

## Breaking Down the Deportation Strategy: A Look at Policies, Costs, and Potential Consequences

Alejandro Gutiérrez-Li

JEL Classifications: J01, J21, J43, Q10

Keywords: Deportations, Immigration enforcement, Labor supply

DOI: 10.22004/ag.econ.371484

Curtailing the number of undocumented immigrants and reducing future inflows is the top priority of the second Trump administration. To achieve these goals, the government plans to ramp up mass deportations, deter individuals from illegally coming to the United States, and increase the costs of legal immigration. Deporting individuals is both financially and logistically costly, and different policies have been passed over the years to achieve such goal both at the federal and state levels, with different degrees of success. At the same time, many individuals without legal authorization in the United States have been living in the country for many years (or decades) and are part of local labor markets in sectors in which recruiting domestic workers has proven to be a challenge. If mass deportations are carried out, and no alternative sources of labor or production are afforded to employers, the impact on industries like agriculture, construction, restaurants, and hospitality could be substantial, adversely affecting the entire economy.

This article examines recent trends in repatriations across multiple administrations, the countries of origin of most deportees, and the main reasons for their removal. Subsequently, we analyze policies used in the last two decades to carry out enforcement at the federal level, together with examples of state-level additional measures that have been implemented across the country. Importantly, the number of unauthorized individuals and their labor supply are not influenced by single policies or the combination of them, but rather by the degree to which the plethora of policies is enforced. We highlight some actions that the current administration is taking to increase removals as well as the practical costs of carrying out a large-scale deportation effort. The effects on sectors historically reliant on undocumented labor, as well as the entire American economy, are discussed at the end.

### Repatriations

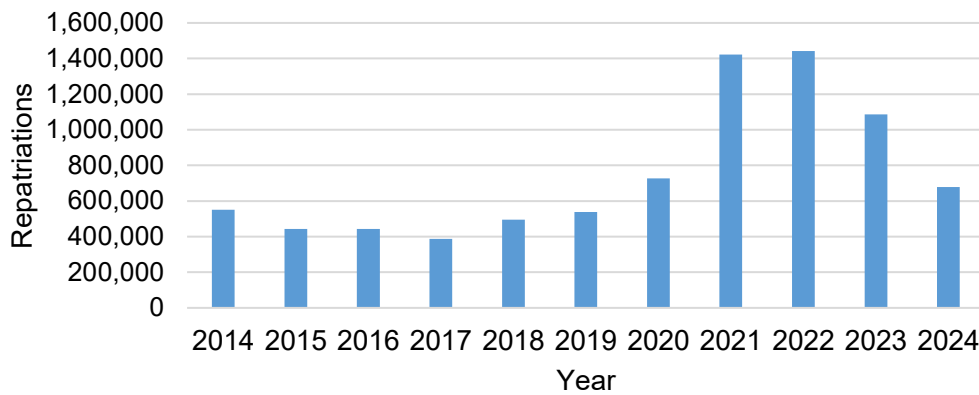
One key outcome associated with immigration enforcement is repatriation, defined as the process of sending a foreigner back to their country of origin or a third country.<sup>1</sup> Official statistics include, under this definition, administrative and enforcement returns, removals, and expulsions based on Title 42 (a temporary policy that allowed the government to quickly expel individuals based on health concerns during the COVID pandemic). In the last decade, more than 8,215,000 individuals were removed (Figure 1). During that time, repatriations peaked in 2022 thanks to a significant rise in expulsions based on Title 42. After the policy ended in 2023, the number of repatriations returned to comparable levels seen up to 2020.

In the last two decades, the overwhelming majority of deported individuals were from Mexico, the top source country of immigrants in the United States (Table 1), followed by citizens from the so-called “Northern Triangle” (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador). Combined, individuals from these four countries represented close to 90% of all deportees, although citizens from 210 different nations were removed.

One argument traditionally used to politically justify stronger immigration enforcement and removals is that immigrants have high crime rates. As shown in Table 2, during 2003–2024, the most common reasons for deporting individuals were illegal entry, driving under the influence of alcohol, assault, traffic offenses, illegal reentry, and burglary. Approximately 50% of all deported individuals had no criminal conviction.

<sup>1</sup> If the individuals are forced out of the country (i.e. removed against their will), they are technically deported.

**Figure 1. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Removals Nationwide, 2003–2024**



Source: Data from the Office of the Homeland Security Statistics based on calendar year. Repatriations include Title 42 expulsions, administrative returns, enforcement returns, and removals. See the page below for the definitions of each category: <https://ohss.dhs.gov/topics/immigration/immigration-enforcement/monthly-tables> [Accessed October 18, 2025].

## Immigration Enforcement Measures

Immigration enforcement has been implemented in the last two decades through multiple programs like Secure Communities, 287(g) agreements, E-Verify, and Omnibus Laws (Amuedo-Dorantes and Arenas-Arroyo, 2019). Secure Communities (SC) started in 2008 and was replaced by the Priority Enforcement Program (PEP) in 2014. The program was piloted during the George W. Bush Administration, and required agencies to establish concrete strategies for collecting biometric data of individuals who might be deemed a national security threat (Tokar, 2013). SC was based on information sharing, guaranteeing that fingerprints and other biometric data from detainees were checked with the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to assess whether individuals had prior criminal activity. SC entailed cooperation between local and state authorities and the federal

government. The program was rolled out in a staggered way all around the country. Data from the Transactional Records Access Clearing House at Syracuse University (TRACImmigration, 2025) show that, during 2009–2020, 761,509 individuals were removed nationwide through the Secure Communities Program (see Figure 2).<sup>2</sup> SC was discontinued by the Biden administration in 2021.

Most individuals removed under SC were located, not surprisingly, in states with large immigrant populations (Figure 3). Notably, almost 30% were found in Texas (225,739), followed by California (176,255), Arizona (58,709), and Florida (37,952). It is worth noting that, in each state, some localities or urban centers may decide to become “sanctuary cities,” which means that local authorities do not cooperate with the federal government in immigration enforcement actions. Such local rules tend to reduce the effectiveness of enforcement to different degrees.

**Table 1. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Removals by Nationality: 2003-2024**

Country	Removals
Mexico	3,373,405
Guatemala	649,935
Honduras	521,894
El Salvador	338,861
Dominican Republic	58,714
Brazil	58,663
Colombia	54,595
Ecuador	42,839
Nicaragua	34,352
Jamaica	23,839
Other	320,614
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,477,711</b>

Source: Data from TRACImmigration (2025). Title 42 removals are not included.

<sup>2</sup> The policy’s name was temporarily changed to the Priority Enforcement Program (PEP) from November 2014 to January 2017.

<b>Cause</b>	<b>Total</b>
No conviction	2,691,283
Illegal entry (INA SEC.101(a)(43)(O), 8USC1325 only)	499,021
Driving under the influence of liquor	255,903
Assault	171,077
Traffic offense	123,567
Illegal reentry (INA SEC.101(a)(43)(O), 8USC1326 only)	108,263
Burglary	83,174
Other	1,545,423
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,477,711</b>

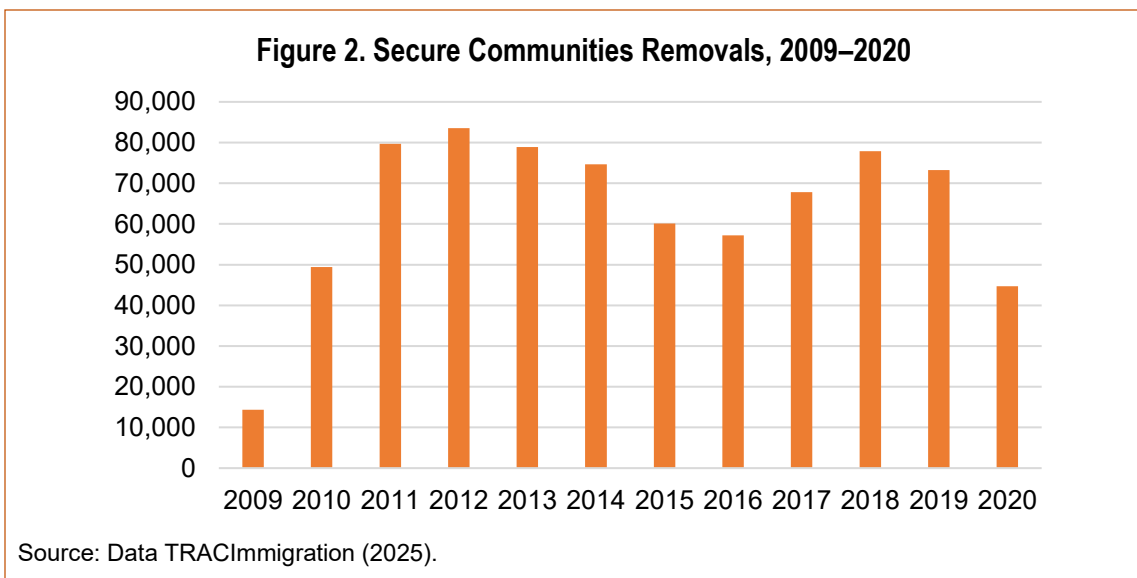
Source: Data from TRACImmigration (2025).

Unlike SC, 287(g) agreements are of voluntary adoption. The programs were created in 1996 by the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act as an addition to Section 287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), enacted in 1952, which explains their name (Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2025). The agreements give local and state law enforcement agents the power to exercise some immigration-related measures. Police officers operating in jurisdictions with a 287(g) agreement in place are allowed to interrogate and arrest immigrants without a warrant, jail individuals, and begin removal processes. As of February 2025, there were more than 150 287(g) agreements in place in counties in Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. About 140,000 individuals were removed from the country via 287(g) agreements between 2009 and 2024 (Figure 4).

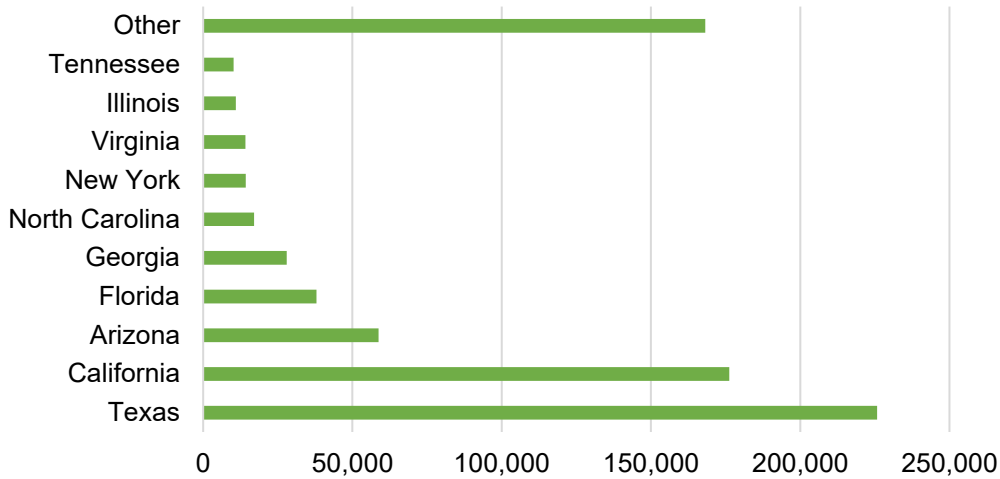
E-Verify is an enforcement program of voluntary adoption by private employers and mandatory in most of the public sector. The program was created by the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act

(IIRIRA) of 1996 and was called the Basic Pilot Program until 2007 (Huang et al., 2022). In 2009 the government made E-Verify mandatory among federal contractors and subcontractors (Huang et al., 2022). It consists of online employment eligibility verification, by which employers check whether job applicants have work authorization by cross-checking information provided by the candidates with records from the Department of Homeland Security and the Social Security Administration. Prior versions of the Farm Workforce Modernization Act (a project to update farm labor rules, which has repeatedly failed to be passed into law) have included provisions to make E-Verify mandatory across all agricultural employers.

Omnibus laws are immigration enforcement measures taken at the state rather than the federal level. They usually grant officers the ability to ask individuals to show if they have legal status to be in the US and come in the form of single bills encompassing multiple provisions related to immigration (Anadón, 2023). The first such law was implemented in Arizona in 2010. More recently, Florida passed Bill 1718 into law. According to this piece of legislation, private businesses with 25 or more employees must implement E-Verify to screen all new workers. In addition, transporting undocumented immigrants and the use of false IDs to work became



**Figure 3. Top Ten States by Secure Communities Removals, 2009–2020**

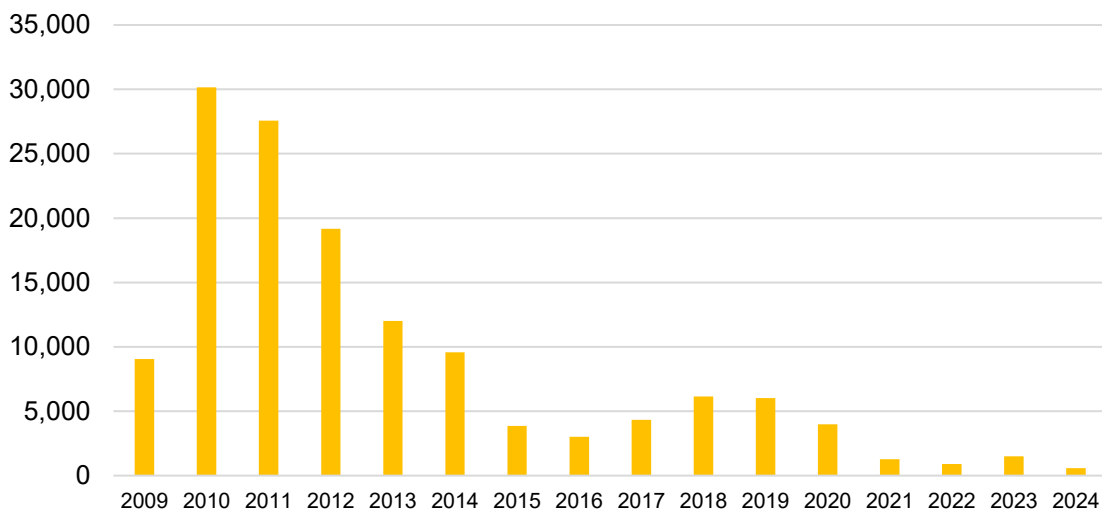


Source: Data from TRACImmigration (2025).

felonies. The law also punishes undocumented immigrants who drive with out-of-state licenses. Omnibus laws do not replace federal immigration regulations and can coexist with national-level policies. It is also worth mentioning that, in addition to immigration policies applicable nationwide or in individual states, other measures can be taken that indirectly end up impacting the stock and flow of immigrants into the United States. For example, during the COVID pandemic, the introduction of Title 42 stood out as a temporary measure put in place to quickly expel migrants encountered in states that border Mexico. The policy was in effect from March 21, 2020, to May 11, 2023,<sup>3</sup> and was not designed as an immigration policy. Instead, the justification for its implementation was based on health-related concerns.

The adoption of policies like SC, 287(g) agreements, and E-Verify has been found to reduce the farm labor supply across the country and negatively impact the incomes of farmers (Kostandini et al., 2014; Luo and Kostandini, 2022; Luo, Konstandini, and Jordan, 2023). Similar effects are seen in other sectors heavily reliant on unauthorized labor, like construction and hospitality (Gutiérrez-Li, 2025). More generally, between 2020 and 2024, there were on average 352,000 deportations per year (Gelatt and Bush-Joseph, 2025), and the Trump administration wants to increase that number to 1 million. Given the limited amount of resources (budget, detention facilities, and officers) and their policy priorities, different administrations have shifted funds from interior to border enforcement (or vice versa) rather than addressing both at the same time.

**Figure 4. 287(g) Program Removals, 2009–2024**



Source: Data from TRACImmigration (2025).

<sup>3</sup> Additional information on Title 42 removals and other enforcement policies can be found here:

<https://ohss.dhs.gov/topics/immigration/immigration-enforcement/monthly-tables>

Last, it is important to note that individuals' behavior is influenced by the combination of all policies in place. However, the key aspect people take into consideration is the degree to which they are enforced. Since major immigration enforcement programs generally require approval from Congress, the executive branch is somewhat bound by the existing policies. What matters in practice is whether and the extent to which policies are implemented. Gutiérrez-Li and Rubalcaba (2025) found that even in periods outside the activation of immigration enforcement policies, unexpected increases in enforcement intensity led to sharp, albeit temporary, reductions in the labor supply of farmworkers. According to the authors, above-normal levels of immigration-related arrests in a community can decrease labor force participation by as much as 3.2 percentage points and reduce weekly working hours by as much as 17% per month. Their results show that localized immigration enforcement exerts downward pressure on the agricultural labor supply even during periods when new policies are not being activated, especially in regions of the United States where labor-intensive agricultural production is widespread.

The policies explained above—SC, 287(g), and E-Verify, among others—have been used for many years to exercise immigration enforcement. In addition, the current administration has expanded its efforts to deport individuals by taking measures like allowing immigration agents to search and detain undocumented individuals in houses of worship, schools, hospitals, and other sensitive places (Bustillo, 2025). Likewise, the administration is taking efforts to force areas to eliminate sanctuary city policies (White House, 2025) and has built new prisons and detention facilities in states like Florida. Moreover, the government has announced the creation of a program for undocumented individuals to self-deport in exchange for a bonus or cash payment. According to the Department of Homeland Security, there will be a “historic opportunity for illegal aliens to receive cost-free travel, forgiveness of any failure to depart fines, and a \$1,000 exit bonus” to facilitate travel back to immigrants' countries of origin (or another country) through the CBP Home Mobile App (Department of Homeland Security, 2025).

## Costs

Carrying out a major deportation effort involves two main types of costs. First, there are costs of production (CP), which refer to the negative impact of removing workers on production. In sectors like agriculture, reliance on undocumented workers is well known (Gutiérrez-Li, 2025; Hertz and Zahniser; Kostandini et al., 2014), as manual labor has become harder to find in some areas of the country. If employers in sectors in which domestic

workers are hard to recruit cannot automate their production processes or find other workers, production losses (like food rotting on farms or construction projects halting) are to be expected. Estimates of the impact of enforcement on key economic variables vary. However, several recent studies generally suggest negative effects. For example, according to the Budget Model at the University of Pennsylvania (<https://budgetmodel.wharton.upenn.edu>), mass deportations in the following four to ten years would lead to significant GDP losses (in the billions), wage reductions for both low- and high-skilled workers, and fewer jobs. Moreover, undocumented immigrants also pay taxes through their payroll and consumption within the United States, and their removal would translate into tax revenue losses. Similarly, a study from the Dallas Federal Reserve Bank (Orrenius et al., 2025) concludes that a reduction in net immigration to the United States will hamper GDP growth but could have a small impact on inflation, while researchers at the Peterson Institute for International Economics found, in addition, a negative association between deportations and employment (McKibbin, Hogan, and Noland, 2024).

The second main cost associated with enforcement relates to the actual financial burden of deporting individuals, including arresting and/or detaining migrants, processing them through the court systems, keeping them in jails, and their removal to their countries of origin or other nations via buses or flights. Providing a \$1,000 bonus and covering all the transportation costs for individuals to self-deport is potentially a cheaper option than forcibly removing them, but an onerous one in and of itself. The workforce needed at each of these steps includes ICE agents, security personnel, lawyers, judges, clerks, pilots, and police officers, among many others. Likewise, costs associated with deterrence and finishing the border wall are also considerable. US Immigration and Customs Enforcement does not currently have the personnel to carry out the ambitious goal of deporting millions of undocumented immigrants in the next few years. For this reason, the Department of Homeland Security is trying to rehire retired personnel by offering different perks, including \$50,000 signing and retention bonuses.<sup>4</sup>

## Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Labor shortages have become a persistent challenge for sectors like agriculture, construction, health care, and hospitality, which have historically relied on undocumented workers (Gutiérrez-Li, 2025 and 2024a). Research has shown that, even in periods of crises and high unemployment, domestic workers are reluctant to take jobs in industries involving physically demanding tasks, like agriculture (Luckstead, Nayga, and Snell, 2022).

---

<sup>4</sup> See this recent post found on the USA jobs website on August 8, 2025, for a Deportation Officer: <https://www.usajobs.gov/job/841738400>

In the context of a potential sharp increase in deportations, a significant reduction in the number of new illegal borders crossings, tightening of immigration enforcement in the interior, the end of programs allowing individuals from certain countries to live and work temporarily in the United States, a reduction in refugee admissions, a rise in self-deportations, and an increase in legal migration costs, the United States will likely experience a workforce contraction. Sectors already struggling to find workers could find themselves facing increased competition for a scarcer labor supply. In turn, this could push some companies out of business, lead to higher wage bills, and even result in temporary product and service shortages, as domestic production costs go up and the costs of imports rise due to tariffs and other barriers. New job creation and innovation could also be threatened if self-employed individuals are deported, as immigrants tend to be over-represented in the entrepreneurship sector (Gutiérrez-Li, 2024b).

While significant increases in labor costs will likely lead to disruptions and other challenges, long-run desirable changes could accelerate. First, investments in automation could increase. Secondly, artificial intelligence and other technologies could improve efficiency in production processes and reduce the need for manual, low-skilled labor, and at the same time foster demand for workers with a different skillset. Additionally, although unlikely, the exacerbation of labor shortages could open opportunities to pass immigration reforms, creating legal pathways to employ foreign workers in industries needing them in a more affordable way. In any case, the appetite for goods and services from industries currently employing undocumented workers is not expected to wane any time soon. On the contrary, the demand for fresh produce and housing is likely to rise with population and economic growth. Likewise, the aging of the current population will likely result in an increase in demand for healthcare services.

---

## For More Information

- Amuedo-Dorantes, C., and E. Arenas-Arroyo. 2019. "Immigration Enforcement and Children's Living Arrangements." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 38(1):11–40. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22106>
- Anadón, I.J. 2023. The role of states in U.S. immigration: A study of population dynamics and subnational immigration laws. *Social Science Research*, 114, 102909. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2023.102909>
- Bustillo, X. 2025, January 20. "Trump Signs Sweeping Actions on Immigration and Border Security on Day 1." *NPR Politics*. Available online: <https://www.npr.org/2025/01/20/g-s1-43650/trump-inauguration-day-one-immigration>
- East, C.N., A.L. Hines, P. Luck, H. Mansour, and A. Velásquez. 2023. "The Labor Market Effects of Immigration Enforcement." *Journal of Labor Economics* 41(4):957–996. <https://doi.org/10.1086/721152>
- Gelatt, J., and K. Bush-Joseph. 2025, February. "Explainer: ICE Arrests and Deportations from the U.S. Interior." *Explainers*. Migration Policy Institute.
- Gutiérrez-Li, A. 2024a. *Feeding America: How Immigrants Sustain US Agriculture*. Rice University Baker Institute for Public Policy. <https://doi.org/10.25613/Z5BY-GZ22>
- Gutiérrez-Li, A. 2024b. "Home Country Work Experience and Immigrant Self-Employment in the United States." *International Migration Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183241262966>
- Gutiérrez-Li, A. 2025. "The Unseen Workforce: How Immigration Enforcement Could Shake the U.S. Economy." *Choices* 40(3):1–6. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.362692>
- Gutiérrez-Li, A., and J. Rubalcaba. 2025. "The Effects of Ongoing Internal Immigration Enforcement on the U.S. Agricultural Labor." *Journal of the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaa2.70026>
- Hertz, T., and S. Zahniser. 2013. "Is There a Farm Labor Shortage?" *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 95(2):476–481. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajae/aas090>
- Huang, K.M., D. Farnsworth, Z. Guan, and Y. Li. 2024. "E-Verify and Its Implications for U.S. Agriculture." *Choices* 39(1):1–10. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.339723>
- Kostandini, G., E. Mykerezi, and C. Escalante. 2014. "The Impact of Immigration Enforcement on the U.S. Farming Sector." *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 96(1):172–192. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajae/aat081>
- Luckstead, J., R.M. Nayga Jr, and H. Snell. 2022. "U.S. Workers' Willingness to Accept Meatpacking Jobs Amid the Covid-19 Pandemic." *Journal of the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association* 1(1):47–60. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaa2.8>
- Luo, T., and G. Kostandini. 2022. "Stringent Immigration Enforcement and Responses of the Immigrant-Intensive Sector: Evidence from E-Verify Adoption in Arizona." *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 104(4):1411–1434. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajae.12271>
- Luo, T., G. Kostandini, and J.L. Jordan. 2023. "Stringent Immigration Enforcement and the Farm Sector: Evidence from E-Verify Adoption Across States." *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy* 45(2):1211–1232. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aep.13269>
- University of Pennsylvania. 2025, July 28. "Mass Deportation of Unauthorized Immigrants: Fiscal and Economic Effects." Brief, Immigration. Budget Model.
- McKibbin, W., M. Hogan, and M. Noland. 2024. "Trump's Deportation Plan Would Cause Lower U.S. Employment and GDP Than Otherwise." *PIIE Charts*. Peterson Institute for International Economics.

- Orrenius, P.M., G. Ozor, M. Zavodny, and X. Zhou. 2025. "Declining Immigration Weighs on GDP Growth, with Little Impact on Inflation." Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas.
- TRACImmigration. "Immigration and Customs Enforcements Records Through July 2020." Transactional Records Access Clearing House at Syracuse University. Available online: <https://tracreports.org/phptools/immigration/secure/> [Accessed August 5, 2025]
- White House. 2025, April 28. "Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Protects American Communities from Criminal Aliens." Available online: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/04/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-protects-american-communities-from-criminal-aliens/>
- Tokar, E.L. 2013. "Unlocking Secure Communities: The Role of the Freedom of Information Act in the Department of Homeland Security's Secure Communities." *Legislation and Policy Brief* 5(1):103.
- US Department of Homeland Security. "CBP Home: Assistance to Voluntarily Self-Deport." Available online: <https://www.dhs.gov/cbphome> [Accessed August 2025]
- US Immigration and Customs Enforcement. "Partner with ICE Through the 287(g) Program." Available online: <https://www.ice.gov/287g> [Accessed October 2025]

**About the Authors:** Alejandro Gutiérrez-Li ([alejandro-gli@ncsu.edu](mailto:alejandro-gli@ncsu.edu)) is an Assistant Professor of Agricultural and Resource Economics at North Carolina State University.

**Acknowledgments:** The author has nothing to disclose.

---

©1999–2026 CHOICES. All rights reserved. Articles may be reproduced or electronically distributed as long as attribution to Choices and the Agricultural & Applied Economics Association is maintained. Choices subscriptions are free and can be obtained through <http://www.choicesmagazine.org>.