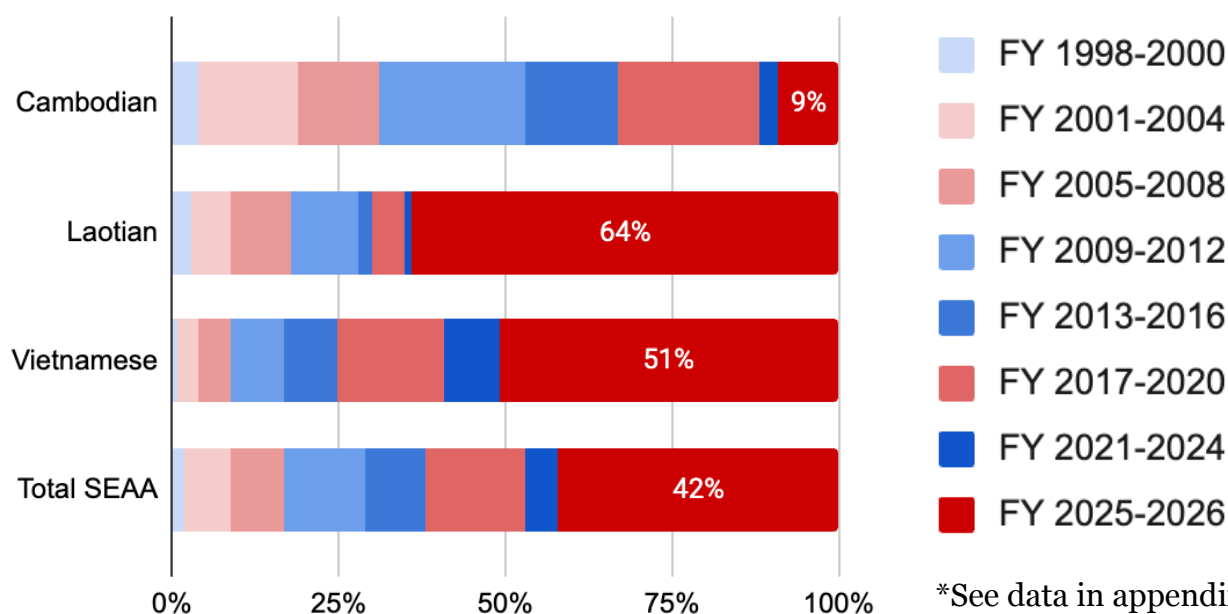
- 42% of all Southeast Asian deportations occurred in Fiscal Years 2025 and 2026.
- There has been a 20-fold increase in the deportations of Southeast Asian elders.
- The Department of Homeland Security is deporting individuals who have lived in the United States for decades, including a significant number of Vietnamese individuals who arrived in the United States prior to July 12, 1995.

Who Are Southeast Asian Americans?

Southeast Asian Americans (SEAAs) number over three million¹ in the United States, and most arrived in the United States as refugees or are the children of refugees. This fact sheet focuses on the deportations of Southeast Asian² individuals from Cambodia,³ Laos, and Vietnam.⁴ These communities continue to face unique socioeconomic, educational, health, and immigration challenges shaped by their refugee experiences, including displacement and resettlement in under-resourced communities.⁵

The Rising Deportations of Southeast Asian Americans

Figure 1: Share of SEAAs Deported from Fiscal Years 1998-2026



As shown in Figure 1,⁶ deportations of SEAs increased significantly from the Clinton (FY1998-FY 2000) through Obama (FY2009-FY2016) administrations, fell sharply under Biden administration (FY2021-2024), and have surged dramatically since 2025, with the deportations of Laotians and Vietnamese seeing particularly drastic increases.

- 64% of all Laotian deportations and 51% of all Vietnamese deportations since 1998 have occurred between FY2025 and FY2026.⁷
- 42% of all Southeast Asian deportations occurred during that same period.

Who Is Being Deported?

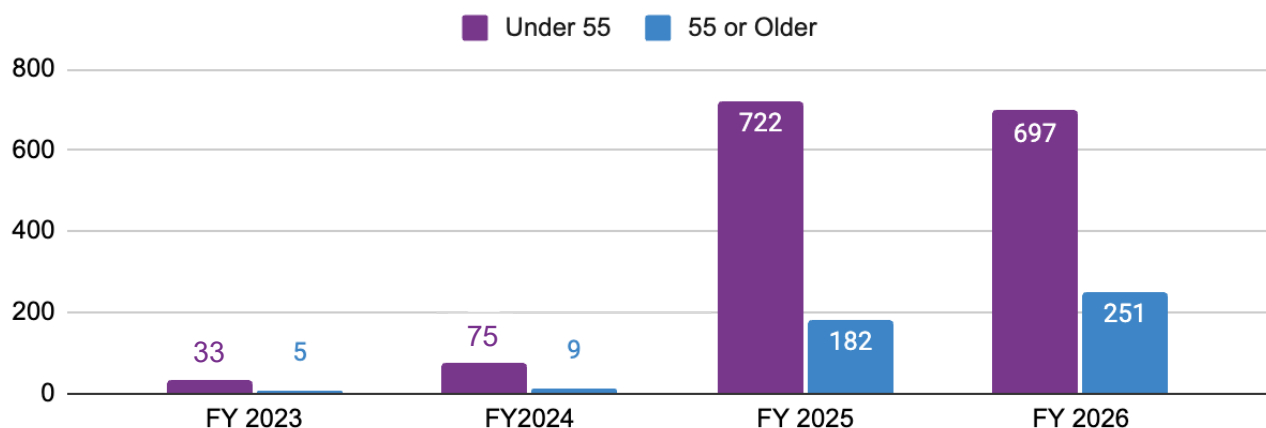
SEAs are uniquely impacted by the US immigration enforcement system due to the intersection of their resettlement conditions and criminalization.⁸ As a result, long-term residents bear a disproportionate share of deportations: pre-1995 Vietnamese refugees (see pg. 3 below for details), individuals with decades-old convictions, and older adults (see Figure 2) with deep family and community ties.

A Significant Portion of SEAs with Convictions Deported in FY 2025 and 2026 Have Decades-Old Convictions

- 58% of Cambodians with a conviction deported have a 20+ year old conviction
- 57% of Laotians with a conviction deported have a 20+ year old conviction
- 50% of Vietnamese with a conviction deported have a 20+ year old conviction

In FY2025 and FY2026, 78.6% of all Southeast Asians deported had a conviction that was at least a decade old, and 53.3% had a conviction that was at least two decades old. In FY2024, nine SEAA elders were deported. In FY2025 alone, that number rose to 182 – a more than 20-fold increase in a single year.

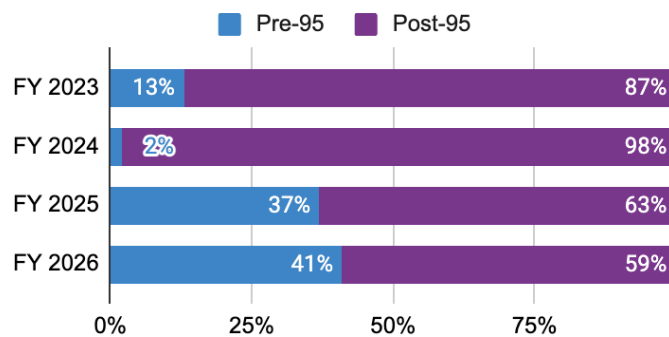
Figure 2: SEAA Elders Deported



Pre-1995 Vietnamese Deportations are on the Rise

The 2008 US-Vietnam repatriation agreement previously protected Vietnamese refugees who entered the United States prior to July 12, 1995 from deportation.⁹ Those protections were eliminated in the 2020 US-Vietnam agreement negotiated under the first Trump Administration.¹⁰ As Figure 3 shows, deportations of these populations have increased significantly in FY 2025 and 2026.

Figure 3: Pre-95 Vietnamese Deportations



- In FY2025, 37% of deported Vietnamese were pre-1995 arrivals.

- In FY2026, this figure increased to 41%.

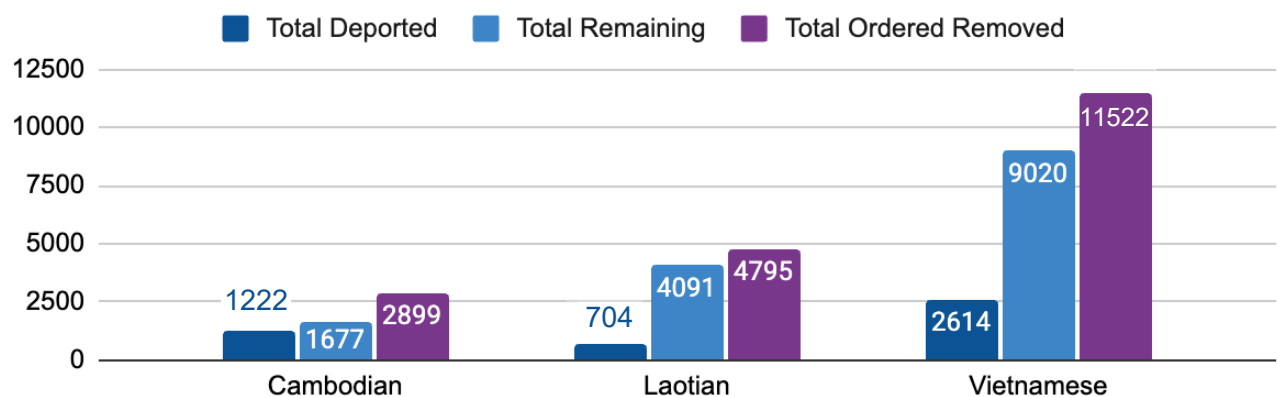
Southeast Asians With an Order of Removal

Deportations represent only half of the impact of immigration enforcement on SEAs. Thousands still live with a final order of removal and in a state of limbo, unsure if they can remain with their families in the United States. Figure 4¹¹ shows that:

- 19,216 SEAs have been ordered removed since 1998¹²; and
- About 14,788 SEAs still live in the United States with a final order of removal.

Additionally, the data also show that 76% of all SEAA removal orders are because of contact with the criminal legal system.

Figure 4: SEAs with a Final Order of Removal



POLICY SOLUTIONS

Limit the deportations of Southeast Asian refugees

- Cosponsor the Southeast Asian Deportation Relief Act

This act provides deportation relief, work authorization, and a pathway for eligible deported individuals to return to the United States.

Reform the United States immigration enforcement system

- Reintroduce the New Way Forward Act
- Narrow deportation grounds and establish a statute of limitations for immigration enforcement

Increase oversight of immigration enforcement

- Increase oversight of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP); and
- Prevent any further funding through appropriations, reconciliation, or any other funding mechanisms to either ICE or CBP.

This act ends mandatory detention, bans for-profit detention facilities, and limits deportation. It also forbids state and local law enforcement from conducting immigration enforcement.

Expand immigration relief and support for immigrants facing removal

- Restore judicial discretion of immigration judges;
- Establish a right to reopen proceedings for individuals who were deported because of unlawful removal orders or because their convictions(s) was/were vacated;
- Create an opportunity for previously deported immigrants and refugees to return home to the United States.

REFERENCES

- ¹US Census Bureau, 2024 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates Selected Population Profiles (So201), table So201, selected population groups (Hmong alone or in any combination, Laotian alone or in any combination, Cambodian alone or in any combination, and Vietnamese alone or in any combination), accessed May 30, 2026, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSSPP1Y2024.So201>. Population totals are summed from four ACS 2024 1-Year So201 population profiles and may include a small number of individuals counted in more than one group.
- ²SEARAC uses a geopolitical definition of Southeast Asian that specifically refers to the communities who arrived as refugees from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.
- ³Cambodian data in this fact sheet are inclusive of individuals identified in publicly available data as citizens or nationals of both Cambodia and Kampuchea.
- ⁴Laotian and Vietnamese in this fact sheet are inclusive of ethnic minorities from Laos and Vietnam, including the Hmong, Mien, Montagnard, and other groups. Data collected and reported do not differentiate between ethnic groups, and citizenship country data do not require an individual to necessarily be a citizen of Laos or Vietnam to be listed as such by DHS.
- ⁵Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC), Southeast Asian American Journeys (Washington, DC: Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, 2024), 5–6.
- ⁶DHS removal data is reported in fiscal year and does not completely overlap with the start and end dates of a presidential term. The data shown gives an estimate of the totality of deportations under presidential administrations between 1998 and 2026.
- ⁷Deportation Data Project, ICE Detention Stays Dataset (Berkeley, CA: Deportation Data Project), accessed April 7, 2026, <https://deportationdata.org/data/processed/ice.html>. The dataset runs through March 2026.
- ⁸Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC), Southeast Asian American Journeys (Washington, DC: Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, 2024), 15-20.
- ⁹United States and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Agreement on the Acceptance of the Return of Vietnamese Citizens, art. 2 (“Vietnamese citizens are not subject to return to Vietnam under this Agreement if they departed Vietnam for the United States prior to July 12, 1995”).
- ¹⁰US Department of Homeland Security and the Ministry of Public Security of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Memorandum of Understanding Between the Department of Homeland Security of the United States of America and the Ministry of Public Security of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (November 2020), released pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, <https://cdn.craft.cloud/5cd1c590-65ba-4ad2-a52c-b55e67f8f04b/assets/media/ALC-FOIA-Re-Release-MOU-bates-1-8-8-10-21.pdf>.
- ¹¹Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC), Immigration Court Closure Data Tool, filtered for nationals of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, Syracuse University, accessed May 30, 2026, <https://tracreports.org/phptools/immigration/closure/>
- ¹²This data is an estimate based on totaling TRAC estimates for Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam and subtracting that data from available DHS and Deportation Data Project removals for individuals with a final order of removal with citizenship (as listed by DHS) from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.

APPENDIX

Figure 1: Share of SEAs Deported from Fiscal Years 1998-2026

	FY 1998- 2000	FY 2001- 2004	FY 2005- 2008	FY 2009- 2012	FY 2013- 2016	FY 2017- 2020	FY 2021- 2024	FY 2025- 2026
Cambodian	4%	15%	12%	22%	14%	21%	3%	9%
Laotian	3%	6%	9%	10%	2%	5%	1%	64%
Vietnamese	1%	3%	5%	8%	8%	16%	8%	51%
Total SEAA	2%	7%	8%	12%	9%	15%	5%	42%
Total SEAA Deportations	105	307	336	540	395	685	209	1852