

Do today's ICE agents bear resemblance in function to the brownshirts of 1930's Germany?

ChatGPT said:

There are some surface-level functional similarities between today's U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents and the *Sturmabteilung* (SA, or "brownshirts") of 1930s Nazi Germany, but also key differences that make the analogy imperfect.

Here's a careful breakdown:

Resemblances in function

- 1. Enforcing a political agenda through intimidation and arrests**
 - The SA targeted groups the Nazi regime defined as "undesirable" — primarily Jews, leftists, and others seen as threats.
 - ICE focuses on immigrants the government deems "unlawfully present," but under certain administrations, enforcement priorities have shifted toward broad, aggressive targeting, including those with no serious criminal record.
 - In both cases, these actions serve not just a legal function but also a political message about who belongs and who doesn't.
- 2. Public displays of force**
 - The brownshirts patrolled streets, conducted raids, and maintained a visible presence to intimidate communities.
 - ICE conducts workplace raids, neighborhood sweeps, and high-profile arrests that create a climate of fear among immigrant populations.
- 3. Instrument of social control over specific populations**
 - Both acted (or act) to monitor, disrupt, and displace a targeted group, reinforcing an exclusionary vision of national identity.

Key differences

- 1. Legal status and structure**
 - The SA was a paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party — officially outside the state apparatus until later — often acting with *extra-legal* authority and violence.
 - ICE is a formal federal law enforcement agency operating within the U.S. legal system, with defined statutory powers (though critics argue these powers can be abused or unevenly applied).

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2. Level of violence

- The brownshirts regularly engaged in beatings, assassinations, and pogroms.
- ICE's use of force is generally constrained by U.S. law, though there are documented cases of abuse, deaths in custody, and excessive force — but not systematic, legally sanctioned street violence on the SA's scale.

3. Role in political takeover

- The SA was instrumental in helping Hitler destabilize democratic institutions and seize absolute power.
- ICE is not a political militia in that same sense, though under certain administrations, its actions can be aligned closely with political goals.

Bottom line

The closest resemblance is in **function toward a targeted population** — enforcing a nationalist vision, spreading fear, and signaling that a specific group is unwelcome.

The biggest difference is in **degree and legality** — ICE operates within a bureaucratic, rule-bound framework, while the brownshirts operated as an overtly violent political street gang aiding a dictatorship-in-progress.

If you frame it metaphorically, ICE under aggressive enforcement policies can feel “brownshirt-like” to the communities affected — but historically and structurally, the comparison is not one-to-one.

