



About the Authors:

Kalum Rock

Kalum Rock holds Master's degrees in Political Science from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, specializing in European Governance. His research focuses on transatlantic politics, particularly US-EU relations. He has worked for the European External Action Service and the American Chamber of Commerce in Germany, and has expertise in multilateralism and international diplomacy, especially at the UN level.

Marlene Heine

Leonard Strohwald is engaged in a B.Sc. in Mathematics at Technical University Munich. Bridging his passion for both international politics and technology, he



interned at EPIS Thinktank in 2024, contributing to the establishment of the EPIS Reports and the social media presence.

About the publication:

3 Main Points:

Main question: How does intensified immigration enforcement under Trump affect the U.S. economy and corporate behaviour? Argument: Expanded detention, infrastructure growth, and public enforcement generate political gains but create economic friction for labour-dependent industries. Conclusion: The administration governs through the tension between sovereignty and market dependence, shifting costs onto migrants and mobility-reliant sectors.

Highlight Sentence:

“Immigration enforcement functions as a political economy instrument, expanding state coercion while structurally constraining labour-dependent industries in the U.S. economy.”

Definition:

Immigration: International movement of people to a destination country to settle as permanent residents

Immigration Enforcement, Corporate Hedging, and the Contradictions of Mobility in Trump’s America

By Kalum Rock and Marlene Heine

Immigration in the United States has returned to the centre of national politics not primarily through legislative reform, but through enforcement. Since President Donald Trump’s inauguration on January 20, 2025, the federal government has pursued a visibly intensified interior enforcement strategy: expanded detention capacity, a rise in “at-large” arrests within communities, and policy changes that widen who can be detained and on what grounds. The policy logic behind these measures cannot be separated from their social implications and economic contradictions. The government’s emphasis on coercive tools has generated sustained societal resistance. At the same time, major U.S. corporations are

positioning themselves strategically to hedge against multiple political contingencies. While maintaining channels of access to Trump and his administration, they remain structurally reliant on a workforce with migrant backgrounds and on cross-border mobility.

1. Part I. The enforcement turn and its social consequences

The enforcement shift of the Trump administration's first year is best understood as a move from routinized, institutionally "quiet" immigration control toward a more public, securitized posture. One measurable indicator is detention. Reuters reported in February 2026 that [roughly 68,000 people were in ICE detention, a level described as about a 75% increase since Trump assumed office](#). Advocacy and policy organizations tracking detention have reported similar magnitudes: placing mid-January 2026, detention levels sat in the low 70,000s, accompanied by a [rapid expansion of detention facilities](#) and a shift toward community-based arrests rather than the more traditional model of transferring individuals from local jails into federal custody.

That enforcement expansion has been accompanied by adjustments that extend the state's discretionary authority. A Department of Homeland Security (DHS) memorandum issued in February 2026, [broadened ICE's authority to detain legally admitted refugees awaiting permanent residency](#) such as green cards, mandating detention and "re-vetting" a year after arrival as part of the adjustment process, in a departure from prior guidance. In analytical terms, this development signifies more than a quantitative intensification of enforcement. Rather, it reflects a reclassification dynamic: groups previously positioned within an administratively regularized framework are rendered newly subject to custodial control. The underlying political rationale corresponds to insights from securitization theory. By framing mobility and immigrant status as enduring categories of risk, state authorities can legitimize measures typically associated with exceptional governance—such as detention and expanded vetting—as components of routine administrative practice.

The legitimacy problem, however, emerges when this posture collides with public visibility and contested uses of force. In early 2026, national reporting documented a

[series of shootings involving federal immigration officers in Minnesota](#), which became focal points for protests as well as disputes about accountability and narrative control. The Guardian reported, for example, on the death of Minneapolis resident [Renée Nicole Good, who was fatally shot on January 7, 2026](#), and situated the case within a broader pattern of deaths “in dealings with ICE” during 2026. Independent of normative evaluations of enforcement policy, these episodes point to an empirically observable dynamic: When immigration control is carried out through street-level operations rather than primarily through administrative procedures, the state’s coercive practices become more visible to bystanders, local authorities, and mediated publics. This heightened visibility increases the likelihood of public scrutiny and competing interpretations, thereby limiting the government’s capacity to singularly shape the narrative surrounding enforcement actions.

This clarifies why public reactions constitute politically salient outcomes, rather than merely secondary effects of enforcement practices. Axios reported on a wave of [viral videos mocking ICE and Border Patrol incidents in Minneapolis](#), describing how filmed moments can reshape perceptions of competence and legitimacy. While such developments may appear anecdotal, they carry analytical significance. The effectiveness of enforcement is shaped not solely by formal legal authority, but also by perceptions of professionalism, proportionality, and adherence to accountable procedures. When operational footage circulates outside institutional channels, it functions as informal oversight, even if imperfectly, and it often amplifies distrust in communities already sceptical of federal immigration policing.

The administration, for its part, has defended the crackdown as necessary for security and public order. Moreover, it has pursued further expansion rather than retrenchment. According to Reuters, late-2025 reporting indicated that the administration was planning a [further escalation of immigration enforcement in 2026](#), combining significant budgetary expansion with a renewed emphasis on workplace raids, despite indications of growing political backlash ahead of the midterm cycle. This pattern highlights a governing assumption that the benefits of visible enforcement may outweigh its attendant social and institutional frictions.

2. Part II. Corporate hedging in an enforcement state

If the state side of the story is coercive expansion, the corporate side is adaptation under contradiction. Large firms are not simply “for” or “against” crackdowns. They are embedded in two overlapping realities: first, a political environment where access to the executive can shape regulation, contracting, and antitrust risk; second, a labour market and business model that depends on immigrant workers, international talent, and cross-border flows.

This duality is visible in the symbolic alignment of major business elites with Trump early in the term. Reuters described how [tech billionaires and major CEOs attended events around Trump’s January 2025 inauguration](#) and were seated prominently. AP News similarly highlighted that [several tech leaders appeared as high-profile attendees](#), an image interpreted by critics as a staging of corporate power near the centre of political authority. Beyond optics, institutional money followed: the Brennan Center reported [unprecedented inauguration fundraising totals and emphasized the scale of large donors in the 2025 inaugural cycle](#). The Washington Post later reported on a [pattern of “gifts” and overt flattery by CEOs](#) seeking influence and favourable policy outcomes.

This is not best read as ideological conversion. It resembles classic political risk management. When immigration enforcement is pursued by a strong executive posture, firms that rely on federal discretion (procurement, merger review, platform regulation, tax, industrial policy) have incentives to avoid antagonism. The corporate strategy becomes one of accommodation: public neutrality on enforcement excesses, private lobbying for carve-outs (skilled visas, employer protections), and visible demonstrations of loyalty that reduce the probability of becoming a political target.

Efforts toward policy accommodation intersect with structural labour dependence, a tension that has been rendered particularly visible through worksite enforcement operations. In September 2025, [immigration authorities detained 475 individuals](#) during a raid at Hyundai’s electric vehicle manufacturing facility in Ellabell, Georgia. The case illustrates the willingness of state authorities to apply enforcement measures irrespective of the project’s prominence, including those linked to strategic industrial upgrading and job creation. In other words, the raid is not only about undocumented labour; it signals that enforcement can be performative and politically

communicative, even when it risks economic friction with investors and local development coalitions.

This tension becomes more pronounced when considering sectors characterized by structural reliance on immigrant labour and limited short-term substitutability. The hospitality industry provides a good example, given its labour-intensive nature and geographic concentration in major service and tourism hubs. A February 2026 report on Las Vegas documented a [steep visitor decline in 2025 and explicitly noted “political concerns”](#) as one factor shaping demand, with knock-on effects for workers and firms. Separately, reporting tied to union analysis argued that [immigration crackdowns fuelled fear among workers and deterred travel](#), affecting tourism revenue and staffing in hospitality-heavy regions. Even where one disputes causal weights, the mechanism is plausible and observable: aggressive enforcement and hostile rhetoric can operate as demand shocks (fewer visitors) and supply shocks (labour scarcity), especially when workers believe their presence or family stability is precarious.

These developments position the 2026 World Cup within a broader policy context that extends beyond sport. Mega-events are inherently transnational mobility projects, dependent on the efficient cross-border movement of spectators, media representatives, sponsors, and temporary workers. At the same time, the Trump administration has considered proposals to expand “maximum vetting” requirements for international visitors. In February 2026, Democratic senators called on the administration to withdraw a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) proposal that would have required millions of Visa Waiver Program travellers to disclose social media identifiers from the preceding five years. Legislators cautioned that such measures [could discourage travel demand](#), including in relation to the World Cup. From a political-economy perspective, this is the same contradiction in a different register: the administration pursues expanded screening and deterrence in the name of security, while industries dependent on visitor inflows and predictable entry procedures lobby against measures that raise uncertainty and perceived surveillance costs.

Taken together, corporate responses to immigration politics during the Trump administration’s first year do not conform to a simple narrative of resistance or

alignment. Rather, they can be understood as operating within a two-level framework. On one level, firms pursue access, regulatory stability, and political protection within Washington. On another, they remain structurally dependent on immigrant labour and consumer markets, while also relying on favourable perceptions among international audiences regarding the U.S as an attractive economic and travel destination. The Hyundai raid shows that accommodation does not guarantee insulation; the travel-vetting debate shows that even policies aimed at “visitors” can become part of the same deterrence ecosystem that affects investor confidence and demand.

3. Conclusion

By February 2026, immigration politics under Trump has become a test of state authority executed through enforcement rather than legislation, and a test of capitalist dependence on mobility within an increasingly restrictive governance environment. The administration has [expanded detention and broadened categories](#) of people vulnerable to custody, including refugees in the adjustment pipeline. High-profile enforcement controversies and shootings, particularly in Minnesota, have [catalysed protest and intensified scrutiny of ICE practices and narratives](#). Meanwhile, corporate America has pursued a hedging strategy: [conspicuous engagement with Trump and his inner circle, combined with quiet efforts to preserve labour and travel flows essential to profitability](#).

The deeper analytical point is that immigration here functions as a site where sovereignty and globalization collide in real time. Enforcement politics promises control and symbolic order; the market demands labour flexibility and cross-border circulation. The first year of Trump’s second term suggests that the U.S. is not resolving this tension so much as governing through it, shifting costs onto migrants, border-crossers, and the industries that cannot easily replace them.