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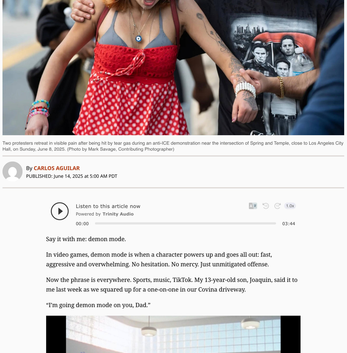
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OPINION › COMMENTARY - Opinion

Carlos [illegible]e like our neighbors are worth it, because they are

Opinion Advocates for ideas and draws conclusions based on the author's interpretation of facts and data.



Two protesters retreat in visible pain after being hit by tear gas during an anti-ICE demonstration near the intersection of Spring and Temple, close to Los Angeles City Hall, on Sunday, June 8, 2025. (Photo by Mark Savage, Contributing Photographer)

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By CARLOS AGUILAR
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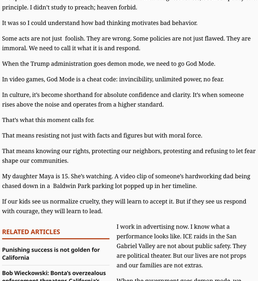
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Say it with me: demon mode.

In video games, demon mode is when a character powers up and goes all out: fast, aggressive and overwhelming. No hesitation. No mercy. Just unmitigated offense.

Now the phrase is everywhere. Sports, music, TikTok. My 13-year-old son, Joaquin, said it to me last week as we squared up for a one-on-one in our Covina driveway.

"I'm going demon mode on you, Dad."

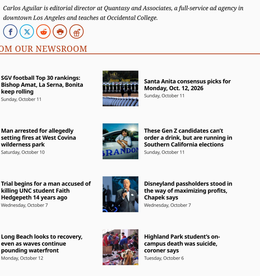


He said it with a grin but I could feel the vibe. He was about to unleash every Euro step and pump fake he had stored up from NBA2K and YouTube. I had to brace myself.

But here's the thing: demon mode isn't just a phrase kids toss around. It's a style, an energy. And it's creeping into our politics.

Right now, Trump's immigration policy has gone full demon mode.

I grew up and taught in La Puente, where ICE activity recently reared its ugly head. Duds are being picked up in front of work sites.



Unmarked vans are spotted outside apartment complexes. Tips are texted before breakfast. Families hold their breath and dread their fate.

This isn't enforcement, it's intimidation. This isn't heroics, it's theatrics.

This version of immigration policy is designed for maximum spectacle. It is calculated cruelty performed at volume. It is meant to signal dominance.

That's demon mode.

I don't use that phrase lightly. I earned my master's degree in ethics at Talbot School of Theology at Biola University, where we studied ethical systems and the language of moral discourse.

We spent serious time on the difference between law and righteousness, between policy and principle. I didn't study to preach; heaven forbid.

It was so I could understand how bad thinking motivates bad behavior.

Some acts are not just foolish. They are wrong. Some policies are not just flawed. They are immoral. We need to call it what it is and respond.

When the Trump administration goes demon mode, we need to go God Mode.

In video games, God Mode is a cheat code: invincibility, unlimited power, no fear.

In culture, it's become shorthand for absolute confidence and clarity. It's when someone rises above the noise and operates from a higher standard.

That's what this moment calls for.

That means resisting not just with facts and figures but with moral force.

That means knowing our rights, protecting our neighbors, protesting and refusing to let fear shape our communities.

My daughter Maya is 15. She's watching. A video clip of someone's hardworking dad being chased down in a Baldwin Park parking lot popped up in her timeline.

If our kids see us normalize cruelty, they will learn to accept it. But if they see us respond with courage, they will learn to lead.

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I work in advertising now. I know what a performance looks like. ICE raids in the San Gabriel Valley are not about public safety. They are political theater. But our lives are not props and our families are not extras.

When the government goes demon mode, we cannot stay quiet.

We need to bring our full selves to the fight: our faith, our humor, our voice, our flags, our community and our resistance.

The San Gabriel Valley is the heartbeat of Los Angeles County. Our work fuels the economy. Our people fill the streets, shops, schools and churches. Our way of life is intimately connected to each other's well-being. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus said it plainly: "Whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

Joaquin might feign demon mode in the driveway. But I know it when I see it in real life. And I know what to do when it shows up.

Name it. Face it. And organize like our neighbors are worth it. Because they are.

Carlos Aguilar is editorial director at Quantasy and Associates, a full-service ad agency in downtown Los Angeles and teaches at Occidental College.

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