

# RINGING THE ALARM BELLS

RISING AUTHORITARIAN PRACTICES AND EROSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE UNITED STATES

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL



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**Cover photo:** A protester and National Guard members behind riot shields during a tense moment in Los Angeles, California on June 14, 2025 © David Pashae/Middle East Images/AFP/Getty Images

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**“The erosion of human rights is not always announced with sirens or tanks.”**

– Amnesty International, *Rights Revealed: Authoritarian Practices*<sup>1</sup>

The United States of America under the leadership of President Donald J. Trump is showing a recognizable pattern of authoritarian practices and erosion of human rights that Amnesty International has documented for decades across countries worldwide. In 2025, President Trump acted quickly and consistently through executive actions and administrative measures to shrink civic space and undermine the rule of law domestically and internationally, with both short- and long-term consequences for human rights safeguards.

The Trump administration’s efforts to intimidate, silence, and punish protesters and critics, restrict the press and reshape access to information, and systematically erode the rule of law are creating a human rights emergency. These actions are mutually reinforcing: press intimidation makes human rights violations and abuses harder to expose; retaliation against protest makes people afraid to speak; expanding surveillance and militarization increases the costs of dissent; and attacks on courts, lawyers, and oversight bodies make accountability harder to enforce. These efforts embolden authoritarian practices globally.<sup>2</sup>

We have seen where this road leads when dissent is punished, oversight is dismantled, and people can be disappeared or expelled beyond the reach of the law. But we also know something else: the slide is not inevitable. There is still time to stop it.

One year into President Trump’s second administration, the “alarm bells” of authoritarian practice signal a dangerous trajectory. At stake are the rights that enable people to defend all other rights and live without fear from the arbitrary exercise of power and discrimination, including the rights to freedom of the press, expression, and peaceful protest; a fair trial and due process; equality and non-discrimination; and privacy. When these rights are weakened, the harms do not stay contained – they spread.

Ring the Alarm Bells: Rising Authoritarian Practices provides an overview of twelve alarm bells, with calls to federal, state, and local officials, public institutions, civil society, and private actors such as technology companies to match the urgency with practical steps to safeguard civic space, restore rule-of-law safeguards, and prevent the normalization of repression and human rights violations.

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, *Rights Revealed: Human Rights and the Escalation of Authoritarian Practices Around the World-Part 2* (Index: POL 32/0426/2025), 28 October 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/POL3204262025ENGLISH.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International, “Amnesty International warns of global human rights crisis as ‘Trump Effect’ accelerates destructive trends”, 29 April 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/04/global-human-rights-crisis-trump-effect-accelerates-destructive-trends/>

# GLOSSARY

<b>AUTHORITARIAN PRACTICES</b>	When governments and others in power use certain tactics to stop people from speaking out, limit civic space, entrench power, weaken or undermine the rule of law, and violate human rights. <sup>3</sup>
<b>CIVIC SPACE</b>	The environment that allows individuals and groups to participate in the political, economic, or social life of a society.
<b>CIVIL SOCIETY</b>	Groups of people, networks, and non-governmental institutions, including unions, trade associations, and non-profit organizations, that come together to promote something for the betterment of their community or society.
<b>FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION</b>	A human right that protects the right of individuals to express their opinions or beliefs without interference from the government.
<b>FREEDOM OF THE PRESS</b>	A human right that guarantees the ability of journalists and media organizations to publish news, opinions, and information without undue government interference, censorship, or punishment from the government.
<b>RULE OF LAW</b>	As defined by the United Nations <sup>4</sup> , the rule of law is a principle under which all persons, institutions, and entities are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced, independently adjudicated, and consistent with international human rights standards. The rule of law requires states to take concrete and effective measures to promote and ensure adherence to the principles of supremacy of the law, checks and balances and separation of powers, equality before the law, and equal protection of the law, accountability to the law, fairness in the application of the law, participation in decision-making, legal certainty, avoidance of arbitrariness, and procedural and legal transparency.

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<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International, *Rights Revealed-Part 2* (previously cited).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, "What is the rule of law?", <https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/what-is-the-rule-of-law/>; see Amnesty International, *Rights Revealed-Part 2* (previously cited).

# INTRODUCTION

We have been here before. Amnesty International has long documented authoritarian practices in many countries and contexts. The details vary, but the pattern is familiar: measures that aim to concentrate power, undermine the rule of law, and evade accountability, accompanied by the blatant disregard and violation of human rights.<sup>5</sup> Governments begin by controlling information, discrediting critics, punishing protest, and narrowing civic space. They demonize groups to justify abusive measures and test tactics of repression, and they weaken courts, oversight bodies, and the legal profession, making it increasingly difficult to halt or reverse these patterns of backsliding and abuse.

By the time the harms are undeniable, the institutions designed to restrain power may already be compromised. As Amnesty International has documented for more than a decade, the rule of law, civic space, and human rights have deteriorated in Hungary under the government of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.<sup>6</sup> Most recently, a new state office targeted civil society organizations, independent media, and activists, and repressive legislation continued to exert a far-reaching and chilling effect on LGBTI people.<sup>7</sup>

In the Americas, Amnesty International has documented its concerns and condemned both longstanding authoritarian practices and the renewed trend of narrowing civic space across the continent. In Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, governments have concentrated power and eroded any form of accountability, and are suppressing dissent while committing crimes under international law to do so.<sup>8</sup> In El Salvador, Paraguay, and Argentina, where freedom of expression, assembly, and association are under severe threat, the human rights of marginalized populations are denied by repeatedly dehumanizing them.<sup>9</sup>

In El Salvador, a repressive model grounded in authoritarian practices has become entrenched. It is characterized by the prolonged application of the state of emergency and the systematic use of mass and arbitrary detentions, together with widespread allegations of torture, deaths in custody, and enforced disappearances.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the progressive closure of civic space has further intensified through the criminalization of human rights defenders and dissenting voices and adoption of the Foreign Agents Law,

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<sup>5</sup> Amnesty International, *Rights Revealed-Part 2* (previously cited).

<sup>6</sup> Amnesty International, *Defending Rule of Law in Hungary*, 30 September 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2020/09/hungary-rule-of-law/>

<sup>7</sup> Amnesty International and others, Joint Open Letter to the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, the Rule of Law, and Consumer Protection, Michael McGrath, 23 May 2025, <https://www.amnesty.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/OPEN-LETTER-ON-THE-HUNGARIAN-BILL-.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Amnesty International, "Human rights in Cuba 2024", <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/central-america-and-the-caribbean/cuba/report-cuba/>; Amnesty International, "Nicaragua: A continuum of repression and systematic human rights violations under the Ortega-Murillo government", 18 April 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/04/nicaragua-systematic-human-rights-violations-ortega-murillo/>; Amnesty International, *Human rights in Venezuela 2024*, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/south-america/venezuela/report-venezuela/>; Amnesty International, "Venezuela: Persecution builds relentlessly for civil society and dissidents", 16 April 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/04/venezuela-civil-society-dissident-voices-face-incessant-escalation-persecution/>;

<sup>9</sup> Amnesty International, "El Salvador: New Foreign agents law threatens rights and freedoms of civil society organizations and the media" (Index: AMR 29/9498/2025), 13 June 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr29/9498/2025/en/>; Amnesty International, *Behind the veil of popularity: Repression and regression of human rights in El Salvador* (Index: AMR 29/7423/2023), 4 December 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr29/7423/2023/en/>; Amnesty International, "Paraguay: Veto anti civil society law" (Index: AMR 45/8679/2024), 24 October 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr45/8679/2024/en/>; Amnesty International, *Argentina: Silence is not an option: Repression and impunity in Jujuy* (Index: AMR 13/9390/2025), 30 May 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr13/9390/2025/en/>; Amnesty International, "Argentina: Open Letter to President Javier Milei months into his administration" (Index: AMR 13/8563/2024), 3 October 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr13/8563/2024/en/>

<sup>10</sup> Amnesty International, "El Salvador: A thousand days into the state of emergency. "Security" at the expense of human rights", 20 December 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/12/el-salvador-mil-dias-regimen-excepcion-modelo-seguridad-a-costa-derechos-humanos/>; Amnesty International, *Human rights in El Salvador 2024*, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/central-america-and-the-caribbean/el-salvador/report-el-salvador/>

which facilitates the surveillance and sanctioning of civil society organizations.<sup>11</sup>

Other countries that have experienced authoritarian practices include Ethiopia, where authorities shut down internet and telephone communications, arbitrarily arrested journalists and peaceful protesters, and suspended prominent human rights organizations in the context of an internal armed conflict; and Tunisia, where the president dissolved parliament and undermined judicial independence, “enabling arbitrary detention, politically motivated prosecutions, and widespread repression of activists, migrants, and civil society to consolidate authoritarian control since 2021.”<sup>12</sup>

In 2025, authoritarian laws, policies, and practices accelerated worldwide.<sup>13</sup> Governments entrenched power by targeting and banning media, threatening and dissolving NGOs, jailing critics on baseless “terrorism” or “extremism” charges, weaponizing immigration, and criminalizing human rights defenders, climate activists, and Gaza solidarity protesters.<sup>14</sup>

The erosion of civic space, the rule of law, and human rights in the United States is a clear case of the global pattern Amnesty International warns about.<sup>15</sup> These shifts in the USA embolden authoritarian practices worldwide. But as Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International’s Secretary General, warned:

**“For years now, we’ve witnessed a creeping spread of authoritarian practices among states the world over, fostered by aspiring and elected leaders’ cruelty, all who believe in freedom and equality must steel ourselves to counter increasingly extreme attacks on international law and universal human rights.”**

– Amnesty International, Global human rights crisis as ‘Trump effect’ accelerates destructive trends.<sup>16</sup>

As laid out in this briefing paper, two fronts are closing in the USA. First, civic space is narrowing: journalists intimidated, protesters punished, universities and civil society silenced, and communities dehumanized. Second, rule-of-law safeguards are weakening: due process bypassed, courts and lawyers intimidated, oversight dismantled. These fronts reinforce each other: a society cannot defend rights through the courts if people cannot speak and organize, and speech is not free when the state can punish critics without legal constraint.

At the same time, in a classic hallmark of authoritarian practices, the Trump administration is dehumanizing and criminalizing marginalized populations. What is justified as exceptional treatment of a “target group” risks becoming a model for broader repression. The Trump administration started most visibly with refugees and migrants, marshalling public attention and resources across the government to target them consistently at the federal, state, and local levels of life and governance. However, the administration targeted other populations as well from the first day, such as Black and Brown communities, LGBTI people, and women, and the right to equality and non-discrimination, reinforcing a baseline in the United States of oppression and discrimination against individuals and groups who have fought hard for decades and centuries to ensure respect for everyone’s human rights.

Similarly, the transformation of immigration enforcement into a paramilitary-style operation is testing tactics that can be used against other populations. The immigration enforcement system combines broad discretion,

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<sup>11</sup> Amnesty International, “El Salvador: Criminal system used as a weapon to punish human rights defenders”, 9 October 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/10/el-salvador-sistema-penal-utilizado-como-arma-para-castigar-a-quienes-defienden-derechos-humanos/>; Amnesty International, “El Salvador deepens siege on civil society”, 26 May 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/05/el-salvador-profundiza-el-asedio-a-la-sociedad-civil/>; Amnesty International, “El Salvador: Government deepens authoritarian pattern in the face of social discontent”, 20 May 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/05/el-salvador-gobierno-profundiza-patron-autoritario-frente-al-descontento-social/>

<sup>12</sup> Amnesty International, *Rights Revealed-Part 2* (previously cited).

<sup>13</sup> Amnesty International USA, “Amnesty International warns of global human rights crisis as ‘Trump effect’ accelerates destructive trends”, 28 April 2025, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/amnesty-international-warns-of-global-human-rights-crisis-as-trump-effect-accelerates-destructive-trends/>

<sup>14</sup> Amnesty International, “Global human rights crisis as ‘Trump effect’ accelerates destructive trends” (previously cited).

<sup>15</sup> Amnesty International, “Global human rights crisis as ‘Trump effect’ accelerates destructive trends” (previously cited).

<sup>16</sup> Amnesty International, “Global human rights crisis as ‘Trump effect’ accelerates destructive trends” (previously cited).

speed, fear, and dehumanization – conditions that make it easier to normalize practices such as masked law enforcement, militarized raids, large-scale detention, surveillance, and summary expulsions.

These measures, combined with other efforts by the Trump administration to roll back human rights safeguards and international engagement, created ripe conditions for concentrating power in the president, undermining human rights further, and spreading global impunity.

Under international human rights law, governments must respect, protect, and fulfill human rights. The highlighted rights at risk, while only a partial list, are critical to enabling transparency and participation in government, undergirded by the rule of law. Accountability and protection from arbitrary power create the space for people to live with fairness, dignity, and security.

Amnesty International recognizes the warning signs from its global work – and also why there is still time to stop the slide if people and institutions act now.

**“In free and fair societies, power is kept in balance through the rule of law, accountability, and public participation. These are often called the “pillars” of a free society. These principles are crucial. They mean that no one, not even those in government, is above the law. It requires courts to be fair and independent, and police and military to abide by the law. It means people have the right to protest peacefully, organise, and speak freely. And it means governments can be questioned and held to account without fear of reprisals. But when leaders reject being questioned, when they ignore or undermine these principles, they start to crack those pillars. This is when freedom is eroded and the seeds of repression are sown.”**

Amnesty International, *Rights Revealed: Authoritarian Practices*, Part 2 <sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Amnesty International, *Rights Revealed-Part 2* (previously cited).



# ALARM BELLS OF RISING AUTHORITARIAN PRACTICES IN THE USA

President Trump's administration is cracking the pillars of a free society. Alarm bells are ringing. Although not a comprehensive list, these alarm bells cover:

- Targeting freedom of the press and access to information
- Targeting freedom of expression and assembly
- Targeting civil society and universities
- Targeting political opponents and critics
- Targeting judges, lawyers, and the legal system
- Undermining due process
- Attacking refugee and migrant rights
- Scapegoating populations and rolling back non-discrimination policies
- Using the military for domestic purposes and militarizing law enforcement
- Dismantling checks on corporate accountability and anti-corruption measures
- Increasing surveillance capacity
- Undermining international systems designed to protect human rights

Under each alarm bell is a snapshot of policy measures and actions that demonstrate a pattern of escalating authoritarian practices in the USA and are by no means exhaustive.

**“We speak of authoritarian practices when governments and others in power use certain tactics to stop people from speaking out, limit civic space, entrench power, weaken or undermine the rule of law, and violate human rights.”**

– Amnesty International, *Rights Revealed: Authoritarian Practices*, Part 2. <sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Amnesty International, *Rights Revealed-Part 2* (previously cited).

# ALARM BELL 1: PRESS FREEDOM AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION ARE UNDERMINED

**RIGHTS AT STAKE INCLUDE: FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION; FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION.**

Independent journalism and freedom of the press are critical human rights safeguards: they help expose abuses, enable accountability, and equip the public to make informed decisions and to challenge abuse and corruption. Amnesty International has documented a common authoritarian practice of elected leaders seeking to control the narrative by intimidating journalists, restricting access, discrediting critical outlets, and weaponizing regulatory power to punish independent reporting.<sup>19</sup>

Over the past year, President Trump dangerously escalated these tactics.<sup>20</sup> By conditioning access with speech-chilling terms, verbally attacking journalists, withdrawing security clearances, and threatening funding, the Trump administration reshaped press oversight of the government, allowing it to help control the message and discouraging critical reporting.<sup>21</sup>

The Trump administration hand-picked which outlets could cover the White House and barred the Associated Press from covering the White House in "restricted spaces" because of its editorial decision to use "Gulf of Mexico" instead of "Gulf of America."<sup>22</sup> In October 2025, dozens of reporters walked out of the Pentagon and turned in their press badges rather than sign documents waiving their First Amendment protections, representing unprecedented press restrictions.<sup>23</sup> The New York Times sued the Trump administration for restricting journalists' ability to report.<sup>24</sup>

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) was arguably weaponized from an independent regulatory agency into an instrument of political retaliation.<sup>25</sup> FCC Chairman Brendan Carr terminated all diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives within the FCC; sought to enforce the termination of DEI initiatives upon private entities as a form of FCC regulation; reopened a complaint against CBS News regarding its editing of an interview with former US Vice President Kamala Harris; and launched investigations into NPR and PBS.<sup>26</sup> An executive order made the FCC, an independent regulatory agency, accountable to the president rather than Congress.<sup>27</sup>

President Trump further sought to control access to information by directing funding cuts for the publicly funded broadcasters NPR and PBS.<sup>28</sup> Although a court settlement with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting

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<sup>19</sup> Amnesty International, "What is the state of global press freedom?", 2 May 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2025/05/what-is-the-state-of-global-press-freedom-in-2025/>

<sup>20</sup> Amnesty International, *USA: Chaos & cruelty: 10 Compounding Assaults on Human Rights: A Review of President Trump's First 100 days in Office* (Index: AMR 51/9313/2025), 30 April 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr51/9313/2025/en/>, p.5.

<sup>21</sup> See also Committee to Protect Journalists, *Alarm bells: Trump's First 100 Days Ramp Up Fear for the Press, Democracy*, 30 April 2025, <https://cpj.org/special-reports/alarm-bells-trumps-first-100-days-ramp-up-fear-for-the-press-democracy/>

<sup>22</sup> Amnesty International, *USA: Chaos & cruelty: 10 Compounding Assaults on Human Rights: A Review of President Trump's First 100 days in Office* (previously cited); New York Times, "Trump White House moves to pick the pool reporters who cover him, Restricted spaces are 'the Oval Office, Air Force One, and Mar-a-Lago.'" A July 2025 U.S. federal appeals court decision, which allowed the Administration's ban to stand, is under appeal. US District Court for the District of Columbia, *Associated Press v. Budowich*, Case 1:25-cv-00532, <https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/69662918/the-associated-press-v-budowich/> (last updated 18 December 2025). <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/25/business/media/trump-white-house-press.html>

<sup>23</sup> Associated Press, "Journalists turn in access badges, exit Pentagon rather than agree to new reporting rules", 15 October 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/pentagon-press-access-hegseth-trump-restrictions-5d9c2a63e4e03b91fc1546bb09ffbf12>; New York Times, "Pentagon press restrictions", 20 September 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/09/20/us/pentagon-press-restrictions.html>

<sup>24</sup> New York Times, "Under Trump, Voice of America is down but not out — Full Report", 26 October 2025, <https://static01.nyt.com/newsgraphics/documenttools/340343f285781674/6da3eb69-full.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Amnesty International, "Protect freedom of press" (Index: AMR 51/9251/2025 USA), 10 April 2025, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/UA-37.25-USA.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> US Federal Communications Commission, Office of Chairman Brendan Carr, "Chairman Carr ends FCC's promotion of DEI", 21 January 2025, <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-409054A1.pdf>; New York Times, "The F.C.C. is pressuring companies to drop D.E.I. it's succeeding, too", 11 July 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/11/business/tmobile-fcc-dei-corporate-america.html>; Chairman Brendan Carr, "Re: federal license obligations of NPR and PBS member stations", 29 January 2025, <https://static01.nyt.com/newsgraphics/documenttools/340343f285781674/6da3eb69-full.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Executive Order, *Ensuring Accountability for All Agencies*, 18 February 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/ensuring-accountability-for-all-agencies/>

<sup>28</sup> Executive Order, *Ending Taxpayer Subsidization of Biased Media*, 1 May 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/05/ending-taxpayer-subsidization-of-biased-media/>; NPR, "Trump plans order to cut funding for NPR and PBS", 15 April 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/04/15/nx-s1-5352827/npr-pbs-public-media-trump-rescission-funding>.

restored limited grant funding to NPR's public radio satellite system for the next five years,<sup>29</sup> President Trump and Congress zeroed out funding for NPR and PBS through a budgetary process known as "rescission."<sup>30</sup>

The effects extended beyond US borders. President Trump gutted the US Agency for Global Media, which resulted in the shuttering or significant hobbling of independent media outlets, including Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Asia, Radio Marti, and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.<sup>31</sup> The impact of the abrupt and arbitrary actions targeting these media outlets is especially felt in countries where the robust and independent functioning of the press is already curtailed by their governments.<sup>32</sup> The dismantling of USAID left international journalists covering rights-abusing governments without institutional support or financial assistance from impacted organizations.<sup>33</sup>

### **CASE STUDY: MARIO GUEVARA – AN IMMIGRANT JOURNALIST TARGETED WHILE REPORTING AND DEPORTED**

Mario Guevara, a US-based Salvadoran journalist, was the first known journalist detained by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for reporting and subsequently deported, creating a precedent to exile reporters.<sup>34</sup>

Guevara was arrested on 14 June 2025, at a "No Kings" protest in Doraville, Georgia, while wearing a press vest and livestreaming coverage of immigration enforcement and raids as part of his professional work.<sup>35</sup> Law enforcement transferred him to ICE agents for deportation proceedings despite his valid authorization to remain in the United States.<sup>36</sup> All criminal charges against him were dropped.<sup>37</sup>

While an immigration judge set bond for his release on 1 July 2025, ICE refused to accept the bond payment and appealed the order.<sup>38</sup> The government claimed his livestream reporting posed a danger to public safety and law enforcement officials.<sup>39</sup> Despite AIUSA's Urgent Action campaign demanding Guevara's release and campaigning efforts from dozens of organizations, Guevara was deported to El Salvador on 3 October 2025.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>29</sup> US District Court for the District of Columbia, *National Public Radio, Inc. and others v. Donald J. Trump and others*, Case 25-cv-1674-RDM, Joint Stipulation for Dismissal of Certain Claims, 17 November 2025, <https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.dcd.280953/gov.uscourts.dcd.280953.77.0.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> PBS News, "Trump signs bill canceling \$9 billion in foreign aid and public broadcasting funding", 24 July 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/trump-signs-bill-canceling-9-billion-in-foreign-aid-and-public-broadcasting-funding>

<sup>31</sup> Executive Order, *Continuing the Reduction of the Federal Bureaucracy*, 14 March 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/continuing-the-reduction-of-the-federal-bureaucracy/>; Amnesty International, "What is the state of global press freedom?" (previously cited); New York Times, "Under Trump, Voice of America is down but not out", 26 October 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/26/us/politics/under-trump-voice-of-america-is-down-but-not-out.html>; Montse Ferrer, "Trump's gutting of RFA hurts press freedom – and helps its opponents – across Asia", 27 March 2025, *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/03/trumps-gutting-of-rfa-hurts-press-freedom-and-helps-its-opponents-across-asia/>; Amnesty International, *USA: Chaos & cruelty: 10 Compounding Assaults on Human Rights: A Review of President Trump's First 100 days in Office* (previously cited).

<sup>32</sup> *The Diplomat*, "Trump's gutting of RFA hurts press freedom – and helps its opponents – across Asia" (previously cited).

<sup>33</sup> Amnesty International, "What is the state of global press freedom?" (previously cited).

<sup>34</sup> Amnesty International, "USA outcome: Release journalist from immigration detention", 8 October 2025, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/urgent-actions/usa-outcome-release-journalist-from-immigration-detention/>

<sup>35</sup> Amnesty International, "USA outcome: Release journalist from immigration detention" (previously cited).

<sup>36</sup> Amnesty International, "USA outcome: Release journalist from immigration detention" (previously cited).

<sup>37</sup> Amnesty International, "USA outcome: Release journalist from immigration detention" (previously cited).

<sup>38</sup> Amnesty International, "USA outcome: Release journalist from immigration detention" (previously cited).

<sup>39</sup> Amnesty International, "USA outcome: Release journalist from immigration detention" (previously cited).

<sup>40</sup> Amnesty International USA, "Deporting journalist Mario Guevara sends chilling message: Reporters in the U.S. Can be Silenced and Deported for Doing Their Job", 3 October 2025, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/deporting-journalist-mario-guevara-sends-chilling-message-reporters-in-the-u-s-can-be-silenced-and-deported-for-doing-their-job/>

# ALARM BELL 2: SPEECH AND PROTEST ARE PUNISHED

**RIGHTS AT STAKE INCLUDE: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY, AND ASSOCIATION; NON-DISCRIMINATION; DUE PROCESS.**

Freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are human rights that people rely on to defend all other rights. A classic warning sign of authoritarian practices is when authorities use surveillance, arrest, administrative punishment, and the military to make protest and dissent feel dangerous. Neutralizing opposition is an authoritarian practice designed to evade accountability for violating rights and breaking the law.<sup>41</sup>

The Trump administration had a significant impact on free expression: threatening and criminalizing protest, dissent, and academic freedom. As shown below, it targeted foreign-born students protesting the Israeli government's ongoing genocide in Gaza and people protesting and monitoring the administration's aggressive immigration enforcement actions in particular, achieving multiple goals: constraining protest, undermining universities as a civic space, and building a permission structure to use the military in forms of domestic enforcement.

The Trump administration detained and sought to deport students who expressed views and engaged in protests in solidarity with the rights of the Palestinian people in particular.<sup>42</sup> Early in the president's term, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced that he had revoked the visas of at least 300 students and visitors, claiming that the individuals had engaged in "vandalizing universities, harassing students, taking over buildings, creating a ruckus" without providing any evidence of their individual conduct.<sup>43</sup> To pursue its agenda, the administration used the "Catch and Revoke" program, combining social media monitoring, visa status tracking, and automated threat assessments, to revoke visas at scale.<sup>44</sup> In August 2025, the US Department of State announced that it had revoked 6,000 student visas, of which between 200 and 300 were identified as support for terrorism under a broad federal statute.<sup>45</sup> On 12 January 2026, the State Department announced that it had revoked over 100,000 visas in 2025, of which 8,000 were student visas for "encounters with law enforcement for criminal activity."<sup>46</sup>

In a harrowing action, President Trump federalized the US National Guard to deploy to the City of Los Angeles, California, to support the policing of individuals protesting US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) immigration raids. A few days later, 700 US Marines were deployed as well to be stationed outside a federal immigration detention facility and ICE office.<sup>47</sup> For the first time since 1965, the National Guard force was activated without a request from that state's governor – but at that time, the military was deployed to protect protestors, while this deployment *targeted* protestors.<sup>48</sup> The National Guard was sent to Los Angeles following two days of protests against federal agents conducting widespread, militarized workplace immigration raids, over the objections of the state's governor.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Amnesty International, *Rights Revealed-Part 2* (previously cited).

<sup>42</sup> Amnesty International USA, "Amnesty International USA raises alarm at freedom of expression crisis in the U.S.," 19 September 2025, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/amnesty-international-usa-raises-alarm-at-freedom-of-expression-crisis-in-the-u-s/>

<sup>43</sup> Reuters, "Rubio says US may have revoked more than 300 visas", 27 March 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/rubio-says-us-may-have-revoked-more-than-300-visas-2025-03-27/>; Amnesty International USA, *Chaos & Cruelty: 10 Compounding Assaults on Human Rights* (previously cited).

<sup>44</sup> Amnesty International, "USA/Global: Tech made by Palantir and Babel Street pose surveillance threats to pro-Palestine student protestors & migrants", 21 August 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/08/usa-global-tech-made-by-palantir-and-babel-street-pose-surveillance-threats-to-pro-palestine-student-protestors-migrants/>

<sup>45</sup> BBC News, "US State Department revokes 6,000 student visas", 18 August 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cz93vznd07o>

<sup>46</sup> US Department of State, X post: "Breaking: The State Department has now revoked over 100,000 visas, including some 8,000 student visas and 2,500 specialized visas for individuals who had encounters with U.S. law enforcement for criminal activity.", 12 January 2026, <https://x.com/StateDept/status/2010740549469557010>

<sup>47</sup> Amnesty International, "USA: End the use of military to police protests" (Index: AMR 51/9499/2025 USA), 13 June 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr51/9499/2025/en/>; PBS News, "Pentagon withdraws 700 Marines from Los Angeles", 21 July 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/pentagon-withdraws-700-marines-from-los-angeles>

<sup>48</sup> Amnesty International, "USA: End the use of military to police protests" (previously cited).

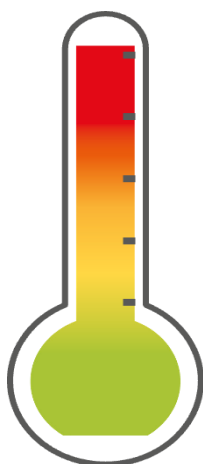
<sup>49</sup> Amnesty International, "USA: End the use of military to police protests" (previously cited); Associated Press, "California Gov. Newsom says Trump is a threat to democracy", 6 June 2025, <https://www.apnews.com/article/donald-trump-gavin-newsom-california-immigration-protests-a6467fcd3fa66c945ac7c15c40362972>

## CASE STUDY: MAHMOUD KHALIL AND LEQAA KORDIA

Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian activist and student organizer who recently graduated from Columbia University in the USA and lawful permanent resident of the USA, was unlawfully detained by US immigration authorities in March 2025 for his pro-Palestinian activism.<sup>50</sup> A federal judge ordered his release on bail in June 2025, though a recent appellate decision reversed that order and deportation proceedings continue as he continues his appeals and to fight to stay in the USA with his family.<sup>51</sup> Khalil's case is not isolated. At least ten other international students or activists were similarly targeted for detention and deportation by the government for their advocacy on Palestinian human rights.<sup>52</sup>

Leqaa Kordia, a 32-year-old Palestinian woman, was targeted for her participation in a 2024 protest outside Columbia University advocating against the Israeli government's ongoing genocide in Gaza. She has been arbitrarily detained since 13 March 2025, at the Prairieland Detention Facility in Texas, which is located far from her attorney and family and has a documented history of human rights violations.<sup>53</sup> Leqaa has lost approximately 175 family members in Gaza since the genocide began.<sup>54</sup> Amnesty International is calling for her release.<sup>55</sup> These cases send a chilling message: if you speak out for human rights, you will be targeted, you will be punished, and you will not have due process. That is a terrifying prospect, not just for students, not just for immigrants, but for everyone.

## THE CIVIC SPACE THERMOMETER<sup>56</sup>



**LOCKED DOWN:** Only state narratives allowed, rights restricted

**CRITICAL:** Protests banned, media controlled, civic groups dismantled

**SHRINKING:** Arrests of critical voices, smear campaigns, increased surveillance

**WARNING SIGNS:** Legal restrictions increase, intimidation starts, disinformation spreads

**WIDE OPEN:** Free press, protests without repression, strong civic networks

<sup>50</sup> Amnesty International USA, "Mahmoud Khalil must not be deported" (previously cited).

<sup>51</sup> Amnesty International USA, "Mahmoud Khalil must not be deported" (previously cited); New York Times, "Appeals court opens the door to Mahmoud Khalil's rearrest", 15 January 2026, [https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/15/nyregion/mahmoud-khalil-detention.html?utm\\_sf\\_cserv\\_ref=807095&smid=tw-nytimes&smtyp=cur&utm\\_sf\\_post\\_ref=652088858](https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/15/nyregion/mahmoud-khalil-detention.html?utm_sf_cserv_ref=807095&smid=tw-nytimes&smtyp=cur&utm_sf_post_ref=652088858)

<sup>52</sup> Amnesty International USA, "Mahmoud Khalil must not be deported" (previously cited).

<sup>53</sup> Amnesty International, "USA: Release detained protester" (Index: AMR 51/0380/2025 USA), 8 October 2025, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/UA-96.25-USA.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> Amnesty International, "USA: Release detained protester" (previously cited).

<sup>55</sup> Amnesty International, "USA: Release detained protester" (previously cited).

<sup>56</sup> The Civic Thermometer was developed for the 2025 Amnesty International *Rights Revealed: Authoritarian Practices, Part II* human rights education resource. The Civic Space Thermometer is not an official measurement, but a simplified tool designed to help think critically about how open or restricted civic life can be in different societies. Many organizations monitor civic space. For example, CIVICUS, "CIVICUS Monitor: Tracking Civic Space," <https://monitor.civicus.org/data>.

# ALARM BELL 3: CIVIL SOCIETY AND UNIVERSITIES ARE COERCED TO NARROW CIVIC SPACE

**RIGHTS AT STAKE INCLUDE: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY, AND ASSOCIATION; EDUCATION AND NON-DISCRIMINATION; ACADEMIC FREEDOM.**

Civil society organizations and universities form some of the key infrastructure of civic space, where people organize, debate, and hold power accountable. A common authoritarian practice is to use funding threats, legal status threats, and “security” narratives to force compliance.<sup>57</sup>

President Trump took aim at civil society over the past year through the lens of “terrorism.” The Trump administration cast a wide net that could capture tax-exempt organizations and their funders who oppose the president’s policies. His executive order aimed at dismantling groups it claims to be domestic terrorists was followed by an executive proclamation outlining a new ideological focus and broad national strategy for combatting domestic terrorism and political violence.<sup>58</sup> The US Attorney General’s implementing memorandum directed intensified “domestic terrorism” investigations, including the creation of recurring lists of groups and funders and incentives to report “suspicious” activities.<sup>59</sup> Although the memo includes a footnote dedicated to the protection of free speech and First Amendment-protected activity, its purpose seemingly conflicts with the nominal commitment. For example, the US Department of Justice (DOJ) is increasingly considering the act of filming immigration arrests as an act of domestic terrorism, weaponizing an important aspect of public protest and accountability against increasingly lawless federal agents.<sup>60</sup> The Trump administration also targeted philanthropic organizations, including the Open Society Foundations.<sup>61</sup>

Reinforcing the agenda, Congress acted to target tax-exempt nonprofit organizations by proposing language for HR 1, the “One Big Beautiful Bill” Act, that would enable the US Secretary of the Treasury to terminate the tax-exempt status of nonprofit organizations based on an allegation that they are “terrorist supporting organizations.”<sup>62</sup> This effort was defeated, and the bill passed without this language.<sup>63</sup> Alarming, it mirrored earlier legislation, H.R. 9495, that passed in the US House of Representatives in the fall of 2024, which predates the current Congress and current administration; that bill stalled in the US Senate.<sup>64</sup> The broad and

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<sup>57</sup> Amnesty International, *Rights Revealed-Part 2* (previously cited); Randi Weingarten and Amy Spitalnick, “By targeting NGOs, Trump and his allies take aim at civil society”, 9 June 2025, Newsweek, <https://www.newsweek.com/targeting-ngos-trump-his-allies-take-aim-civil-society-opinion-2082127>; BBC News, “Russia’s Putin signs law against ‘undesirable’ NGOs”, 24 May 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32860526>; Associated Press, “Hungary’s Orbán says he will do away with pro-democracy and rights groups receiving U.S. aid”, 7 February 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/orban-hungary-eliminate-ngos-usaid-aff22b9f9003f4c6c3115a9798c18af6>

<sup>58</sup> Executive Order, *Designating Antifa as a Domestic Terrorist Organization*, 22 September 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/09/designating-antifa-as-a-domestic-terrorist-organization/>; White House, “Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump designates antifa as a domestic terrorist organization”, 22 September 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/09/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-designates-antifa-as-a-domestic-terrorist-organization/>; Executive Order, *Countering Domestic Terrorism and Organized Political Violence*, 25 September 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/09/countering-domestic-terrorism-and-organized-political-violence/>; White House, “Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump develops new strategy to counter domestic terrorism and organized political violence”, 25 September 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/09/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-develops-new-strategy-to-counter-domestic-terrorism-and-organized-political-violence/>

<sup>59</sup> Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, “DOJ Plan to target ‘domestic terrorists’ risks chilling speech”, 18 December 2025, <https://www.thefire.org/news/doj-plan-target-domestic-terrorists-risks-chilling-speech>; Ken Klippenstein, “FBI Making list of American ‘extremists,’ leaked memo reveals”, 6 December 2025, <https://www.kenklippenstein.com/p/leak-fbi-list-of-extremists-is-coming>

<sup>60</sup> Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, “DOJ plan to target ‘domestic terrorists’ risks chilling speech” (previously cited); Guardian, “Revealed: FBI opened domestic terrorism investigations into anti-ICE activity across US”, 19 December 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/dec/19/fbi-terrorism-investigations-anti-ice-activity>; CATO Institute, “The government unconstitutionally labels ICE observers as domestic terrorists”, 15 December 2025, <https://www.cato.org/blog/dhs-policy-threatening-arresting-ice-observers-violates-their-rights>

<sup>61</sup> New York Times, “Justice Department official pushes prosecutors to investigate George Soros’ foundation, according to report”, 25 September 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/25/us/politics/justice-trump-george-soros-foundation.html>; NPR, “Hungary’s leader proposes ‘Stop Soros’ laws against NGOs that help migrants”, 23 February 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/02/23/588218227/hungarys-leader-pushes-for-stop-soros-laws-against-ngos-that-help-migrants>

<sup>62</sup> US Congress, Committee on Ways and Means, “Title XI—Committee on Ways and Means, ‘The One, Big, Beautiful Bill’”, pp. 380-388, 13 May 2025, [https://waysandmeans.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/SMITMO\\_017.xml.pdf](https://waysandmeans.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/SMITMO_017.xml.pdf)

<sup>63</sup> Charity & Security Network, “‘Nonprofit Killer’ provision removed from ‘One Big Beautiful Bill’, concerns for charities remain”, 28 May 2025, <https://charityandsecurity.org/news/nonprofit-killer-provision-removed-from-one-big-beautiful-bill-concerns-for-charities-remain/>

<sup>64</sup> US Congress, *Stop Terror-Financing and Tax Penalties on American Hostages Act*, H.R.9495, 118th Congress (2023-24) <https://www.congress.gov/118/bills/hr9495/BILLS-118hr9495rds.pdf>

vague authority to terminate non-profit status in the name of “counterterrorism” is a practice that many governments have used to target civil society organizations.<sup>65</sup>

The Trump administration targeted civil society organizations working in particular domains, for example those working on refugee and migrant rights. One of the ways was through funding cuts. “Stop work orders,” which are official directives that suspend funding and require work to cease on a project, threw people’s lives into disarray, halted essential forms of legal, housing, and job assistance, and forced organizations to drastically downsize and even shutter. The DOJ issued a “stop work order” to federally funded legal orientation providers for immigration cases, halting crucial services such as the Legal Orientation Program (LOP), the Immigration Court Helpdesk, and programs for children and families, citing new executive actions for review.<sup>66</sup> The US Department of State also issued “stop-work orders” to refugee resettlement agencies and other organizations serving refugees, as part of the president’s broader review of foreign aid, forcing immediate cessation of housing assistance, job placement, and other critical support for thousands of individuals, including Afghan allies.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to civil society organizations, the Trump administration targeted universities, withdrawing billions of dollars in federal contracts and grants and threatening their tax-exempt status and endowments in efforts to assert control over who they hire and admit, and what they teach.<sup>68</sup> President Trump’s executive order on public loan forgiveness raises concerns that the administration seeks to revoke the tax-exempt status of some groups based on an expansive definition of activities with an “illegal purpose.”<sup>69</sup> President Trump shortly after called for the revocation of Harvard University’s 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status for “pushing political, ideological, and terrorist inspired/supporting ‘Sickness’” not in the “public interest.”<sup>70</sup> The US Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights accused graduate programs at 45 schools of violating the 1964 Civil Rights Act by partnering with The PhD Project, a nonprofit that helps students from underrepresented groups earn doctoral degrees in business. Six additional institutions of higher education were investigated for awarding alleged “impermissible race-based scholarships.” Another was accused of “administering a program that segregates students on the basis of race.”<sup>71</sup>

#### **CASE STUDY: THE “COMPACT FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE” PRESSURE CAMPAIGN**

Framed as an initiative to promote “academic excellence,” the “Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education” was a coercive funding incentive to undermine the rights to academic freedom and freedom of expression, restrict transgender students from accessing certain parts of campus, erase non-binary identities, and prohibit DEI commitments.<sup>72</sup> In October 2025, 12 universities were informed that they could receive special federal funding if they agreed to the compact’s requirements. By October 20, six universities had rejected the proposed compact, demonstrating that refusal to comply with government coercion can blunt attempts to constrict civic space.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Amnesty International USA, “Amnesty International USA urges no vote on H.R. 9495”, 12 November 2024,

<https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/amnesty-international-usa-urges-no-vote-on-h-r-9495/>

<sup>66</sup> ABC News, “DOJ orders federally funded legal service providers to stop providing support at immigration courts”, 23 January 2025,

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/doj-orders-federally-funded-legal-service-providers-stop/story?id=118027656>; Newsweek, “DOJ stops

federal legal aid to immigrants”, 23 January 2025, [https://www.newsweek.com/doj-stops-legal-aid-immigrants-court-executive-order-](https://www.newsweek.com/doj-stops-legal-aid-immigrants-court-executive-order-2019976)

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programs”, 22 January 2025, [https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/reported-doj-orders-federally-funded-legal-service-providers-to-](https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/reported-doj-orders-federally-funded-legal-service-providers-to-stop-work-on-the-legal-orientation-program-immigration-court-helpdesk-and-counsel-for-children-initiative/)

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<sup>67</sup> Immigration Policy Tracking Project, “2025.01.24 PRM stop work letter to resettlement agency”, 24 January 2025,

[https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/report-tump-memo-bars-resettlement-agencies-from-providing-services-to-refugees-currently-in-](https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/report-tump-memo-bars-resettlement-agencies-from-providing-services-to-refugees-currently-in-the-united-states/#/tab-policy-documents)

[the-united-states/#/tab-policy-documents](https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/report-tump-memo-bars-resettlement-agencies-from-providing-services-to-refugees-currently-in-the-united-states/#/tab-policy-documents); Immigration Policy Tracking Project, “State Department orders resettlement agencies to stop

funded work supporting refugees currently in the U.S.”, 24 January 2025, [https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/report-tump-memo-](https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/report-tump-memo-bars-resettlement-agencies-from-providing-services-to-refugees-currently-in-the-united-states/)

[bars-resettlement-agencies-from-providing-services-to-refugees-currently-in-the-united-states/](https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/report-tump-memo-bars-resettlement-agencies-from-providing-services-to-refugees-currently-in-the-united-states/)

<sup>68</sup> New York Times, “How universities are responding to trump”, 6 January 2026, [https://www.nytimes.com/article/trump-university-](https://www.nytimes.com/article/trump-university-college.html)

[college.html](https://www.nytimes.com/article/trump-university-college.html); Phillip Levine, “Why Trump’s endowment tax is bad public policy”, 29 October 2025, U.S. News & World Report,

<https://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2025-10-29/college-university-trump-endowment-tax>

<sup>69</sup> Executive Order, *Restoring Public Service Loan Forgiveness*, 7 March 2025, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-](https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/restoring-public-service-loan-forgiveness/)

[actions/2025/03/restoring-public-service-loan-forgiveness/](https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/restoring-public-service-loan-forgiveness/)

<sup>70</sup> New York Times, “Harvard signals it will resist Trump’s efforts to revoke tax-exempt status”, 2 May 2025,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/02/us/politics/trump-harvard-tax-exempt-status.html>

<sup>72</sup> Amnesty International USA, “Academic freedom cannot exist under political coercion: President Trump’s compact threatens higher

education”, 20 October 2025, [https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/academic-freedom-cannot-exist-under-political-coercion-](https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/academic-freedom-cannot-exist-under-political-coercion-president-trumps-compact-threatens-higher-education/)

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of the general counsel”, 20 October 2025, <https://www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/2025-10/Letter-AAUP-to-OGC-Compacts.pdf>;

Washington Examiner, “Compact for academic excellence in higher education”, 1 October 2025,

<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Compact-for-Academic-Excellence-in-Higher-Education-10.1.pdf>

<sup>73</sup> Amnesty International USA, “Academic freedom cannot exist under political coercion: President Trump’s compact threatens higher education” (previously cited).

# ALARM BELL 4: RETALIATION AGAINST CRITICS AND WHISTLEBLOWERS IS NORMALIZED

**RIGHTS AT STAKE INCLUDE: FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION; FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY, AND ASSOCIATION; LIFE, LIBERTY, PRIVACY, AND EDUCATION; DUE PROCESS; FREEDOM FROM ARBITRARY DETENTION.**

A hallmark of authoritarian practice is using the machinery of government to punish, intimidate, and coerce critics to compel speech and action in line with government agendas and deter oversight. Political threats and retribution, including both targeted “singling out” measures and broader “swept up” impact, pressure individuals and institutions to fall in line. Fewer abuses are reported, oversight weakens, and institutions become less able to prevent abuses before they spread.<sup>74</sup>

Documented efforts demonstrate that President Trump used numerous levers of government to retaliate against, threaten, and coerce elected officials, federal employees and prosecutors, and universities and media outlets, among others.<sup>75</sup> As his Chief of Staff acknowledged, his campaign vow of vengeance informed his policy agenda.<sup>76</sup> As reported by Reuters, President Trump targeted at least 470 people, institutions, and groups.<sup>77</sup>

In line with authoritarian practices, the Trump administration retaliated against targets through firings, suspensions, investigations, and the revocation of security clearances; threatened them with investigations or penalties, including freezing federal funds; and coerced them to roll back diversity initiatives or other policies through threatening to revoke security clearance and pull federal funding and contracts.<sup>78</sup>

For example, President Trump weaponized the US Department of Justice (DOJ) against his political opponents. Publicly pressured by the president, the DOJ brought legal charges against New York Attorney General Letitia James and against former director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), James Comey.<sup>79</sup> Letitia James had earlier brought legal charges against the president as a private citizen while he was out of office, which resulted in a civil judgment against Trump.<sup>80</sup> Comey investigated Russian interference in the 2016 election while serving in the first Trump administration.<sup>81</sup> Federal courts dismissed both cases, which the DOJ is appealing.<sup>82</sup>

President Trump used executive action to strip the security clearances of former senior officials. One person was Christopher Krebs, former director of the US Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, who had testified that the 2020 US presidential election was not “rigged.” Another was Miles Taylor, who previously served as chief of staff at the US Department of Homeland Security,

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<sup>73</sup> Amnesty International USA, “Academic freedom cannot exist under political coercion: President Trump’s compact threatens higher education” (previously cited).

<sup>74</sup> Amnesty International, *Rights Revealed – Part 2* (previously cited).

<sup>75</sup> Reuters, “Trump’s campaign of retribution: At least 470 targets and counting”, 26 November 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-trump-retribution-tracker/>

<sup>76</sup> Vanity Fair, “Susie Wiles talks Epstein files, Pete Hegseth’s war tactics, retribution, and more (part 2 of 2)”, 16 December 2025, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/story/trump-susie-wiles-interview-exclusive-part-2>; New York Times, “Trump’s top aide acknowledges ‘score settling’ behind prosecutions”, 16 December 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/16/us/politics/trump-susie-wiles.html>

<sup>77</sup> Reuters, “Trump’s campaign of retribution” (previously cited). Reuters excluded federal employees who lost their jobs as part of force reductions, and foreign individuals, institutions, and governments.

<sup>78</sup> Reuters, “Trump’s campaign of retribution: At least 470 targets and counting” (previously cited); Amnesty International USA, *Chaos & Cruelty* (previously cited).

<sup>79</sup> Donald Trump, Truth Social post: “Pam: I have reviewed over 30 statements and posts saying that, essentially, “same old story as last time, all talk, no action. Nothing is being done. What about Comey, Adam “Shifty” Schiff, Leticia??? They’re all guilty as hell, but nothing is going to be done.”, 20 September 2025, <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/115239044548033727>

<sup>80</sup> Office of the New York State Attorney General, “Attorney General James wins landmark victory in case against Donald Trump”, 16 February 2024, <https://ag.ny.gov/press-release/2024/attorney-general-james-wins-landmark-victory-case-against-donald-trump>

<sup>81</sup> NPR, “Comey acknowledges surveillance problems but defends overall Russia inquiry”, 30 September 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/30/918438002/graham-plans-new-political-offensive-in-hearing-with-old-foe-comey>

<sup>82</sup> PBS News, “Judge dismisses cases against James Comey, Letitia James after finding the prosecutor was illegally appointed”, 24 November 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/judge-dismisses-cases-against-james-comey-letitia-james-after-finding-the-prosecutor-was-illegally-appointed>; JURIST, “Criminal cases against Comey, James dismissed as federal judge rules prosecutor was unlawfully appointed”, November 2025, <https://www.jurist.org/news/2025/11/criminal-cases-against-comey-james-dismissed-as-federal-judge-rules-prosecutor-was-unlawfully-appointed/>; New York Times, “Read the ruling dismissing the charges against Letitia James and James Comey”, 24 November 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/11/24/us/james-comey-ruling.html>; US District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, *United States of America v. Letitia James*, Case 2:25-CR-122-JKW, Notice of Appeal, 19 December 2025, <https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.vaed.583341/gov.uscourts.vaed.583341.142.0.pdf>



who criticized President Trump's first administration in an initially anonymous New York Times op-ed.<sup>83</sup>

President Trump and his administration also specifically targeted Democratic members of Congress. President Trump threatened in a Truth Social post to have Democratic lawmakers with military and intelligence backgrounds tried for sedition – emphasizing that the crime is “punishable by DEATH” [in capitals in the post] – after they released a video telling serving military members to refuse any illegal orders.<sup>84</sup> The US Department of Defense subsequently announced an investigation of Senator Mark Kelly, a former Naval officer, under the Uniform Code of Military Justice.<sup>85</sup> Charges were pursued against US Representative LaMonica McIver, who was attempting to conduct an oversight visit at an immigration detention facility in Newark, New Jersey, along with two other members of Congress, in line with their Congressionally authorized responsibilities to conduct oversight visits, whether planned or unannounced.<sup>86</sup>

The Trump administration used polygraphs, loyalty screening, or threats of termination to intimidate government employees into supporting the president's agenda and from speaking with the media without government approval.<sup>87</sup> The US Department of Justice established a new policy authorizing a broad set of qualifiers for issuing subpoenas to journalists it believes leaked protected information, even if non-classified, which could also infringe upon whistleblowers' rights.<sup>87</sup> The administration retaliated against whistleblowers such as Nicholas Enrich, a senior USAID staffer, who was fired after releasing multiple memos, including one to the New York Times, that presented evidence of the potentially severe humanitarian and human rights impacts stemming from the defunding of USAID; and Erez Reuveni, a former lawyer for the US Department of Justice, who was fired after admitting to a federal judge the government deported a man to El Salvador in error.<sup>88</sup> He subsequently filed a whistleblower claim to the US Senate detailing what he described as the Trump administration's intentional efforts to disregard court rulings and the due process rights of hundreds of migrants.<sup>89</sup>

Conversely, President Trump granted impunity to those who supported him in challenging the lawful results of the 2020 US presidential election. In one of his first acts, he signed a presidential proclamation granting sweeping clemency to around 1,500 people for their involvement in efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election on 6 January 2021, shielding supporters from accountability.<sup>90</sup> Amnesty International USA called on

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<sup>83</sup> Reuters, “Trump's campaign of retribution: At least 470 targets and counting” (previously cited); Rev, *Fired Election Official Chris Krebs Senate Testimony on 2020 Election Security Transcript*, 16 December 2020, <https://www.rev.com/transcripts/fired-election-official-chris-krebs-senate-testimony-on-2020-election-security-transcript> (also accessible here [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g79qFb\\_WhwY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g79qFb_WhwY)); Presidential Memoranda, “Addressing risks from Chris Krebs and government censorship”, 9 April 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/04/addressing-risks-from-chris-krebs-and-government-censorship/>; The White House, “Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump addresses risks associated with Miles Taylor”, 9 April 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/04/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-addresses-risks-associated-with-miles-taylor/>; Miles Taylor, “I am part of the resistance inside the Trump administration”, 5 September 2018, New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/05/opinion/trump-white-house-anonymous-resistance.html>

<sup>84</sup> Reuters, “Trump says ‘seditious’ Democrats urging US troops to refuse illegal orders should face death”, 20 November 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-says-democrats-who-told-us-military-refuse-illegal-orders-deserve-death-2025-11-20/>

<sup>85</sup> New York Times, “Pentagon investigates senator over video trump claimed was seditious”, 24 November 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2025/11/24/us/trump-news?ref=am-quickie.ghost.io#james-comey-case-dismissed>

<sup>86</sup> Amnesty International USA, “Members of Congress must have access to conduct unannounced oversight visits at ICE detention facilities without criminalization”, 21 October 2025, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/oversight-is-essential-to-ensuring-that-human-rights-including-to-due-process-are-respected-and-that-ice-is-operating-within-the-boundaries-of-the-law/>

<sup>87</sup> Office of the Attorney General, “Updated policy regarding obtaining information from, or records of, members of the news media”, 25 April 2025, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/25919716-attorney-general-bondi-memorandum-updated-policy-regarding-obtaining-information-from-or-records-of-members-of-the-news-media/>

<sup>88</sup> Wall Street Journal, “He represented contentious immigration cases for the government. His candor cost him his job”, 15 April 2025, <https://www.wsj.com/us-news/law/this-lawyer-defended-republicans-and-democrats-his-candor-cost-him-his-job-b3515a38>

<sup>89</sup> CNN, “USAID official put on administrative leave for scathing memo blaming political appointees for affecting ‘lifesaving’ work”, 3 March 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/03/03/politics/usaaid-official-leave-memo>; US House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Shadow hearing - thrown into chaos: the dismantling of USAID and its real-life consequences, “Statement of Nicholas Z. Enrich”, 25 March 2025, [https://democrats-foreignaffairs.house.gov/\\_cache/files/d/b/db005314-e34b-4a4a-be19-256f0aeeec786/F61F3916997C61B45C7A778442E99AA80534C64EFD978952C1E3F08F67D8DC7D.nicholas-z.-enrich---statement-for-the-record-1.pdf](https://democrats-foreignaffairs.house.gov/_cache/files/d/b/db005314-e34b-4a4a-be19-256f0aeeec786/F61F3916997C61B45C7A778442E99AA80534C64EFD978952C1E3F08F67D8DC7D.nicholas-z.-enrich---statement-for-the-record-1.pdf); Nicholas Enrich, “Risks to U.S. national security and public health: consequences of pausing global health funding for lifesaving humanitarian assistance”, 4 March 2025, USAID, <https://static01.nyt.com/newsgraphics/documenttools/2dbdd9a823b8824/168a9032-full.pdf>; New York Times, “Justice Dept. whistle-blower warns of Trump administration's assault on the law”, 10 July 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/10/us/politics/trump-bove-reuveni-whistleblower-doj-deportations.html>; New York Times, “Justice Dept. Leader Suggested Violating Court Orders, Whistle-Blower Says”, 24 June 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/24/us/politics/justice-department-emil-bove-trump-deportations-reuveni.html>

<sup>90</sup> Proclamation, *Granting Pardons and Commutation of Sentences for Certain Offenses Relating to the Events at or near the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021*, 20 January 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/granting-pardons-and-commutation-of-sentences-for-certain-offenses-relating-to-the-events-at-or-near-the-united-states-capitol-on-january-6-2021/>; Amnesty International, USA: *Chaos & cruelty: 10 Compounding Assaults on Human Rights: A Review of President Trump's First 100 days in Office* (Index: AMR 51/9313/2025), 30 April 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr51/9313/2025/en/>; New York Times, “Trump grants sweeping clemency to all Jan. 6 rioters”, 20 January 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/20/us/politics/trump->

the US Attorney General to conduct a prompt, thorough, and impartial investigation into the storming of the US Capitol on 6 January 2021, including, but not limited to, examining the role of former President Trump, former White House staff, members of Congress, and white supremacist and other hate groups and militias in inciting, planning, and executing coordinated actions that resulted in the death of seven people. Amnesty further called for the investigation to include the endangerment of and death threats toward lawmakers and their staff, and the incitement to continued hate violence through racist chants and the donning of racist, neo-Nazi, and xenophobic symbols, and that all those found responsible, regardless of their current or former position in government, must be held to account.<sup>91</sup>

## **CASE STUDY: POLITICAL VIOLENCE, POLITICAL RETALIATION, AND THE TARGETING OF DEMOCRATIC ELECTED OFFICIALS: SENATOR MARK KELLY**

Democratic lawmakers with military and intelligence backgrounds released a video telling serving military members to refuse any illegal orders.<sup>92</sup> After President Trump threatened the lawmakers twice via Truth Social posts with charges of sedition, emphasizing that the crime is punishable by “DEATH”, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt clarified that the president does not want to execute members of Congress.<sup>93</sup> The following day, the president further clarified, “I’m not threatening death, but I think they’re in serious trouble. In the old days, it was death. That was seditious behavior.”<sup>94</sup>

Senator Mark Kelly, who was part of the video, and his wife have received a surge in graphic and violent threats since the president's comments – more in a single day than they had in recent months.<sup>95</sup> All six Congress members are receiving round-the-clock security detail from the Capitol Police.<sup>96</sup>

Other agencies of the Trump administration stepped in to pursue the president's agenda. The US Department of Defense, in a highly unusual move against a retired military officer, threatened to court-martial Senator Kelly with respect to actions taken when they were not in military service.<sup>97</sup> The FBI opened an inquiry into the actions of all six members of Congress.<sup>98</sup>

Although he did not refer to a particular order in their video, Senator Kelly had earlier raised concerns about the legal jeopardy of US troops involved in US airstrikes on boats in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific.<sup>99</sup> The video's message emphasized that the oath is to the Constitution and warned that threats to constitutional order were arising from abroad and at home.<sup>100</sup>

**“This is just about sending a message to retired service members, active-duty service members, government employees — do not speak out against this president or there will be consequences.”<sup>101</sup>**  
*- Senator Mark Kelly*

[pardons-jan-6.html](https://www.npr.org/2025/01/30/nx-s1-5276336/donald-trump-jan-6-rape-assault-pardons-rioters); NPR, “Criminal records of Jan. 6 rioters pardoned by Trump include rape, domestic violence”, 30 January 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/01/30/nx-s1-5276336/donald-trump-jan-6-rape-assault-pardons-rioters>.

<sup>91</sup> Amnesty International, Letter to Attorney General Merrick Garland, 11 March 2021, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/TG-to-AG-Garland-on-investigation-and-accountability-regarding-Jan-6th-RGoodfellow-and-JLin.pdf>

<sup>92</sup> US Senator Elissa Slotkin, “Don’t give up the ship”, 18 November 2025, <https://x.com/SenatorSlotkin/status/1990774492356902948?s=20>; Reuters, “Trump says ‘seditious’ Democrats urging US troops to refuse illegal orders should face death” (previously cited).

<sup>93</sup> CBS News, “Trump condemned by Democrats after he accuses 6 lawmakers of ‘seditious behavior’”, 20 November 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-democrats-seditious-behavior/>

<sup>94</sup> NBC News, “Trump says he wasn’t threatening Democrats he accused of ‘seditious behavior, punishable by death’”, 21 November 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/trump-democrats-sedition-death-threat-military-rcna245156>

<sup>95</sup> The Hill, “Kelly on threats since Trump call for arrest: ‘They’re graphic, they’re violent’”, 3 December 2025, <https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/5631316-mark-kelly-threats-illegal-orders-video/>

<sup>96</sup> Bridge Michigan, “Elissa Slotkin: FBI targeting Democrats over ‘illegal orders’ video”, 25 November 2025, <https://bridgemi.com/michigan-government/elissa-slotkin-fbi-targeting-democrats-over-illegal-orders-video/>

<sup>97</sup> New York Times, “Pentagon investigates senator over video trump claimed was seditious”, 24 November 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2025/11/24/us/trump-news?ref=am-quickie.ghost.io#mark-kelly-pentagon-investigation>; Associated Press, “Experts doubt the Pentagon can punish Kelly over the ‘illegal orders’ video”, 30 November 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/kelly-video-pentagon-investigation-trump-sedition-military-4a5ed2d4674d7ed735aa9cb330e22099>

<sup>98</sup> CBS News, “FBI opens inquiry into 6 Democrats appearing in video that urged defying illegal orders, lawmakers say”, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/fbi-inquiry-six-democrats-illegal-orders-video/>

<sup>99</sup> US Senator Mark Kelly, “ICYMI: On all in with Chris Hayes, Kelly questions recent U.S. boat strikes that are putting servicemembers at risk”, 23 October 2025, <https://www.kelly.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/icymi-on-all-in-with-chris-hayes-kelly-questions-recent-u-s-boat-strikes-that-are-putting-servicemembers-at-risk/#:~:text=October%2023%2C%202025-,ICYMI:%20On%20All%20in%20with%20Chris%20Hayes%2C%20Kelly%20Questions%20Recent,accountability%20for%20Jeffrey%20Epstein's%20victims>

<sup>100</sup> US Senator Elissa Slotkin, “Don’t give up the ship” (previously cited).

<sup>101</sup> Military.com, “Sen. Mark Kelly calls Pentagon investigation into his remarks a move to chill military dissent”, 16 December 2025, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2025/12/16/sen-mark-kelly-calls-pentagon-investigation-his-remarks-move-chill-military-dissent.html>

# ALARM BELL 5: JUDGES, LAWYERS, AND THE LEGAL SYSTEM ARE TARGETED TO WEAKEN THE RULE OF LAW

**RIGHTS AT STAKE INCLUDE: FAIR TRIAL AND COUNSEL; DUE PROCESS; ACCESS TO REMEDY; JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE.**

The rule of law depends on courts that can check executive power and lawyers who can represent clients without intimidation, ensuring that everyone is treated equally under the law, and no one is above the law. Public attacks on judges and threats of impeachment for rulings that constrain executive action, alongside efforts to delegitimize entire courts, undermine public trust and signal to the judiciary that independence may come with personal or professional risk. When law firms are punished for taking cases or who they employ, it has a cumulative effect that chills representation for those challenging rights violations and undermines people's access to counsel and ability to receive a fair trial and due process.

Through executive action and policy measures, the Trump administration took steps that had the effect of constraining the judiciary and the wider legal system.<sup>102</sup> It bypassed established judicial processes, and in response to courts blocking implementation of its policies, took actions to curb their power: calling for the impeachment of judges; flouting and avoiding complying with court orders; and seeking to curb courts' authority to issue temporary orders.<sup>103</sup> It used executive power to chill lawyers' practice of law and the operation of bar associations.<sup>104</sup> It punished career prosecutors for their work in the previous administration.<sup>105</sup> The chilling effect was profound. Lawyers, law firms, and law associations were threatened with investigations and sanctions for carrying out their professional responsibilities, and prosecutors were fired if not sufficiently loyal.<sup>106</sup> Taken together, these actions struck the foundations of the rule of law, which is essential infrastructure for ensuring that human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.<sup>107</sup>

For example, President Trump used executive action and administrative pressure to threaten and coerce law firms and lawyers to alter their representation. A presidential memorandum directed the US Attorney General to consider investigations and sanctions against attorneys and law firms who engage in "frivolous, unreasonable, and vexatious" litigation against the US government.<sup>108</sup> The executive action identified examples of conduct that could fall under its purview, such as one specific lawyer's efforts to oppose actions to overturn the 2020 US presidential election and representation of asylum seekers and migrants in immigration court proceedings, creating a chilling effect to take on such cases.<sup>109</sup> President Trump signed a series of executive actions identifying specific law firms seeming to be engaged in legal cases that were contrary to his agenda or that employed individuals he considered adversaries.<sup>110</sup> A number of law firms yielded to the Trump

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<sup>102</sup> Amnesty International USA, Letter to the Senate Judiciary Committee, 6 October 2025, [https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/DC\\_AIUSA\\_Judiciary\\_Comm\\_Letter\\_10.6.25.pdf](https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/DC_AIUSA_Judiciary_Comm_Letter_10.6.25.pdf)

<sup>103</sup> New York Times, "Defiance and threats in deportation case renew fear of constitutional crisis", 19 March 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/19/us/politics/trump-deportations-constitutional-crisis-impeachment.html>; New York Times, "Judge threatens contempt proceedings over deportation flights to El Salvador", 16 April 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/16/us/politics/trump-probable-cause-contempt-deportation-flights.html>

<sup>104</sup> Dan Cotter, "Law firm independence under attack with Executive Order", American Constitution Society, 10 April 2025, <https://www.acslaw.org/inbrief/law-firm-independence-under-attack-with-executive-orders/>; New York Times, "Justice Department bars its lawyers from American Bar Association functions", 9 April 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/09/us/politics/justice-dept-bars-its-lawyers-from-american-bar-association-functions.html>

<sup>105</sup> Politico, "DOJ fires dozens of prosecutors who handled Jan. 6 cases", 31 January 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/01/31/doj-purges-prosecutors-january-6-cases-00201904>; Associated Press, "How the Trump administration erased centuries of Justice Department experience", 16 January 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/justice-department-bondi-trump-firings-prosecutors-b4134e5db9d9ff7963fc8c4bf7a0a166>

<sup>106</sup> Dan Cotter, "Law firm independence under attack with Executive Order", American Constitution Society, 10 April 2025, <https://www.acslaw.org/inbrief/law-firm-independence-under-attack-with-executive-orders/>; New York Times, "Justice Department bars its lawyers from American Bar Association functions", 9 April 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/09/us/politics/justice-dept-bars-its-lawyers-from-american-bar-association-functions.html>; Politico, "DOJ fires dozens of prosecutors who handled Jan. 6 cases", 31 January 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/01/31/doj-purges-prosecutors-january-6-cases-00201904>; Associated Press, "How the Trump administration erased centuries of Justice Department experience", 16 January 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/justice-department-bondi-trump-firings-prosecutors-b4134e5db9d9ff7963fc8c4bf7a0a166>

<sup>107</sup> Reuters, *How Trump's crackdown on law firms is undermining legal defenses for the vulnerable*, 31 July 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/investigations/trumps-war-big-law-leads-firms-retreat-pro-bono-work-underdogs-2025-07-31/>

<sup>108</sup> Presidential Memoranda, "Preventing Abuses of the legal system and federal courts", 22 March 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/preventing-abuses-of-the-legal-system-and-the-federal-court/>

<sup>109</sup> Presidential Memoranda, "Preventing Abuses of the legal system and federal courts" (previously cited); Reuters, *How Trump's crackdown on law firms is undermining legal defenses for the vulnerable* (previously cited); Amnesty International USA, Letter to the Senate Judiciary Committee (previously cited).

<sup>110</sup> Amnesty International USA, Letter to the Senate Judiciary Committee (previously cited); see, e.g., Presidential Memorandum, "Suspension of security clearances and evaluation of government contracts", 25 February 2025,

administration's demands and signed agreements that impacted their DEI-related hiring practices and policies, who they represented, and their provision of pro bono legal representation to causes supported by the president.<sup>111</sup>

**“If human rights are not respected, there is no rule of law. Where there is no rule of law, human rights are not respected. The rule of law means no one is above the law, everyone is treated equally, everyone is held accountable to the same laws, there are clear and fair processes for enforcement, there is an independent judiciary, and human rights are guaranteed for all. The rule of law and human rights are two sides of the same principle, the freedom to live in dignity.”**

Amnesty International, “Defending Rule of Law in Hungary”<sup>112</sup>

Politicization inside the DOJ eroded institutional independence and redirected prosecutorial power toward political ends. This included the creation of internal structures framed as addressing “weaponization” of the US Department of Justice over the last four years; firings or reassignments of career justice officials; and directing prosecutorial resources and power for political retribution, seen in a pattern of indictments and threats of investigations against current and former elected and appointed officials.<sup>113</sup>

Verbal attacks by President Trump, the US Attorney General, the Deputy Attorney General, and other Trump administration officials against individual judges reinforced the weaponization of the legal system under the DOJ to constrain the independence of the judiciary.<sup>114</sup> President Trump called several times for the impeachment of Chief Judge James Boasberg for the US District of Columbia, who oversees the *J.J.G. v. Trump* litigation challenging the president’s directive on implementing the Alien Enemies Act; Judge Boasberg barred the Trump administration from unlawfully expelling alleged Venezuelan gang members to Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo prison (CECOT), the notorious mega prison in El Salvador.<sup>115</sup> Chief Justice John

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<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/suspension-of-security-clearances-and-evaluation-of-government-contracts/>; Executive Order, *Addressing Risks from Perkins Coie LLP*, 6 March 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/addressing-risks-from-perkins-coie-llp/>; Executive Order, *Addressing risks from Paul Weiss*, 14 March 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/addressing-risks-from-paul-weiss/>; Executive Order, *Addressing Risks from Jenner & Block*, 25 March 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/addressing-risks-from-jenner-block/>; Executive Order, *Addressing Risks From Wilmerhale*, 27 March 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/addressing-risks-from-wilmerhale/>; New York Times, “Trump’s order targeting Jenner & Block was unconstitutional, judge rules”, 23 May 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/23/us/politics/trump-jenner-block-law-firm.html>; New York Times, “As firms sue to stop Trump’s executive orders, a split emerges in big law”, 28 March 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/28/business/jenner-block-wilmer-hale-trump-lawsuit.html>

<sup>111</sup> Business Insider, “Here’s where all the firms in the Trump-Big Law fight stand”, 28 May 2025, <https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-big-law-fight-firms-legal-dilemma-2025-3>

<sup>112</sup> Amnesty International, “Defending rule of law in Hungary”, 30 September 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2020/09/hungary-rule-of-law/>; see Amnesty International, *Strengthening the Rule of Law Recommendations for All Governments to Make Pledges to the High-Level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly (24 September 2012)* (Index: IOR 40/020/2012), December 2012, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ior400202012en.pdf>

<sup>113</sup> Office of the Attorney General, “Restoring the integrity and credibility of the Department of Justice” (previously cited); Reuters, “Trump’s campaign of retribution: At least 470 targets and counting” (previously cited); American Bar Association, “Independence and evidence-based decision-making must drive federal prosecutorial actions”, 16 October 2025, <https://www.americanbar.org/news/abanews/aba-news-archives/2025/10/independence-and-evidence-must-drive-federal-prosecutorial-actions/>

<sup>114</sup> Office of the Attorney General, “Restoring the integrity and credibility of the Department of Justice” (previously cited).

<sup>115</sup> The Hill, “Trump’s judicial battles raise profiles of federal judges”, 3 January 2026, <https://thehill.com/regulation/court-battles/5669944-judges-threats-trump-administration/>; New York Times, “Judge tells U.S. to help bring back deported Venezuelans or allow legal challenges elsewhere”, 22 December 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/22/us/trump-boasberg-alien-enemies-act-venezuela.html>; President of the United States of America, *Invocation of the Alien Enemies Act Regarding the Invasion of the United States by Tren de Aragua*, Proclamation 10903, 14 March 2025, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2025-03-20/pdf/2025-04865.pdf>; USA, Alien Enemies Act, 50 U.S. Code § 21 - Restraint, regulation, and removal, 1798, (accessible at

Roberts of the Supreme Court, the USA's highest court, issued a rare rebuke after President Trump first called for Judge Boasberg's impeachment; the president has continued in his calls. The DOJ even requested that the case be reassigned from Judge Boasberg.<sup>116</sup> US District Judge Paula Xinis for the District of Maryland also drew the vitriol of Trump administration officials for her rulings in the case of Kilmar Ábrego García, ordering his immediate release and, for now, barring his deportation.<sup>117</sup>

Reinforcing the administration's actions, members of Congress filed resolutions calling for the impeachment of judges who ruled against the president's policies.<sup>118</sup> By the end of March, Congress members had filed resolutions calling for the impeachment of six judges.<sup>119</sup> In February, one Member of Congress displayed a poster of 11 judges – four had articles of impeachment filed or in process against them and seven were "wanted."<sup>120</sup>

This drumbeat of calls for impeachment and verbal attacks on judges, because the president, his administration, and members of Congress do not agree with their rulings, endangers the safety of judges.<sup>121</sup> Since President Trump took office, there has been an uptick in threats against judges.<sup>122</sup> Threats against federal judges doubled from 2021-2024, with an increase in "threatening electronic communications" due to political disagreement with rulings; this increase largely tracks with an increase in political violence following court rulings against people engaged in challenging the November 2020 presidential election results and participating in the January 2021 insurrection.<sup>123</sup> US District Judge John Coughenour for the Western District of Washington was swatted after indefinitely blocking Trump's executive order to restrict birthright citizenship.<sup>124</sup> Since fiscal year 2026 began in October 2025, there have already been 131 threats against federal judges.<sup>125</sup>

It is not surprising that the Trump administration focused on attacking the judicial system. The courts were a key avenue for challenging the president's expansive view of executive authority and testing authoritarian practices. As of mid-December, well over 500 legal challenges have been filed against Trump administration

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<https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/50/21>; United States District Court for the District of Columbia, *J.G.G. v. Donald J. Trump*, Case 1:25-cv-00766-JEB, Complaint, 15 March 2025, [https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.dcd.278436/gov.uscourts.dcd.278436.1.0\\_3.pdf](https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.dcd.278436/gov.uscourts.dcd.278436.1.0_3.pdf)

<sup>116</sup> The Hill, "DOJ seeks to boot Judge Boasberg from pursuing contempt hearings", 12 December 2025, <https://thehill.com/regulation/court-battles/5646447-trump-boasberg-deportation-feud/>; US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, *In re: Donald J. Trump, in his official capacity, et al*, Case 1:25-cv-00766-JEB, Petition for Writ a Writ of Mandamus, <https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.dcd.278436/gov.uscourts.dcd.278436.206.0.pdf>

<sup>117</sup> The Hill, "Trump's judicial battles raise profiles of federal judges", 3 January 2026, <https://thehill.com/regulation/court-battles/5669944-judges-threats-trump-administration/>; The Hill, "Judge orders Abrego Garcia's immediate release from ICE custody", 11 December 2025, <https://thehill.com/regulation/court-battles/5644176-judge-orders-abrego-garcias-immediate-release-from-ice-custody/>

<sup>118</sup> Reuters, "Republican lawmaker seeks U.S. judges impeachment over foreign aid ruling", 27 February 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/republican-lawmaker-seeks-us-judges-impeachment-over-foreign-aid-ruling-2025-02-27/>; Wisconsin Public Radio, "Wisconsin's Van Orden moves to impeach judge who blocked Musk from Treasury records", 20 February 2025, <https://www.wpr.org/news/wisconsin-van-orden-impeach-judge-paul-engelmayer-elon-musk-doge-treasury-trump>

<sup>119</sup> Reuters, "Republicans seek impeachment of 2 more judges who stymied Trump", 24 March 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/republicans-seek-impeachment-2-more-judges-who-stymied-trump-2025-03-24/>

<sup>120</sup> US Representative William Andrew Ogles, YouTube post: "Impeachathon update", 28 February 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/WFPM2fcdGWA>; Amnesty International notes that Democrats have also called for the impeachment of judges, in respect to allegations of corruption. See House Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, "Ocasio-Cortez introduces articles of impeachment against Justice Thomas and Justice Alito", 10 July 2024, <https://ocasio-cortez.house.gov/media/press-releases/ocasio-cortez-introduces-articles-impeachment-against-justice-thomas-and>

<sup>121</sup> NBC News, "American Bar Association backs 'rule of law' after Musk calls for judges to be impeached", 4 March 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/justice-department/american-bar-association-backs-rule-law-elon-musk-calls-judges-impeach-rcna194662>; Politico, "Judges, rankled by Trump's impeachment calls, agree: 'It's not a great strategy'", 20 March 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/03/20/judges-impeachment-donald-trump-00003536>

<sup>122</sup> Reuters, "Judges face rise in threats as Musk blasts them over rulings", 5 March 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/judges-face-rise-threats-musk-blasts-them-over-rulings-2025-03-05/>; Good Morning America, "Threats against federal judges increase amid Trump administration legal battles", <https://www.goodmorningamerica.com/Politics/live-updates/donald-trump-second-term-119864095/threats-against-federal-judges-increase-amid-trump-administration-legal-battles-120004017>

<sup>123</sup> US Department of Justice, "Statement of Ronald Davis Director United States Marshals Service before the Subcommittee on Crime and Federal Government Surveillance Committee on the Judiciary United States House Of Representatives", 14 February 2024, <https://www.congress.gov/118/meeting/house/116837/witnesses/HHRG-118-JU08-Wstate-DavisR-20240214.pdf>; US Department of Justice, US Marshals Service, "FY 2024 Annual Report", USMS Publication 2, January 2025, <https://www.usmarshals.gov/sites/default/files/media/document/Pub-2-2024-Annual-Report.pdf>; Reuters, "Exclusive: Threats to US federal judges double since 2021, driven by politics", 13 February 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/threats-us-federal-judges-double-since-2021-driven-by-politics-2024-02-13/>

<sup>124</sup> The Hill, "Trump's judicial battles raise profiles of federal judges" (previously cited); The Hill, "Judge rails against Trump in blocking birthright executive order for second time", 6 February 2025, <https://thehill.com/regulation/court-battles/5130744-trump-judge-birthright-order-blocked/>; NBC News, "Judges who ruled against Trump say harassment and threats have changed their lives", 23 December 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/judges-ruled-trump-say-harassment-threats-changed-lives-rcna248445>

<sup>125</sup> NBC News, "Judges who ruled against Trump say harassment and threats have changed their lives" (previously cited).

### **CASE STUDY: COLLECTIVE RETALIATION AGAINST MARYLAND FEDERAL JUDGES PROTECTING DUE PROCESS**

In an act of collective retaliation against federal judges in Maryland, the US Department of Justice (DOJ) sued the entire Maryland federal district bench – all 15 federal district court judges – over a standing order, signed by Chief Judge George L. Russell III in May 2025, that requires non-US citizens to remain in immigration custody for at least 48 hours prior to removal to allow for appeals.<sup>127</sup> The court issued the standing order because of the rapid pace of detentions and rushed deportations.<sup>128</sup>

Because there was no federal judge in Maryland who could hear the case, a federal judge in Virginia was assigned the case.<sup>129</sup> Judge Thomas T. Cullen of Virginia dismissed the case because it was not an appropriate claim before the court: "To hold otherwise would run counter to overwhelming precedent, depart from longstanding constitutional tradition, and offend the rule of law."<sup>130</sup>

Judge Cullen took the opportunity to admonish the administration's assault on the judicial system, writing, "Indeed, over the past several months, principal officers of the Executive (and their spokespersons) have described federal district judges across the country as "leftwing," "liberal," "activists," "radical," "politically minded," "rogue," "unhinged," "outrageous, overzealous, [and] unconstitutional," "[c]rooked," and worse. Although some tension between the coordinate branches of government is a hallmark of our constitutional system, this concerted effort by the Executive to smear and impugn individual judges who rule against it is both unprecedented and unfortunate."<sup>131</sup>

### **CASE STUDY: EXECUTIVE ACTION TARGETING LAW FIRMS, COMPROMISING ACCESS TO COUNSEL AND A FAIR TRIAL**

A 22 March 2025 memorandum instructed the US Attorney General to review law firms' conduct in litigation against the federal government over the last eight years, representing a broader pattern of intimidation aimed at discouraging firms from taking cases that challenge government action.<sup>132</sup> When lawyers and firms fear retaliation for representation, people facing abuses – from migrants to protesters to journalists – lose access to remedy and due process.

<sup>126</sup> Just Security, "Litigation Tracker: Legal challenges to Trump administration actions", 8 January 2026, <https://www.justsecurity.org/107087/tracker-litigation-legal-challenges-trump-administration/>; see The Hill, "Trump's judicial battles raise profiles of federal judges" (previously cited).

<sup>127</sup> ABC News, "Justice Department sues entire Maryland federal judiciary over immigration policy", 25 June 2025, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/justice-department-sues-entire-maryland-federal-judiciary-immigration/story?id=123204280>; Bloomberg Law, "Maryland federal court halts quick removals of detained migrants (1)", 22 May 2025, <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/us-law-week/maryland-federal-court-halts-quick-removals-of-detained-migrants>; US District Court for the District of Maryland, *In re: Petitions for Writs of Habeas Corpus – Alien Detainee*, Case 1:00-mc-00308, Standing Order, 21 May 2025, <https://www.mdd.uscourts.gov/sites/mdd/files/2025-01.pdf>; US District Court for the District of Maryland, *United States of America and others v. Chief Judge George L. Russell III and others*, Case 1:25-cv-02029, Complaint, 24 June 2025, [https://www.bloomberglaw.com/public/document/UNITEDSTATESetalvRusselletalDocketNo125cv02029DMdJun242025CourtDo1?doc\\_id=XOUG1JUISA92998ILVNS19VL35](https://www.bloomberglaw.com/public/document/UNITEDSTATESetalvRusselletalDocketNo125cv02029DMdJun242025CourtDo1?doc_id=XOUG1JUISA92998ILVNS19VL35); United States District Court for the District of Maryland, *USA v. Chief Judge George Russell III and others*, Case 1:25-cv-02029, Memorandum Opinion, 26 August 2025, [https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.mdd.584990/gov.uscourts.mdd.584990.58.0\\_3.pdf](https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.mdd.584990/gov.uscourts.mdd.584990.58.0_3.pdf)

<sup>128</sup> WUSA, "In unusual standing order, Maryland judge grants automatic two-day injunctions on deportations", 30 May 2025, <https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/legal/in-unusual-standing-order-maryland-judge-grants-automatic-two-day-injunctions-on-deportations-george-russell/65-5f61c536-d872-4748-9647-c833a251e492>; PBS, "Trump administration sues Maryland federal judges over order blocking immediate removal of immigrants", 25 June 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/trump-administration-sues-maryland-federal-judges-over-order-blocking-immediate-removal-of-immigrants>

<sup>129</sup> ABC7 Chicago News, "Court throws out lawsuit by Trump administration against all Maryland federal judges", 26 August 2025, <https://abc7chicago.com/post/court-throws-lawsuit-president-donald-trump-administration-maryland-federal-judges/17655344/>; NBC News, "Judge dismisses Trump lawsuit against Maryland-based judges over handling of immigration cases", 26 August 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/judge-dismisses-trump-lawsuit-maryland-based-judges-handling-immigrati-rcna227233>

<sup>130</sup> US District Court for the District of Maryland, *United States of America and others v. Chief Judge George L. Russell III and others*, Case 1:25-cv-02029, Memorandum Opinion, 26 August 2025, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/26074896-cullen-memorandum-opinion/>

<sup>131</sup> "Judge dismisses Trump administration suit against federal bench in Maryland" (previously cited); US District Court for the District of Maryland, *United States of America and others v. Chief Judge George L. Russell III and others* (previously cited).

<sup>132</sup> Presidential Memoranda, "Preventing Abuses of the legal system and federal courts" (previously cited).

# ALARM BELL 6: DUE PROCESS IS DISREGARDED – ENABLING ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES AND ILLEGAL EXPULSIONS

**RIGHTS AT STAKE INCLUDE: DUE PROCESS; LIBERTY; SEEK ASYLUM; NON-REFOULEMENT; FREEDOM FROM ARBITRARY DETENTION AND TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT; RULE OF LAW.**

Under due process guarantees, as articulated in Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the state cannot deprive someone of their life or liberty without a fair and efficient process.<sup>133</sup> Enforced disappearance is a grave human rights violation and a serious crime under international law, involving secret detention, and torture and other ill-treatment.<sup>134</sup> Enforced disappearances inherently deny due process and the right to a fair trial; individuals must have access to justice, legal recognition, and humane conditions.<sup>135</sup> Torture is prohibited under international law and *jus cogens*,<sup>136</sup> and often occurs during enforced disappearances and arbitrary detentions. Illegal expulsions (also known as “non-refoulement”) mean that states must not expel individuals where there is a risk of torture, unfair trials, or other serious human rights violations.<sup>137</sup>

When authorities can detain or expel people without notice, hearing, or access to counsel – and when court orders are ignored – the state moves from lawful governance toward arbitrary power. Transparency and accountability are the cornerstones of the rule of law. The human rights implications are severe: removal without due process, exposure to abusive detention conditions, and potential violations of the non-refoulement obligation and the right to life.

Among other actions such as ordering the cutting of programs and funding, President Trump used immigration to test the reception of the courts, Congress, and the public to an expansive use of his executive authority. The Trump administration brazenly violated the right to due process and undermined the rule of law by deporting and subjecting people to enforced disappearance, beyond the reach of US law. The mass expulsion of Venezuelan migrants and asylum seekers through the invocation of the Alien Enemies Act on 15 March 2025 and third-country removals are egregious violations of human rights.<sup>138</sup> President Trump’s invocation of the Alien Enemies Act on 15 March 2025, framed as a response to an “invasion,” was an extraordinary use of a wartime law.<sup>139</sup> It was last used to detain over 120,000 Japanese Americans in internment camps in the United States during World War II.<sup>140</sup> The unlawful expulsion of 252 Venezuelan migrants and asylum seekers to CECOT occurred in some instances despite court orders barring their removal.<sup>141</sup> Many of the people expelled were actively engaged in immigration proceedings, had pending asylum claims, or had been granted protection under US law.<sup>142</sup> Families received no official information, and people were removed from tracking systems,

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<sup>133</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 14 (“All persons shall be equal before the courts and tribunals. In the determination of any criminal charge against him, or of his rights and obligations in a suit at law, everyone shall be entitled to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law.” It should be noted that while these guarantees are referred to in the treaty as fair trial guarantees, due process guarantees may be used interchangeably and apply to both criminal charges and civil rights obligations. Due process guarantees are referred to the ICCPR as fair trial guarantees; due process guarantees are used interchangeably with fair trial guarantees.

<sup>134</sup> OHCHR, *About Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance: Working Group on Enforced Disappearances*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-disappearances/about-enforced-disappearance>.

<sup>135</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 14, Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171. (“All persons shall be equal before the courts and tribunals. In the determination of any criminal charge against him, or of his rights and obligations in a suit at law, everyone shall be entitled to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law.” It should be noted that while these guarantees are referred to in the treaty as fair trial guarantees, due process guarantees may be used interchangeably and apply to both criminal charges and civil rights obligations.)

<sup>136</sup> Jus Cogens or preemptory law is a principle of international law dictating that certain rights are fundamental, universally binding norms from which no derogation is permitted, requiring universal condemnation and accountability. Torture and enforced disappearances are considered jus cogens.

<sup>137</sup> OHCHR, “The Principle of Non-refoulement Under International Human Rights Law”, 5 July 2018, [ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Migration/GlobalCompactMigration/ThePrincipleNon-RefoulementUnderInternationalHumanRightsLaw.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Migration/GlobalCompactMigration/ThePrincipleNon-RefoulementUnderInternationalHumanRightsLaw.pdf).

<sup>138</sup> Amnesty International, “Statement on U.S.-Venezuela prisoner swap”, 21 July 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2025/07/amnesty-international-statement-on-u-s-venezuela-prisoner-swap/>

<sup>139</sup> President of the United States of America, *Invocation of the Alien Enemies Act Regarding the Invasion of the United States by Tren de Aragua* (previously cited).

<sup>140</sup> Amnesty International, “USA: Stop Illegal Expulsions to El Salvador” (Index: AMR 51/9206/2025), April 1, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/AMR5192062025ENGLISH.pdf>

<sup>141</sup> Amnesty International, “USA: Stop Illegal Expulsions to El Salvador” (previously cited).

<sup>142</sup> Amnesty International, “USA: Stop Illegal Expulsions to El Salvador” (previously cited).

making it impossible for their family members or lawyers to locate them.<sup>143</sup> US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials have since admitted “many” had no criminal record at all, and some were removed because of a perception they may commit crimes in the future.<sup>144</sup> These individuals were expelled without any notice or due process, and over multiple months, neither the US nor Salvadoran authorities provided any official information on the identities of the individuals expelled to El Salvador or their whereabouts. After four months, these men were returned to Venezuela. Amnesty International considers that these individuals were subjected to enforced disappearance.<sup>145</sup>

Third-country removals raised additional concerns about removals without notice or opportunity to contest them. The Supreme Court ruling in *D.V.D. v. U.S. Department of Homeland Security* permitted the Trump administration to continue removing people to countries that are not their designated country of removal, where they have no personal links and potentially face significant, potentially life-threatening dangers, without first providing them notice, due process, or the opportunity to demonstrate credible fear of harm.<sup>146</sup>

These sorts of enforced disappearances, unlawful expulsions, and removals that lack due process from the US are a glimpse of something very dangerous: they are alarm bells that the Trump administration seems to believe it can ignore laws, court rulings, and human rights as it pleases. In an Oval Office meeting with El Salvador’s president Nayib Bukele, Donald Trump even hinted at his future plans, saying: “Home-grown are next.”<sup>147</sup>

#### **CASE STUDY: ANDRY JOSÉ HERNÁNDEZ ROMERO – UNLAWFULLY EXPELLED DAYS BEFORE AN ASYLUM HEARING WITH NO DUE PROCESS**

Andry José Hernández Romero, a 31-year-old make-up artist and actor from Venezuela, sought safety in the USA after being targeted for being gay and for his political beliefs. He was unlawfully expelled to El Salvador just two days before his asylum hearing, without notice to counsel, without a hearing, without a court order – without due process. In March 2025, Andry and 251 others were illegally sent to CECOT, a notorious maximum-security prison in El Salvador known for its brutal conditions. Families received no official information about their loved ones’ whereabouts.

Andry and other Venezuelan nationals were thus forcibly disappeared from the United States to El Salvador. Four months later, in July 2025, they were forcibly returned from El Salvador to Venezuela. In December 2025, a US federal judge found that Andry and the other Venezuelans who were removed under the Alien Enemies Act should have the opportunity to return to the United States to proceed with their immigration cases. The Trump administration has not complied with that order, and Andry remains in danger in Venezuela.

<sup>143</sup> Amnesty International, “USA: Stop Illegal Expulsions to El Salvador” (previously cited).

<sup>144</sup> Amnesty International, “USA: Stop Illegal Expulsions to El Salvador” (previously cited).

<sup>145</sup> Amnesty International USA, “Chaos & Cruelty: 10 Compounding Assaults on Human Rights,” April 30, 2025, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Chaos-Cruelty-10-Compounding-Assaults-on-Human-Rights-A-Review-of-President-Trumps-First-100-Days-in-Office.pdf>; see Amnesty International, “Enforced disappearances in limbo” (Index: AMR 01/9259/2025), 14 April 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/AMR0192592025ENGLISH.pdf>; Amnesty International, “The human cost of the repressive cooperation between US and El Salvador”, 15 April 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/04/la-cooperacion-represiva-entre-eeuu-y-el-salvador/>

<sup>146</sup> Amnesty International USA, “Supreme Court ruling allowing Trump administration to resume third-country removals flies in face of human rights”, 24 June 2025, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/supreme-court-ruling-allowing-trump-administration-to-resume-expedited-removals-flies-in-face-of-human-rights/>

<sup>147</sup> ABC Audio, “Homegrown are next”: Trump doubles down on sending American ‘criminals’ to foreign prisons”, 14 April 2025, <https://digital.abcaudio.com/news/homegrown-are-next-trump-doubles-down-sending-american-criminals-foreign-prisons>



# ALARM BELL 7: REFUGEE AND MIGRANT RIGHTS ARE ATTACKED – CRUELTY BECOMES POLICY AND REALITY

**RIGHTS AT STAKE INCLUDE: SEEK ASYLUM; NON-REFOULEMENT; LIBERTY; EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION; FAMILY UNITY; FREEDOM FROM TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT; DUE PROCESS.**

Scapegoating refugees and migrants helps to justify abusive enforcement, normalize cruelty, and expand detention systems that operate with minimal transparency, creating a platform for mass human rights violations and a testing ground for increased crackdown on the broader population. Accelerated mass detention and deportation terrorize communities and create a dehumanizing narrative. Enforcement near or within spaces that people depend on for safety and services chills daily life: families avoid school, health care, and basic services out of fear. The rapid expansion of detention capacity, including on military bases and through state-funded facilities and no-bid contracting, alongside documented patterns of abuse, undermines access to counsel and mandated conditions of custody and care. Policies that shut down paths to safety increase the likelihood that people will be returned to harm and that communities will be pushed further into the shadows.

From the first day, the Trump administration aggressively advanced an anti-migrant, anti-refugee agenda, implementing racist and xenophobic executive orders that dehumanized and criminalized migrants and people seeking safety.<sup>148</sup> Nearly all federal law enforcement agencies were deputized to engage in civil immigration enforcement.<sup>149</sup> Masked agents seized migrants, asylum seekers, and US citizens; armored vehicles patrolled streets; and agents targeted areas near schools, faith centers, hospitals, and other previously prohibited areas for immigration enforcement.<sup>150</sup> The mass immigration detention system expanded, holding thousands of people in overcrowded, inhumane facilities, sometimes on military bases; limiting access to bond; and resuming the detention and separation of families.<sup>151</sup> New state-funded detention facilities were built, such as “Alligator Alcatraz.”<sup>152</sup>

The Trump administration ended parole-based humanitarian programs and Temporary Protected Status for many nationalities.<sup>153</sup> Since 20 January 2025, more than 1.5 million immigrants have either lost or will lose their temporary lawful presence, putting them at risk of unlawful deportation.<sup>154</sup> It is the most rapid loss in lawful presence for immigrants in recent US history.<sup>155</sup>

President Trump declared a national emergency at the US-Mexico border and terminated the “CBP One” mobile application’s scheduling system for asylum seekers, with all existing appointments cancelled,<sup>156</sup> effectively ending access to asylum at the border, as Amnesty International’s research at the US-Mexico border demonstrated.<sup>157</sup> The US Refugee Admissions Program was suspended, and a travel ban was expanded from 19 countries to 39 and added individuals who hold Palestinian Authority travel documents.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Amnesty International USA, “Amnesty International USA Reaction to President Trump’s Anti-Immigrant Executive Actions”, 20 January 2025, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/amnesty-international-usa-reaction-to-president-trumps-anti-immigrant-executive-actions/>

<sup>149</sup> Amnesty International USA, *Chaos & Cruelty* (previously cited).

<sup>150</sup> Amnesty International USA, *Chaos & Cruelty* (previously cited).

<sup>151</sup> Amnesty International USA, *Chaos & Cruelty* (previously cited).

<sup>152</sup> Amnesty International, “USA: Shut down “Alligator Alcatraz” (Index: AMR 51/0135/2025), 24 July 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr51/0135/2025/en/>; <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/AMR5192282025ENGLISH.pdf>

<sup>153</sup> WLRN Public Media, “Trump canceled temporary legal status for more than 1.5 million immigrants in 2025”, 29 December 2025, <https://www.wlrn.org/immigration/2025-12-29/trump-canceled-temporary-legal-status-for-more-than-1-5-million-immigrants-in-2025/>

<sup>154</sup> WLRN Public Media, “Trump canceled temporary legal status for more than 1.5 million immigrants in 2025” (previously cited).

<sup>155</sup> WLRN Public Media, “Trump canceled temporary legal status for more than 1.5 million immigrants in 2025” (previously cited).

<sup>156</sup> Amnesty International, “USA: States throughout the Americas must not play a part in President Trump’s harmful policies against people seeking safety”, 29 January 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/01/states-throughout-americas-must-not-play-a-part-in-trumps-harmful-policies-against-people-seeking-safety/>

<sup>157</sup> Amnesty International, *USA: Lives in Limbo: Devastating impacts of Trump’s migration and asylum policies* (Index: AMR 51/9029/2025), 20 February 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr51/9029/2025/en/>

<sup>158</sup> Amnesty International, “On World Refugee Day, States throughout the Americas must uphold the right to seek asylum”, 20 June 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/06/on-world-refugee-day-states-throughout-the-americas-must-uphold-the-right-to-seek-asylum/>; CNN, “Trump expands travel ban list to 39 countries”, 16 December 2025, <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/12/16/politics/travel-ban-trump-expands-countries/>

Amnesty International USA, *Chaos & Cruelty* (previously cited); Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, American Immigration Council, “President Trump Expands His Travel Ban: What You Need to Know”, 19 December 2025, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/president-trump-expands-his-travel-ban-what-you-need-to-know/>

The murder of National Guard soldier Sarah Beckstrom and the serious wounding of Andrew Wolfe in Washington, DC, was a horrific act of violence exploited by President Trump as justification to punish, criminalize, and target entire groups of immigrants, particularly those from Afghanistan, by halting all immigration processing, including asylum, from the countries included in the travel bans, accompanied by hostile and racist rhetoric and misinformation.<sup>159</sup>

### CASE STUDY: “ALLIGATOR ALCATRAZ” AND KROME DETENTION CENTERS

Amnesty International documented cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment at the Everglades Detention Facility (“Alligator Alcatraz”) and the Krome North Service Processing Center (Krome) in Florida that, in some cases at “Alligator Alcatraz,” amount to torture.<sup>160</sup>

In addition, “Alligator Alcatraz” operates outside federal oversight, without the basic tracking systems used in ICE facilities. The absence of registration or tracking mechanisms for those detained at “Alligator Alcatraz” facilitates incommunicado detention and constitutes enforced disappearances when the whereabouts of a person being detained there is denied to their family, and they are not allowed to contact their lawyer.<sup>161</sup>

People have endured treatment that amounts to torture, including being put in the “box,” described as a 2x2-foot cage-like structure people are put in as punishment – sometimes for hours at a time, exposed to the elements with hardly any water – with their hands and feet attached to restraints on the ground.<sup>162</sup> As Ana Piquer, Regional Director for the Americas for Amnesty International stated, “These findings confirm a deliberate system built to punish, dehumanize, and hide the suffering of people in detention.”<sup>163</sup>

People arbitrarily detained in “Alligator Alcatraz” are living in inhuman and unsanitary conditions, including overflowing toilets with fecal matter seeping into where people are sleeping, limited access to showers, exposure to insects without protective measures, lights on 24 hours a day, poor quality food and water, and lack of privacy – including cameras above the toilets.<sup>164</sup>

At ICE’s Krome Detention Center, operated by a private for-profit company, detained individuals reported serious lack of adequate medical care, including failure to provide treatment and medical assessments, despite having medical facilities on site.<sup>165</sup> People detained at Krome confirmed previous reports of human rights violations of overcrowding, prolonged and arbitrary solitary confinement, lack of adequate medical care, overflowing toilets, lack of access to showers, constant illumination, and broken air conditioning.<sup>166</sup> People also reported violence and ill-treatment from guards, difficulty in accessing counsel, and not knowing how long they would be detained or what would come next for them.<sup>167</sup>

<sup>159</sup> Amnesty International USA, “Trump Administration Exploits National Guard Shooting to Push Militarization and Anti-Immigrant Agenda”, 2 December 2025, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/trump-administration-exploits-national-guard-shooting-to-push-militarization-and-anti-immigrant-agenda/>; Metra Mehan, “Against Collective Punishment: Protecting Human Dignity and Legal Principles”, 18 December 2025, Amnesty International USA, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/blog/against-collective-punishment-protecting-human-dignity-and-legal-principles/>

<sup>160</sup> Amnesty International, “USA: New Findings Reveal Human Rights Violations at Florida’s “Alligator Alcatraz” and Krome Detention Centers,” 4 December 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/12/estados-unidos-nuevas-investigaciones-revelan-violaciones-de-derechos-humanos-en-los-centros-de-detencion-de-alligator-alcatraz-y-krome-en-florida/>; Amnesty International, *USA: Torture and Enforced Disappearances in the Sunshine State* (Index: AMR 51/0511/2025), 4 December 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AMR51/0511/2025/en/>

<sup>161</sup> Amnesty International, “USA: New Findings Reveal Human Rights Violations at Florida’s “Alligator Alcatraz” and Krome Detention Centers” (previously cited); Amnesty International, *USA: Torture and Enforced Disappearances in the Sunshine State* (previously cited).

<sup>162</sup> Amnesty International, “USA: New Findings Reveal Human Rights Violations at Florida’s “Alligator Alcatraz” and Krome Detention Centers” (previously cited); Amnesty International, *USA: Torture and Enforced Disappearances in the Sunshine State* (previously cited).

<sup>163</sup> Amnesty International, “USA: New Findings Reveal Human Rights Violations at Florida’s “Alligator Alcatraz” and Krome Detention Centers” (previously cited); Amnesty International, *USA: Torture and Enforced Disappearances in the Sunshine State* (previously cited).

<sup>164</sup> Amnesty International, “USA: New Findings Reveal Human Rights Violations at Florida’s “Alligator Alcatraz” and Krome Detention Centers” (previously cited); Amnesty International, *USA: Torture and Enforced Disappearances in the Sunshine State* (previously cited).

<sup>165</sup> Amnesty International, “USA: New Findings Reveal Human Rights Violations at Florida’s “Alligator Alcatraz” and Krome Detention Centers” (previously cited); Amnesty International, *USA: Torture and Enforced Disappearances in the Sunshine State* (previously cited).

<sup>166</sup> Amnesty International, “USA: New Findings Reveal Human Rights Violations at Florida’s “Alligator Alcatraz” and Krome Detention Centers” (previously cited); Amnesty International, *USA: Torture and Enforced Disappearances in the Sunshine State* (previously cited).

<sup>167</sup> Amnesty International, “USA: New Findings Reveal Human Rights Violations at Florida’s “Alligator Alcatraz” and Krome Detention

# ALARM BELL 8: MILITARIZATION BECOMES A “NEW NORMAL” IN DOMESTIC ENFORCEMENT

**RIGHTS AT STAKE INCLUDE: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY; FREEDOM FROM ARBITRARY DETENTION; LIFE, LIBERTY, AND SECURITY OF PERSON; NON-DISCRIMINATION AND PROTECTION FROM EXCESSIVE FORCE; DOMESTIC LAW ENFORCEMENT SAFEGUARDS.**

Military forces and militarized operations are not appropriate tools for domestic law enforcement.<sup>168</sup> Human rights-compliant law enforcement is based on close relationships between law enforcement officers and the publics they serve, built on trust and direct community engagement.<sup>169</sup> Instead of playing a vital role in the protection of the right to life, liberty, and security of the person, law enforcement was increasingly outsourced to military forces and militarized operations. When troops and militarized agents are deployed in communities or protests, the risks of intimidation, excessive force, and suppression of peaceful assembly rise sharply.<sup>170</sup> Military personnel do not have the experience, training, or equipment for crowd-control maneuvers and the policing of protests. The militarization of immigration enforcement and domestic law enforcement fuels tensions within communities, creates fear, and expands the risk of arbitrary detention and use of unlawful force.

President Trump unnecessarily and inappropriately deployed military resources in the policing of protests, to support aggressive and often unlawful immigration enforcement and under the false pretext of dealing with urban crime. The pattern of National Guard deployments, alongside increased federal immigration enforcement operations, also fed a conflation of crime and race. In six out of nine of the cities where President Trump either threatened or deployed the National Guard, the mayor was a Black mayor of a city with a large Black and Brown population.<sup>171</sup> In each case, he framed the cities as locations rampant with crime and violence needing the National Guard to step in for law enforcement.<sup>172</sup> He deployed the National Guard without the California governor's consent to police protests with incidents of violence, triggered by immigration raids in Los Angeles; a few days later, 700 US Marines were deployed as well to be stationed outside a federal detention facility and ICE office.<sup>173</sup> The declaration of a “crime emergency” in Washington, DC, was used to override local authority and send federal agents and National Guard members into the city.

The Trump administration also deputized almost every federal enforcement agency to act as immigration agents, vastly expanding immigration enforcement efforts and implementing “Kavanaugh Stops,” named after a Supreme Court Justice who issued an opinion allowing for immigration stops and questioning based upon perceived ethnicity, spoken language, or occupation as “relevant factors.” He later attempted to walk back this language through a footnote in a separate case that stated that immigration enforcement cannot make stops or arrests based solely on race and ethnicity.<sup>174</sup> Although federal judges in Washington, DC, and Chicago, Illinois, ordered federal agents to halt the practice of warrantless immigration arrests without probable cause

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Centers” (previously cited); Amnesty International, *USA: Torture and Enforced Disappearances in the Sunshine State* (previously cited).

<sup>168</sup> UN Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders, Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials (UN Basic Principles), 7 September 1990, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-use-force-and-firearms-law-enforcement>; UN General Assembly (UNGA), Resolution 34/169: *Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials* (UN Code of Conduct), adopted on 17 December 1979, UN Doc. A/RES/34/169.

<sup>169</sup> UN Basic Principles (previously cited); UN Code of Conduct (previously cited)

<sup>170</sup> Amnesty International, “USA: Deployment of National Guard to Los Angeles in Response to ICE Raids Is Dangerous”, 9 June 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/06/usa-response-to-ice-raids-is-dangerous/>; Amnesty International, *The World Is Watching: Mass Violations by U.S. Police of Black Lives Matter Protesters’ Rights* (Index: AMR 51/2807/2020), 4 August 2020, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/WorldIsWatchingFullReport080220.pdf>; Amnesty International, *Deadly Force: Police Use of Lethal Force in the United States*, 17 June 2025, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/reports/deadly-force-police-use-of-lethal-force-in-the-united-states/>

<sup>171</sup> See Terrance Sullivan, “The racist subtext of Trump’s militarized policing strategy”, 28 August 2025, Amnesty International USA, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/blog/the-racist-subtext-of-trumps-militarized-policing-strategy/> At time of writing, cities identified: New York City, New York; Memphis, Tennessee; Chicago, Illinois; Baltimore, Maryland; Portland, Oregon; Washington, D.C.; San Francisco, California; Los Angeles, California; and New Orleans, Louisiana.

<sup>172</sup> See Terrance Sullivan, “The racist subtext of Trump’s militarized policing strategy” (previously cited).

<sup>173</sup> Amnesty International, “USA: End the use of military to police protests” (Index: AMR 51/9499/2025 USA), June 13, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr51/9499/2025/en/>; PBS News, “Pentagon withdraws 700 Marines from Los Angeles”, 21 July 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/pentagon-withdraws-700-marines-from-los-angeles>

<sup>174</sup> David Bier, “ICE has diverted over 25,000 officers from their jobs”, 3 September 2025, Cato Institute, <https://www.cato.org/blog/ice-has-diverted-over-25000-officers-their-jobs>; César Cuauhtémoc García Hernández, Justice Brett Kavanaugh and racial proxies, 23 September, 2025, SCOTUSBlog, <https://www.scotusblog.com/2025/09/justice-brett-kavanaugh-and-racial-proxies/>; Trump v. Illinois, No. 25A443 (2025), Kavanaugh concurrence, footnote 4, [https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/25pdf/25a443\\_new\\_b07d.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/25pdf/25a443_new_b07d.pdf)

that the individual is in the USA in violation of any immigration law or regulation and is likely to escape before a warrant can be obtained, civil society organizations continue to document these ongoing practices despite court orders.<sup>175</sup> The Trump administration's intervention was used significantly for immigration enforcement and street-level policing of young people.<sup>176</sup> It impacted racially diverse and immigrant communities in particular.<sup>177</sup>

These deployments signaled a broader readiness to bypass state and local civilian governance structures in only the most extraordinary circumstances, such as when state or local law enforcement is unable to address the situation, and test the limits of executive power. In addition to Los Angeles and Washington, DC, President Trump deployed the National Guard with and without governors' or mayors' consent to Portland, Oregon; Chicago, Illinois; Memphis, Tennessee; and New Orleans, Louisiana.<sup>178</sup> After the US Supreme Court ruled that President Trump could not deploy troops in the Chicago area over the objections of Illinois officials, he announced he would pause deployments to cities where governors had objected but suggested he would not hesitate to deploy troops in the future.<sup>179</sup>

Appearing before hundreds of generals and admirals summoned by the US Secretary of Defense, President Trump referred to US cities as training grounds for the armed forces and spoke of needing the US military to combat what he called the "invasion from within": "We're under invasion from within. No different than a foreign enemy, but more difficult in many ways because they don't wear uniforms."<sup>180</sup>

President Trump used immigration in particular to test the reception of the courts, Congress, and the public to an expansive use of militarization. He sent federal agents from across executive branch agencies and troops to cities led largely by Democratic mayors to assist in immigration raids. Under the direction of US Border Patrol Chief Gregory Bovino, militarized immigration enforcement began in Los Angeles in June and moved to the Chicago area in September.<sup>181</sup> In an incident that grabbed national attention, a pre-dawn Chicago raid in September on an apartment building involved masked, armed federal agents breaking down doors, using flashbangs, and zip-tying residents including children.<sup>182</sup> Bovino continued aggressive operations in North Carolina and New Orleans before returning to Chicago at year's end.<sup>183</sup> In addition to impacting immigrant communities, violent immigration enforcement in Minneapolis on 7 January 2026 led to the shooting death of a local community member by an ICE agent following an incident involving her vehicle.<sup>184</sup> Throughout these efforts, immigration agents increasingly arrested and threatened the arrest of individuals who were watching,

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<sup>175</sup> District Court for the District of Columbia, *Escobar Molina v. Department of Homeland Security*, Case 25-3417 (BAH), Order, 2 December 2025, <https://www.acludc.org/cases/escobar-molina-v-dept-of-homeland-security-challenging-warrantless-immigration-arrests-without-probable-cause-in-d-c/?document=District-Court-Order-on-Preliminary-Injunction-and-Class-Certification>; Costañan Nava v. DHS, Civil Action No. 18-cv-03757; Reason, "Federal Judge confirms what we already knew: DHS is breaking its own rules in DC immigration arrests", 4 December 2025, <https://reason.com/2025/12/04/federal-judge-confirms-what-we-already-knew-dhs-is-breaking-its-own-rules-in-d-c-immigration-arrests/>

<sup>176</sup> CNN, "National Guard troops from GOP-led states begin arriving in DC as part of Trump's crime crackdown", 19 August 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/08/19/politics/national-guard-washington-dc-troops>; CBS News, "40% of arrests in D.C. federal crackdown have been immigration related, data shows", 3 October 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-dc-immigration-arrests/>; Washington Post, "Immigration officers still patrol with D.C. police after Trump emergency", 1 October 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2025/10/01/dc-police-immigration-trump-crime/>

<sup>177</sup> Guardian, "It's not safe in DC as an immigrant: racial profiling surged during Trump's Washington takeover", 10 September 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/sep/10/trump-washington-dc-takeover>

<sup>178</sup> Associated Press, "National Guard arrives in New Orleans for 1st New Year's since Bourbon Street attack", 30 December 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/new-orleans-bourbon-attack-security-1298ae460051ab9d80e04f41ed7b6802>; Memphis Flyer, "National Guard in Memphis until March at least", 19 December 2025, <https://www.memphisflyer.com/national-guard-in-memphis-until-march-at-least/>

<sup>179</sup> New York Times, "Supreme Court blocks Trump's plan to deploy National Guard to Chicago", 23 December 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/23/us/politics/supreme-court-national-guard-chicago.html>; NBC Los Angeles, "Trump says he's dropping push for National Guard in Chicago, LA and Portland, Oregon, for now", 1 January 2026, <https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/national-international/trump-dropping-push-national-guard-chicago-la-portland/3825566/>

<sup>180</sup> Associated Press, "Trump calls for using US cities as a 'training ground' for military in unusual speech to generals", 30 September 2025, <https://www.apnews.com/article/trump-hegseth-generals-meeting-military-pentagon-0ecdcb8877e24329cfa0fc1e851ebd2>; Aaron Blake, "Trump's ominous move to recruit generals and admirals to his political cause", 30 September 2025, CNN, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/09/30/politics/quantico-trump-generals-admirals-military>

<sup>181</sup> BC Chicago, "Chicago, we've arrived: ICE border patrol chief posts message about new operation", 16 September 2025, <https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/chicago-weve-arrived-ice-border-patrol-chief-posts-message-about-new-immigration-operation-in-area/3824889/>

<sup>182</sup> Amnesty International USA, "Pre-dawn ICE raid in Chicago is attack on human rights, spreads fear and intimidation", 7 October 2025, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/pre-dawn-ice-raid-in-chicago-is-attack-on-human-rights-spreads-fear-and-intimidation/>

<sup>183</sup> FOX 32 Chicago, "Border Patrol Chief Gregory Bovino back in Chicago as immigration enforcement continues", 16 December 2025, <https://www.fox32chicago.com/news/border-patrol-gregory-bovino-returns-chicago-immigration-enforcement>

<sup>184</sup> Associated Press, "ICE officer kills a Minneapolis driver in a deadly start to Trump's latest immigration operation", 7 January 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/minnesota-immigration-enforcement-shooting-crackdown-surge-173e00fa7388054e98c3b5b9417c1e5a>

filming, and protesting immigration arrests.<sup>185</sup>

### **CASE STUDY: US CITIZEN KILLED IN IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT OPERATION**

Following a renewed deployment to the Minneapolis, Minnesota, region at the beginning of 2026, masked, armed federal ICE agents were involved in an immigration enforcement operation in a residential neighbourhood south of the downtown area on 7 January. According to witness videos, Renee Nicole Good's vehicle was partially blocking traffic as a convoy of unmarked immigration vehicles attempted to proceed near E. 34<sup>th</sup> St. and Portland Avenue. As she attempted to move her vehicle after conversing with an officer, another officer, who was now in front of the vehicle as it proceeded forward, unholstered his firearm before firing several shots through the windshield and open driver's side window of Renee Good's vehicle. Renee Good died at the scene. None of the agents present reportedly provided medical attention and prevented bystanders from providing aid, while the agents involved in the incident reportedly left the site. Video evidence of the incident contradicted US officials' descriptions of the shooting.<sup>186</sup> Furthermore, DHS Secretary Noem immediately labelled Renee Good a "domestic terrorist" before the initiation of any investigation into the incident, which is emblematic of authoritarian practices.<sup>187</sup> Amnesty International is calling for a prompt, thorough, independent, and impartial investigation into Renee Good's death.

### **CASE STUDY: CHICAGO PRE-DAWN RAID – MILITARIZED RAID IN A RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITY**

In a pre-dawn military-style immigration raid on 30 September 2025 on an apartment building in a historically Black neighborhood in Chicago, masked, armed federal agents used flashbangs, broke into apartments without warrants, forcibly removed residents, including children, and restrained them with zip ties, and interrogated them without access to legal counsel.<sup>188</sup> Federal agents rappelled from helicopters, while an armored vehicle was positioned in the street.<sup>189</sup> The raid was captured in propaganda-style filming and posted by government officials to social media.<sup>190</sup>

The neighborhood became home to many Venezuelans when they were bused from the US southern border to Chicago and other cities led by Democratic mayors.<sup>191</sup> The Trump administration alleged that the residential building harbored Tren de Aragua gang members. Investigations found minimal evidence to support these claims.<sup>192</sup> This terrifying raid demonstrates one of the more egregious examples of what has become a new normal for communities across the United States: increasing militarization under the guise of immigration enforcement in complete disregard for human rights.<sup>193</sup>

<sup>185</sup> Byul Yoon, "Immigration agents are retaliating against people who record them", 25 November 2025, ACLU, <https://www.aclu.org/news/free-speech/photographer-retaliation-foia>

<sup>186</sup> Associated Press, "ICE officer kills a Minneapolis driver in a deadly start to Trump's latest immigration operation" (previously cited); New York Times, "Videos contradict Trump administration account of ICE shooting in Minneapolis", 8 January 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000010631041/minneapolis-ice-shooting-video.html>

<sup>187</sup> Department of Homeland Security, Instagram post: "Fox News: Noem Remarks on Deadly I.C.E. Involved Shooting", 8 January 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DT0sCVpCQgt/>

<sup>188</sup> Amnesty International USA, "Pre-Dawn ICE raid in Chicago is attack on human Rights, spreads fear and intimidation" (previously cited).

<sup>189</sup> Block Club Chicago, "Armed agents raid South Shore apartment building overnight Tuesday", 30 September 2025, <https://blockclubchicago.org/2025/09/30/armed-agents-in-unmarked-vans-target-south-shore-apartment-building/>

<sup>190</sup> Time, "'Military Style' ICE raid on Chicago apartment building shows escalation in Trump's crackdown", 4 October 2025, <https://time.com/7323334/ice-raid-chicago-pritzker-trump/>; Department of Homeland Security, X Post: "DHS law enforcement has made OVER 900 ARRESTS during Operation Midway Blitz in Illinois", 2 October 2025, <https://x.com/DHSgov/status/1973796727615598738>

<sup>191</sup> Block Club Chicago, "Armed agents raid South Shore apartment building overnight Tuesday" (previously cited).

<sup>192</sup> ProPublica, "'I Lost Everything': Venezuelans Were Rounded Up in a Dramatic Midnight Raid but Never Charged With a Crime", 13 November 2025, <https://www.propublica.org/article/chicago-venezuela-immigration-ice-fbi-raids-no-criminal-charges>

<sup>193</sup> Amnesty International USA, "Pre-Dawn ICE raid in Chicago is attack on human rights, spreads fear and intimidation" (previously cited).

# ALARM BELL 9: SURVEILLANCE AND AI TOOLS ARE TURBOCHARGED – ENABLING TARGETING AND REPRESSION AT SPEED

**RIGHTS AT STAKE INCLUDE: PRIVACY; FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION; FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION; FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT; EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION.**

Privacy is a human right that protects expression, association, and equality, among other human rights. When governments deploy artificial intelligence (AI)-driven surveillance tools that enable continuous monitoring, profiling, and rapid targeting, the risk of discriminatory, erroneous, and unchallengeable decisions increases.

When systems flag a person for investigation or visa revocation, the resulting detention or deportation can occur rapidly, before a person has meaningful access to counsel or remedy. Without transparency and oversight, AI can empower and accelerate authoritarian practices by expanding the scale and speed of targeting.

The Trump administration used automated AI-powered surveillance tools to deliberately target non-US citizens.<sup>194</sup> AI tools Babel X, provided by Babel Street, and Palantir's Immigration OS have automated capabilities that enable constant mass monitoring, surveillance, and assessments of people.<sup>195</sup> Babel X, for instance, is allegedly used for AI-powered scanning of social media platforms for flagging "terrorism" related content.<sup>196</sup> Probabilistic technologies that are used to draw inferences about individuals' intent have massive margins for error; they can often be discriminatory and biased.<sup>197</sup>

The Trump administration used these capabilities for the purpose of tracking migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, and as part of the "Catch and Revoke" initiative, identifying and targeting foreign-born students who engaged in protests in support of Palestinian human rights.<sup>198</sup> The Trump administration's deployment of these AI systems within the context of a mass deportation agenda and crackdown on anti-genocide expression led to a host of human rights violations. This included a pattern of unlawful detentions and mass deportations, creating a climate of fear and exacerbating the "chilling effect" for migrant communities and students across schools and campuses.

Reinforcing an ideological approach to targeting individuals, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services, the government agency that processes immigration requests, updated its policy guidance to require screening for "anti-Americanism" in all discretionary decision-making.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Amnesty International, "USA/Global: Tech made by Palantir and Babel Street pose surveillance threats to pro-Palestine student protestors & migrants", 21 August 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/08/usa-global-tech-made-by-palantir-and-babel-street-pose-surveillance-threats-to-pro-palestine-student-protestors-migrants/>; see Electronic Privacy Information Center, "EPIC FOIA: CBP (Babel Street Location-Tracking Service)", First Interim CBP Production, 16 May 2022, <https://epic.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/EPIC-21-12-03-CBP-FOIA-20220516-1st-Interim-Production.pdf>

<sup>195</sup> see Electronic Privacy Information Center, "EPIC FOIA: CBP (Babel Street Location-Tracking Service)", 3 December 2021, <https://epic.org/documents/epic-foia-cbp-babel-street-location-tracking-service/>; Babel Street, <https://www.babelstreet.com/>; Palantir UK, <https://www.palantir.com/uk>

<sup>196</sup> Amnesty International, "USA/Global: Tech made by Palantir and Babel Street pose surveillance threats to pro-Palestine student protestors & migrants" (previously cited); see Mohamad El-Hamalawy, "Harnessing OSINT to Counter Terrorism and Radicalization", January/February 2025, *The Journal of Border Security and Transnational Crime for the World's Border Protection, Management and Security Industry Policy-Makers and Practitioners*, Volume 40, <https://babel-street.files.svdcn.com/production/PDF/BSRJanFeb2025-1.pdf?dm=1738790560>.

<sup>197</sup> Amnesty International, "USA/Global: Tech made by Palantir and Babel Street pose surveillance threats to pro-Palestine student protestors & migrants" (previously cited).

<sup>198</sup> Amnesty International, "USA/Global: Tech made by Palantir and Babel Street pose surveillance threats to pro-Palestine student protestors & migrants" (previously cited).

<sup>199</sup> US Citizenship and Immigration Services, "USCIS to consider anti-Americanism in immigrant benefit requests", 19 August 2025, <https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/news-releases/uscis-to-consider-anti-americanism-in-immigrant-benefit-requests>

## CASE STUDY: “CATCH AND REVOKE” INITIATIVE ENABLED BY SURVEILLANCE AND ENFORCEMENT PLATFORMS

The US State Department’s “Catch and Revoke” initiative combines social media monitoring, visa status tracking, and automated threat assessments of foreign individuals on visas, including foreign-born students.<sup>200</sup> AI-enabled surveillance and automated analysis identify non-US citizens for enforcement action, and enforcement platforms streamline apprehension and removal.

The AI tools supplied by Babel Street and Palantir played a key role in US authorities’ ability to identify people, as well as their behavior and movements, more quickly and on a large scale to determine if their visas should be revoked.<sup>201</sup> Their use in “Catch and Revoke” illustrates how technology can make repression more efficient: it increases scale while increasing risk of bias and misidentification, and can accelerate enforcement faster than legal safeguards can operate.

**“The coercive ‘Catch and Revoke’ initiative, facilitated by AI technologies risks supercharging arbitrary and unlawful visa revocations, detentions, deportations and violations of a slew of human rights. These include the rights to privacy, freedom of expression and access to information, freedoms of movement, equality and non-discrimination, and the right to liberty and protest .... Systems like Babel X and Immigration OS play a key role in the US administration’s ability to carry out its repressive tactics, facilitating rapid automated decisions that have led to mass deportations carried out with unprecedented speed, which does not allow for adequate due process and poses significant risks to the human rights of all immigrants, including students who are non-US citizens.”<sup>202</sup> – Erika Guevara-Rosas, Senior Director for Research, Advocacy, Policy and Campaigns, Amnesty International**

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<sup>200</sup> Amnesty International, “USA/Global: Tech made by Palantir and Babel Street pose surveillance threats to pro-Palestine student protestors & migrants” (previously cited).

<sup>201</sup> Amnesty International, “USA/Global: Tech made by Palantir and Babel Street pose surveillance threats to pro-Palestine student protestors & migrants” (previously cited).

<sup>202</sup> Amnesty International, “USA/Global: Tech made by Palantir and Babel Street pose surveillance threats to pro-Palestine student protestors & migrants” (previously cited).

# ALARM BELL 10: TARGETING POPULATIONS AND ANTI-DISCRIMINATION PROTECTIONS

**RIGHTS AT STAKE INCLUDE: EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION; LIFE; HEALTH; PRIVACY; LIBERTY AND SECURITY.**

Attacks on gender identity, sexual and reproductive rights, and LGBTI rights and dismantling anti-discrimination measures are used to scapegoat communities, entrench discrimination, and weaponize issues of gender and identity to further divide society and justify human rights abuses. These rollbacks are frequently framed as “traditional values” or “public order,” but their impact is concrete: they strip protections, restrict bodily autonomy, increase the risk of harm, and signal that the state will treat some people’s rights as negotiable. Restrictions disproportionately harm marginalized and racialized communities and people living in poverty.

The Trump administration significantly rolled back sexual and reproductive rights, creating a volatile legal landscape. It rescinded prior policies that helped expand and protect access to reproductive care, and it cut funding for reproductive care facilities and programs, forcing clinic closures disproportionately impacting people living on lower incomes.<sup>203</sup> According to the Gender Equity Policy Institute, women and other pregnant people living in states that banned abortion were nearly two times as likely to die during pregnancy, childbirth, or soon after giving birth, compared with those living in states where abortion was legal.<sup>204</sup> Additional barriers to reproductive healthcare, including birth control, pregnancy care, and abortion, existed for many, disproportionately affecting marginalized and racialized groups.<sup>205</sup>

The Trump administration attacked LGBTI rights and care, particularly of transgender people. President Trump signed an executive order “restoring biological truth,” defining sex as an “immutable biological classification as either male or female.”<sup>206</sup> In response, agencies cut programs and funding protecting LGBTI people and erased mentions of LGBTI identity from official materials.<sup>207</sup> In July 2025, the Trump administration shut down the LGBTI-specific option on the national youth suicide hotline.<sup>208</sup> President Trump banned gender-affirming care for people under 19 years, while the Supreme Court upheld state bans for minors.<sup>209</sup>

One of President Trump’s first actions was to sign an executive order eliminating DEI programs across federal agencies. DEI initiatives were established to address systemic inequities in hiring, retention, and advancement that have historically excluded marginalized communities.<sup>210</sup> Declaring that DEI’s “foundational rhetoric and ideas foster intergroup hostility and authoritarianism,” the Trump administration imposed anti-DEI measures throughout the government that led to the mass firing of government DEI professionals and agencies with divisions tasked to uphold civil rights, such as the environmental justice office of the US Department of Justice and US Environmental Protection Agency.<sup>211</sup> Ultimately, federal staffing reductions targeted departments where racialized people and women were most prevalent.<sup>212</sup> Removing DEI initiatives led to cuts in education

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<sup>203</sup> Amnesty International USA, *Chaos & Cruelty: 10 Compounding Assaults on Human Rights* (previously cited).

<sup>204</sup> Gender Equity Policy Institute, *Maternal Mortality in the United States after Abortion Bans*, April 2025, <https://thegepi.org/maternal-mortality-abortion-bans/>

<sup>205</sup> Amnesty International, *Human Rights Crisis in the Aftermath of Dobbs Decision* (Index: AMR 51/8406/2024), August 5, 2024 <https://www.amnestyusa.org/reports/abortion-in-the-usa-the-human-rights-crisis-in-the-aftermath-of-dobbs/>

<sup>206</sup> Executive Order, *Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government*, 20 January 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/defending-women-from-gender-ideology-extremism-and-restoring-biological-truth-to-the-federal-government/>

<sup>207</sup> Amnesty International USA, *Chaos & Cruelty: 10 Compounding Assaults on Human Rights* (previously cited).

<sup>208</sup> KFF Health News, “The National Suicide Hotline For LGBTQ+ Youth Shut Down. States Are Scrambling To Help.”, August 19, 2025, <https://kffhealthnews.org/news/article/988-suicide-crisis-lifeline-hotline-lgbtq-press-3-option-ended-states-backfill/>

<sup>209</sup> Executive Order, *Protecting Children from Chemical and Surgical Mutilation*, 28 January 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/protecting-children-from-chemical-and-surgical-mutilation/>; New York Times, “The Supreme Court’s decision on transgender care for minors, annotated”, 18 June 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/06/18/us/doc-annotation-transgender-scotus-case.html>; Executive Order, *Protecting Children from Chemical and Surgical Mutilation* (previously cited).

<sup>210</sup> Amnesty International USA, *Chaos & Cruelty: 10 Compounding Assaults on Human Rights* (previously cited).

<sup>211</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, “EPA terminates Biden’s environmental justice, DEI arms of agency”, 12 March 2025, <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-terminates-bidens-environmental-justice-dei-arms-agency>; US Department of Justice, “Withdrawal of plan and policy documents”, 7 February 2025, <https://www.justice.gov/enrd/media/1412031/dl?inline>

<sup>212</sup> ProPublica, “Dismissed by DEI: Trump’s purge made Black Women with stable federal jobs an “easy target”, 4 June 2025, <https://www.propublica.org/article/trump-dei-black-women-minorities-careers-jobs-dismissed>



funding and threatened investigations and fines against non-governmental entities with DEI policies.<sup>213</sup> Given the swift assault on DEI initiatives some private individuals acted with impunity and launched a website to surveil, dox, and harass DEI professionals. The result led to increased scrutiny and harassment of Black women professionals and other racialized groups, even if their positions were unrelated to DEI initiatives.<sup>214</sup>

### **CASE STUDY: THE ATTEMPTED ERASURE OF TRANSGENDER IDENTITY THROUGH EXECUTIVE ORDER AND POLICY MEASURES**

In an attempt to erase transgender people's existence under the law, on his first day in office, President Trump signed an executive order declaring it official US policy to recognize only two genders, "male and female," which institutionalized discrimination, affecting access to health care, education, safety, and equal protection.<sup>215</sup>

In a devastating response to this executive order, various agencies erased references to transgender people's history and rights. The National Park Service removed all references to transgender people at the Stonewall National Monument and erased pages detailing the contributions of transgender people.<sup>216</sup> The US Department of State suspended previous rules allowing for updates to gender markers on US passports, causing confusion and delays and making it difficult and even dangerous for transgender people to travel with legal documentation.<sup>217</sup> The US Department of Health and Human Services launched an initiative and "whistleblower" online portal encouraging people to "report" medical providers that offer gender-affirming treatment to trans people.<sup>218</sup>

Another executive order mandating "Patriotic Education" explicitly targets the safety of transgender children in school and threatens to eliminate federal funding for schools that promote "indoctrination" based on "gender ideology and discriminatory equity ideology."<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Spectrum News 1, "Black women federal unemployment surges. Could the change be long term?", 3 December 2025, <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nc/charlotte/news/2025/12/03/black-women-federal-unemployment-surges>

<sup>214</sup> White House, "Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump protects civil rights and merit-based opportunity by ending illegal DEI", 22 January 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/01/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-protects-civil-rights-and-merit-based-opportunity-by-ending-illegal-dei/>; NBC News, "Federal health workers terrified after 'DEI' website publishes list of 'targets'", February 4, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/federal-health-workers-terrified-dei-website-publishes-list-targets-rcna190711>; ProPublica, "Dismissed by DEI: Trump's purge made Black Women with stable federal jobs an 'easy target'", 4 June 2025, <https://www.propublica.org/article/trump-dei-black-women-minorities-careers-jobs-dismissed>

<sup>215</sup> Executive Order, *Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government* (previously cited).

<sup>216</sup> NPR, "Park Service erases 'transgender' on Stonewall website, uses the term 'LGB' movement", 14 February 2025 <https://www.npr.org/2025/02/14/g-s1-48923/stonewall-monument-transgender-park-service>

<sup>217</sup> US Department of State, "Sex marker in passports", 18 November 2025, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/passport-help/sex-marker.html>

<sup>218</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services, "Guidance for whistleblowers on the chemical and surgical mutilation of children, department of health and human services", 14 April 2025, <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/eo-14187-whistleblower-guidance.pdf>

<sup>219</sup> Amnesty International USA, *Chaos & Cruelty: 10 Compounding Assaults on Human Rights* (previously cited).

# ALARM BELL 11: CHECKS ON CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY AND EFFORTS TO FIGHT CORRUPTION ARE PULLED BACK

**RIGHTS AT STAKE INCLUDE: PRIVACY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION; FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION; FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY; DUE PROCESS.**

Pulling back oversight of corporations and public officials erodes transparency and accountability, threatening a government's ability to uphold human rights, especially for people already in vulnerable or marginalized situations. When anti-corruption safeguards and corporate accountability mechanisms are weakened, public resources and policy can be redirected to private interests, deepening inequality, facilitating rights violations, and undermining the systems themselves needed to realize rights.<sup>220</sup> Authoritarian practices further stifle the ability of journalists, members of civil society organizations, whistleblowers, and others working to expose and prevent corruption and defend human rights.<sup>221</sup>

President Trump and his administration moved quickly to take down existing checks on corporate accountability and slashed efforts to fight corruption. After quickly pausing enforcement of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, the Trump administration finally resumed enforcement under new guidelines, closing nearly half its cases in the process.<sup>222</sup> The administration cut most of the lawyers in the US Justice Department unit that handles public corruption cases.<sup>223</sup> It halted, dropped, or withdrew enforcement actions against more than 160 corporations, including all 42 corporations facing Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) cases and investigations. Some of the cases include known ties between the corporations in question and the Trump administration.<sup>224</sup> The CFPB subsequently dropped at least 22 pending enforcement actions against companies and reversed multiple settlements where companies had already agreed to refund affected consumers.<sup>225</sup> The administration withdrew from the UN Tax Convention negotiations, a process to ensure corporations are paying their fair share of taxes.<sup>226</sup>

These rollbacks extended to technology companies under the guise of protecting free speech. President Trump's executive order on "Restoring Freedom of Speech and Ending Federal Censorship" aims to end federal government efforts to pressure social media companies into content moderation.<sup>227</sup> The policy shift occurred in tandem with policy shifts by major technology companies, weakening safeguards that protect human rights online and offline. In January 2025, social media company Meta dismantled its fact-checking programs and changed its content moderation policies, retreating from its previously stated commitments to responsible content governance.<sup>228</sup> It lifted prohibitions on previously banned speech, such as the denigration

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<sup>220</sup> Amnesty International, *Africa: Anti-Corruption Fight in Peril – Crackdown on Anti-Corruption Human Rights Defenders in West and Central Africa* (Index: AFR 01/6978/2023), 11 July 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr01/6978/2023/en/> ; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Corruption and Human Rights: A Practical Guide*, 12 December 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/corruption-and-human-rights-practical-guide>

<sup>221</sup> Amnesty International and others, "States should end reprisals against anti-corruption human rights defenders" (Index: AFR 01/6253/2022), 9 December 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr01/6253/2022/en/>

<sup>222</sup> Amnesty International USA, *Chaos & Cruelty* (previously cited); Wall Street Journal, "Justice Department resumes foreign-bribery work but cuts cases after Trump's pause", 10 June 2025, <https://www.wsj.com/us-news/law/justice-department-resumes-foreign-bribery-work-but-cuts-cases-after-trumps-pause-1b00b14d>

<sup>223</sup> NOTUS, "The Justice Department had 36 lawyers fighting corruption full-time. Under Trump, it's down to two.", 22 September 2025, <https://www.notus.org/courts/doj-public-integrity>; Amnesty International USA, *Chaos & Cruelty* (previously cited).

<sup>224</sup> Amnesty International USA, *Chaos & Cruelty* (previously cited); Public Citizen, "Tracker: corporate enforcement at risk", <https://www.citizen.org/article/corporate-enforcement-trump-tracker/> (last accessed 8 January 2026).

<sup>225</sup> U.S. News & World Report, "Trump's CFPB has dropped more than 20 cases. Consumers could miss out on 'potentially over \$3 billion'", 27 August 2025, <https://www.usnews.com/banking/articles/trumps-cfpb-has-dropped-more-than-20-cases-consumers-could-miss-out-on-over-3-billion-dollar>

<sup>226</sup> United States Mission to the United Nations, "Statement at the session for the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on the UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation", 3 February 2025, <https://usun.usmission.gov/statement-at-the-session-for-the-intergovernmental-negotiating-committee-on-the-un-framework-convention-on-international-tax-cooperation/> Amnesty International USA, *Chaos & Cruelty* (previously cited).

<sup>227</sup> White House, *Restoring Freedom of Speech and Ending Federal Censorship*, 20 January 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/restoring-freedom-of-speech-and-ending-federal-censorship/>

<sup>228</sup> Amnesty International, "Meta's new content policies risk fueling more mass violence and genocide", 17 February 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/02/meta-new-policy-changes/>

and harassment of racialized minorities, trans people, and women.<sup>229</sup> The policy changes were seemingly aimed at currying favor with the new Trump administration.<sup>230</sup>

Oversight of technology companies is essential to protecting human rights, particularly the rights to privacy, non-discrimination, and access to information. Power is concentrated among a small group of companies – Alphabet (Google), Meta, Microsoft, Amazon, and Apple – meaning they effectively control the infrastructure, services, and information people use and see.<sup>231</sup>

**“These few companies act as digital landlords who determine the shape and form of our online interaction.”**

– Hannah Storey, Advocacy and Policy Adviser on Technology and Human Rights, Amnesty International <sup>232</sup>

### CASE STUDY: META'S CONTENT MODERATION POLICIES AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Meaningful participation in daily life often depends on using Meta's social platforms and Google's search and YouTube tools, which have become embedded in the internet.<sup>233</sup> As a result, these companies wield immense power over what information people see, granting them extraordinary power over the boundaries of public discourse and access to information.<sup>234</sup> Their content moderation policies determine what information is allowed to remain on their sites.<sup>235</sup>

Shortly before President Trump's second inauguration in January 2025, Meta announced changes to content policies on its platforms to “allow more speech.”<sup>236</sup> The new policies allowed “allegations of mental illness or abnormality when based on gender or sexual orientation.”<sup>237</sup> They also removed sections which banned users from targeting people “with claims that they have or spread the novel coronavirus”; referring to women “as household objects or property or objects in general”; and calling transgender or non-binary people, “it.”<sup>238</sup>

Asked whether Meta's new content moderation policy came in response to his previous criticism of the company, President Trump said, “Probably.”<sup>239</sup>

<sup>229</sup> Amnesty International, *Breaking up with Big Tech: A human rights-based argument for tackling Big Tech's market power* (Index: POL 30/0226/2025), 28 August 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol30/0226/2025/en/>;

Amnesty International, “Meta's new content policies risk fueling more mass violence and genocide” (previously cited).

<sup>230</sup> Amnesty International, “Meta's new content policies risk fueling more mass violence and genocide” (previously cited); Amnesty International USA, *Chaos & Cruelty: 10 Compounding Assaults on Human Rights* (previously cited). Amnesty International, *Breaking up with Big Tech: A human rights-based argument for tackling Big Tech's market power* (previously cited); NBC News, “Meta is ending its fact-checking program in favor of a ‘community notes’ system similar to X”, 7 January 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/meta-ends-fact-checking-program-community-notes-x-rcna186468>

<sup>231</sup> Amnesty International, *Breaking up with Big Tech: A human rights-based argument for tackling Big Tech's market power* (previously cited); Amnesty International, *Global: Amnesty launches ‘Breaking up with Big Tech’ briefing*, 28 August 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/08/amnesty-launches-breaking-up-with-big-tech-briefing/>

<sup>232</sup> Amnesty International, *Global: Amnesty launches ‘Breaking up with Big Tech’ briefing* (previously cited).

<sup>233</sup> Amnesty International, *Breaking up with Big Tech: A human rights-based argument for tackling Big Tech's market power* (previously cited).

<sup>234</sup> Amnesty International, *Breaking up with Big Tech: A human rights-based argument for tackling Big Tech's market power* (previously cited).

<sup>235</sup> Amnesty International, *Breaking up with Big Tech: A human rights-based argument for tackling Big Tech's market power* (previously cited).

<sup>236</sup> Amnesty International, *Breaking up with Big Tech: A human rights-based argument for tackling Big Tech's market power* (previously cited).

<sup>237</sup> Amnesty International, *Breaking up with Big Tech: A human rights-based argument for tackling Big Tech's market power* (previously cited).

<sup>238</sup> Amnesty International, *Breaking up with Big Tech: A human rights-based argument for tackling Big Tech's market power* (previously cited).

<sup>239</sup> NBC News, “Meta is ending its fact-checking program in favor of a ‘community notes’ system similar to X” (previously cited).

# ALARM BELL 12: UNDERMINING SYSTEMS THAT SUPPORT HUMAN RIGHTS GLOBALLY CREATES GREATER HARM AND EMBOLDENS GREATER IMPUNITY WORLDWIDE

**RIGHTS AT STAKE INCLUDE: LIFE, LIBERTY, AND HEALTH; SEEK ASYLUM; EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION.**

Actions that damage international systems designed to protect human rights increase the risk of abuses in the United States and worldwide and send a clear signal internationally: accountability is optional.

**“We are witnessing an alarming escalation of state-sponsored repression and abandonment of the rule of law and human rights norms around the world.”**

– Erika Guevara-Rosas, Senior Director for Research, Policy, Advocacy and Campaigns, Amnesty International <sup>240</sup>

Although the US government had long positioned itself, at least rhetorically, as a global champion of human rights, the Trump administration quickly drove the USA in reverse. The administration retreated from critical global human rights agreements and bodies, cruelly and chaotically zeroed out foreign assistance, engaged in extrajudicial killings outside its borders and unlawful military action, and modeled a disregard for human rights and global norms. In short, President Trump’s actions on the international stage were a dangerous wrecking ball to accountability and justice – and lethal to life and liberty.

President Trump withdrew from and weakened multiple multilateral bodies and agreements through executive actions, undermining decades of global efforts toward responsibility sharing and mutual action to support human rights and the rule of law. The Trump administration’s actions included sanctioning individuals and organizations engaged with the International Criminal Court (ICC);<sup>241</sup> ending participation in the UN Human Rights Council;<sup>242</sup> withdrawing from the Paris Climate Agreement,<sup>243</sup> the World Health Organization (WHO),<sup>244</sup> and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO);<sup>245</sup> and cutting funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).<sup>246</sup> President Trump announced withdrawal from an additional 66 international organizations in January 2026, including those that serve child survivors of violence, women around the world, and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.<sup>247</sup> The withdrawals and funding cuts created discriminatory outcomes for people seeking justice, racialized groups, women, LGBTI people, and others.<sup>248</sup> While the Human Rights Council has taken the step of rescheduling the United States’ review for November 2026, the US risks

<sup>240</sup> Amnesty International USA, *Chaos & Cruelty: 10 Compounding Assaults on Human Rights* (previously cited).

<sup>241</sup> Executive Order, *Imposing Sanctions on the International Criminal Court*, 6 February, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/imposing-sanctions-on-the-international-criminal-court/>

<sup>242</sup> Executive Order, *Withdrawing the United States from and Ending Funding to Certain United Nations Organizations and Reviewing United States Support to all International Organizations*, 4 February 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-and-ending-funding-to-certain-united-nations-organizations-and-reviewing-united-states-support-to-all-international-organizations/>

<sup>243</sup> Executive Order, *Putting America First in International Environmental Agreements*, 20 January 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/putting-america-first-in-international-environmental-agreements/>

<sup>244</sup> Executive Order, *Withdrawing the United States from the World Health Organization*, 20 January 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-the-worldhealth-organization/>

<sup>245</sup> Politico, “Trump withdraws US from ‘woke’ UNESCO for second time”, 22 July 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/07/22/trump-unesco-withdrawal-united-nations-00466759>

<sup>246</sup> Executive Order, *Withdrawing the United States from and Ending Funding to Certain United Nations Organizations and Reviewing United States Support to all International Organizations* (previously cited).

<sup>247</sup> Executive Order, *Withdrawing the United States from International Organizations, Conventions, and Treaties that Are Contrary to the Interests of the United States*, 7 January 2026, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2026/01/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-international-organizations-conventions-and-treaties-that-are-contrary-to-the-interests-of-the-united-states/>

<sup>248</sup> Amnesty International USA, *Chaos & Cruelty: 10 Compounding Assaults on Human Rights* (previously cited); Amnesty International, *USA: Lives at Risk: Chaotic and Abrupt Cuts to Foreign Aid Put Millions of Lives at Risk* (AMR 51/9408/2025), 29 May 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr51/9408/2025/en/>

becoming the first country in the history of the UN's Universal Periodic Review process not to engage in any way.<sup>249</sup>

The 2024 annual US Department of State human rights report reflected the Trump administration's disregard for human rights and its dehumanization of certain populations. In addition to eliminating entire sections on key issues, such as discrimination against LGBTI people, there were also arbitrary omissions within existing sections of the report based on the country. Rather than providing a consistent and truthful accounting of human rights violations around the world, the report prioritized the Trump administration's political agenda – softening criticism in some countries while ignoring violations in others. For the victims and human rights defenders who rely on these reports to shine light on abuses and violations, the dangerous and short-sighted decision to put out a truncated version that does not tell the whole story of human rights violations sends a chilling message that the US is willing to overlook some abuses, while people experiencing human rights violations may be left to fend for themselves. Without significant Congressional pushback, the 2025 reports threaten to deepen this risk, as the Trump administration issued new reporting guidelines that appear to ignore or even condone many grave abuses, based on the identity of the person experiencing them.

The abrupt, chaotic, and sweeping suspension of US foreign assistance caused and exacerbated human rights abuses against millions of vulnerable people globally and torpedoed multilateral norms of cooperation. The scale and suddenness of the cuts created a life-threatening vacuum that other governments and aid organizations could not realistically fill in the immediate term, violating the rights to life and health and the ability to seek humanitarian protection for millions.<sup>250</sup> Although the number of deaths is not fully documented, people died as a result of the rapid dismantling of USAID and funding cuts.<sup>251</sup>

The Trump administration also demonstrated a blatant disregard for the right to life through its military actions. President Trump ordered military action in Venezuela, resulting in the capture of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, and raising grave concerns for the human rights of the Venezuelan population. The administration's actions violated international law.<sup>252</sup> This military operation followed a series of illegal air strikes in the Eastern Pacific and the Caribbean since early September 2025 that killed over 100 people, reportedly.<sup>253</sup> The ramping up of the bombing campaign despite increased pressure from Congress signals total disregard for the law.<sup>254</sup>

Amnesty International raised the alarm that the attack on Venezuela and the capture of Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores by a permanent UN Security Council member further undermine international law and the rules-based order. These actions signal a world governed by military force and intimidation, increasing the risk of copycat operations.

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<sup>249</sup> Amnesty International USA, "Trump administration fails to participate in UN Human Rights Review," November 7, 2025, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/trump-administration-fails-to-participate-in-un-human-rights-review/>

<sup>250</sup> Amnesty International, *USA: Lives at Risk: Chaotic and Abrupt Cuts to Foreign Aid Put Millions of Lives at Risk* (previously cited); Amnesty International, "Amnesty International warns of devastating consequences as abrupt U.S. foreign aid cuts threaten human rights globally", 29 May 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/05/devastating-consequences-abrupt-u-s-foreign-aid-cuts/>

<sup>251</sup> Amnesty International, "Amnesty International warns of devastating consequences as abrupt U.S. foreign aid cuts threaten human rights globally" (previously cited).

<sup>252</sup> Amnesty International, "Global: Amnesty International raises human rights concerns following u.s. military action in Venezuela" (previously cited).

<sup>253</sup> Amnesty International USA, "Shipwrecked or not, all these bombings are murder", 5 December 2025, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/shipwrecked-or-not-all-these-bombings-are-murder/>; Amnesty International, "U.S. airstrikes in Latin America and the Caribbean are murder. Congress must stop them now", 29 October 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/10/u-s-airstrikes-in-latin-america-and-the-caribbean-are-murder-congress-must-stop-them-now/>

<sup>254</sup> Amnesty International USA, "Shipwrecked or not, all these bombings are murder" (previously cited). Amnesty International, U.S. airstrikes in Latin America and the Caribbean are murder. Congress must stop them now" (previously cited).

## CASE STUDY: SANCTIONS ON THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT EMBOLDEN IMPUNITY

President Trump's actions on the International Criminal Court (ICC), including an executive order sanctioning its Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan and other Court officials, undermine the global rule of law. These actions risk emboldening leaders to commit human rights violations with impunity and threaten international justice for victims of serious crimes, particularly where domestic remedies are unavailable. A direct response to the ICC's efforts to hold Israeli authorities accountable for alleged crimes under international law in Palestine, the executive order also weakened efforts to secure justice to people in Afghanistan, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, Darfur (Sudan), DRC, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, the Philippines, Ukraine, and Venezuela, where the ICC is currently conducting investigations or has issued arrest warrants.<sup>255</sup>

**"The United States is ready to punish an institution that ensures the individuals most responsible for committing atrocities cannot escape justice. No one responsible for crimes under international law should be protected or aided in their attempts to escape individual accountability, least of all with the assistance of the US government based on President Trump's political alliances."**<sup>256</sup> – *Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International Secretary General*

## CASE STUDY: EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTIONS THROUGH ILLEGAL AIR STRIKES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

From early September through December 2025, the Trump administration carried out a series of illegal air strikes in the Eastern Pacific and the Caribbean that killed at least 123 people in 36 vessels.<sup>257</sup> In a September 2 airstrike, the US military allegedly bombed helpless survivors clinging to the wreckage.<sup>258</sup> The Trump administration claims it is intercepting purported drug boats, making it a law enforcement operation despite its insistence these boats are engaged in a conflict.<sup>259</sup> However, the Trump administration is subject to policing standards derived from international human rights law, which holds that all people have the right to life and to a fair trial and only allows states to use lethal force when an imminent threat to life exists and less extreme means, like capture, are insufficient.<sup>260</sup> A state intentionally killing someone outside those circumstances is committing an extrajudicial execution (i.e., a murder), no matter what crime the person is alleged to have committed.<sup>261</sup>

**"Human life cannot be left to the mercy of a ruler's whim. No president has the right to kill arbitrarily and without accountability."**<sup>262</sup> – *Ana Piquer, Americas Director, Amnesty International*

<sup>255</sup> Amnesty International, "USA: Sanctions against International Criminal Court betray international justice system", 6 February 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/02/usa-sanctions-against-international-criminal-court-betray-international-justice-system/>; Amnesty International, "What do the Trump administration's sanctions on the ICC mean for justice and human rights?", 25 March 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2025/03/what-do-the-trump-administrations-sanctions-on-the-icc-mean-for-justice-and-human-rights/>

<sup>256</sup> Amnesty International, "USA: Sanctions against International Criminal Court betray international justice system" (previously cited).

<sup>257</sup> Associated Press, "Timeline of US military buildup near Venezuela and attacks on alleged drug-smuggling boats", 5 December 2025, <https://www.apnews.com/article/trump-maduro-venezuela-drug-cartels-military-timeline-91e242e5c56e39b6b7d72bf55dbd2d>; CNN, "US military says at least three killed in new strikes on alleged drug vessels, with survivors abandoning ship", 31 December 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/12/31/politics/us-strikes-alleged-drug-vessels>; The Intercept, "After undercounting boat strike killings, U.S. military updates death toll", 8 January 2026, <https://theintercept.com/2026/01/08/us-military-boat-strike-deaths-undercount/>

<sup>258</sup> Amnesty International USA, "Shipwrecked or not, all these bombings are murder" (previously cited).

<sup>259</sup> Amnesty International USA, "Shipwrecked or not, all these bombings are murder" (previously cited).

<sup>260</sup> Amnesty International USA, "Shipwrecked or not, all these bombings are murder" (previously cited).

<sup>261</sup> Amnesty International USA, "Shipwrecked or not, all these bombings are murder" (previously cited).

<sup>262</sup> Amnesty International, "U.S. airstrikes in Latin America and the Caribbean are murder. Congress must stop them now" (previously cited)

# CONCLUSION: ANSWERING THE CALL TO RISING AUTHORITARIAN PRACTICES

One year into the Trump administration, the alarm bells over rising authoritarian practices are ringing loudly. The erosion of the rule of law and the rapid closing of civic space threaten fundamental human rights and core values of freedom, equality, and justice. Human rights defenders and organizations working to protect human rights and combat corruption are facing heightened risks of harassment and attacks, while becoming increasingly unable to carry out their vital work.

One of the key moments to monitor in this second year will be the federal mid-term elections in November 2026, which will test the resiliency of participatory governance in the USA. Early signals from this administration threaten the right to vote.<sup>263</sup> The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which

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<sup>263</sup> Proclamation, *Granting Pardons and Commutation of Sentences for Certain Offenses Relating to the Events at or near the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021*, 20 January 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/granting-pardons-and-commutation-of-sentences-for-certain-offenses-relating-to-the-events-at-or-near-the-united-states-capitol-on-january-6-2021/>; Amnesty International, *USA: Chaos & cruelty: 10 Compounding Assaults on Human Rights: A Review of President Trump's First 100 days in Office* (Index: AMR 51/9313/2025), 30 April 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr51/9313/2025/en/>; New York Times, "Trump grants sweeping clemency to all Jan. 6 rioters", 20 January 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/20/us/politics/trump-pardons-jan-6.html>; NPR, "Criminal records of Jan. 6 rioters pardoned by Trump include rape, domestic violence", 30 January 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/01/30/nx-s1-5276336/donald-trump-jan-6-rape-assault-pardons-rioters>; New York Times, "Colorado officials reject Trump's 'Pardon' of a convicted election denier", 13 December 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/13/us/politics/trump-tina-peters.html>; Executive Order, *Preserving and Protecting the Integrity of American Elections*, 25 March 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/preserving-and-protecting-the-integrity-of-american-elections/>; Brennan Center for Justice, "The President's executive order on elections", 31 October 2025, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/presidents-executive-order-elections-explained>; New York Times, "Judge permanently bars Trump from requiring proof of citizenship for voter registration", 31 October 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/31/us/politics/trump-proof-citizenship-voter-registration.html>; US District Court for the District of Columbia, *League of United Latin American Citizens v. Executive Office of the President*, Case 1:25-cv-00946, <https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/69823792/league-of-united-latin-american-citizens-v-executive-office-of-the/> (last updated 9 January 2026); Reuters, "White House is working on executive order on elections, press secretary says", 4 November 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/white-house-is-working-executive-order-elections-press-secretary-says-2025-11-04/>; New York Times, "Trump says he will sign executive order mandating voter I.D.", 31 August 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/31/us/politics/trump-voter-id-executive-order.html>; Office of the Attorney General, "Restoring the integrity and credibility of the Department of Justice", 5 February 2025, <https://www.justice.gov/ag/media/1388506/dl?inline>; New York Times, "No, noncitizens are not voting in droves", 28 October 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/28/technology/noncitizen-voting-election.html>; NBC News, "Researcher who has distorted voter data appointed to Homeland Security election integrity role", 27 August 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/trump-administration/researcher-voter-data-2020-trump-election-integrity-rcna227494>; New York Times, "Trump empowers election deniers, still fixated on 2020 grievances", 22 October 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/22/us/politics/trump-election-deniers-voting-security.html>; Reuters, "Trump's campaign of retribution: At least 470 targets and counting", 26 November 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/investigations/trumps-campaign-retribution-least-470-targets-counting-2025-11-26/>; Stateline, "DOJ plans to ask all states for detailed voting info", 1 August 2025, <https://stateline.org/2025/08/01/doj-plans-to-ask-all-states-for-detailed-voting-info/>; Stateline, "DOJ is sharing state voter roll lists with Homeland Security", 12 September 2025,

the USA has ratified, recognizes and protects the right of every citizen to take part in the conduct of public affairs, the right to vote and to be elected, and the right to have access to public service.<sup>264</sup> The rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association are essential conditions for the effective exercise of the right to vote and must be fully protected.<sup>265</sup> For citizens to participate in elections freely and without intimidation, authorities must ensure that all rights pivotal to such participation can be enjoyed by all without discrimination on account of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, political affiliation or opinion, or other reason.<sup>266</sup> All those in a position to help ensure that the right to vote is maintained should play their part in doing so.

The Trump administration has moved swiftly – oftentimes outside the bounds of the law – to trample on rights and dangerously consolidate power. We know where this path leads, and we know the human cost when alarm bells go unanswered. The recommendations that follow confront the dangers: they defend civic space, insist on respect for the rule of law, protect human rights, and refuse the normalization of repression.

**“At this historical juncture, when authoritarian laws and practices are multiplying the world over in the interests of very few, governments and civil society must work with urgency to lead humanity back to safer ground.”**

— Agnès Callamard, Secretary General of Amnesty International. <sup>267</sup>

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<https://stateline.org/2025/09/12/doj-is-sharing-state-voter-roll-lists-with-homeland-security/>; Associated Press, “US Justice Department sues 6 more states, including NY and California, in its quest for voter data”, 25 September 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/justice-department-voter-rolls-lawsuit-fa2f01412e71f693a33357f608b931d2>; Associated Press, “US Justice Department sues 3 states, District of Columbia for voter data”, 18 December 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/justice-department-voter-registration-data-lawsuit-fe64c86cdcd462cb6c7bcbe1c8d3493d>; Brennan Center for Justice, “Tracker of Justice Department requests for voter information”, 9 January 2026, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/tracker-justice-department-requests-voter-information>; CNN, “Trump signs executive order establishing ‘specialized’ National Guard units to address crime in cities”, 25 August 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/08/25/politics/trump-executive-order-national-guard-units-crime>; NPR, “A reporter outlines Trump’s options to subvert the 2026 midterm elections”, 6 November 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/11/06/nx-s1-5600669/a-reporter-outlines-trumps-options-to-subvert-the-2026-midterm-elections>; Washington Watch with Tony Perkins, “Cleta Mitchell on Concerns raised surrounding president Trump’s executive order on voter ID”, 2 September 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYoNdB1dxho>

<sup>264</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 25

<sup>265</sup> UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), *Draft Guidelines for States on the Effective Implementation of the Right to Participate in Public Affairs*, 20 July 2018, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/39/28>; Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), General Comment 25: The right to participate in public affairs, voting rights and the right of equal access to public service (Art. 25), 12 July 1996, UN Doc. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7; see Amnesty International, “Respect for human rights must be central during the elections in Brazil”, 20 September 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/09/respect-for-human-rights-must-be-central-during-the-elections-in-brazil/>

<sup>266</sup> See Amnesty International, “Sierra Leone November 2012 elections: Briefing to monitors and observers”(Index: AFR 51/008/2012), October 2012, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/afr510082012en.pdf>

<sup>267</sup> UN, “UN experts condemn United States blockade and aggression against Venezuela” (previously cited).



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Amnesty International is calling on federal, state, and local authorities, as well as Congress, international actors, and private actors, to take urgent action to stop the slide toward authoritarian practices and to safeguard civic space, the rule of law, and human rights.

These recommendations are grounded in international human rights law and standards, including protections for freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, due process and fair trial rights, equality and non-discrimination, the prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment, and standards governing the use of force and business responsibility to respect human rights.<sup>268</sup>

## TO THE US EXECUTIVE BRANCH:

- End intimidation and retaliation for exercising the rights to freedom of the press, speech, and peaceful protest, including through arrests, detention, surveillance, visa actions, deportation threats, or regulatory action, and ensure all agencies publicly reaffirm their obligations to respect civic space rights and uphold the rule of law.
- Enact the development of national guidelines on respecting and facilitating the right to peaceful protest, and for all law enforcement agencies to review their policies and the equipment used in the policing of demonstrations, consistent with international standards.
- Protect press freedom and access to information by ending discriminatory press restrictions, stopping intimidation of journalists, preventing misuse of regulatory enforcement, and restoring robust protections for journalists' sources and work products.
- Immediately halt policies and practices that punish freedom of expression, including that of students and protestors through visa revocations, detention, and deportation, and other immigration enforcement linked to peaceful expression, and/or withholding of funding to universities, NGOs, and other groups.
- Cease using "domestic terrorism" frameworks to stigmatize or investigate civil society and protest activity, absent individualized evidence of recognizable criminal conduct, and safeguard the ability of NGOs to operate without intimidation.
- Strengthen whistleblower protections across the federal government, prohibit loyalty tests or retaliatory investigations, and ensure effective remedy – including reinstatement – where retaliation has occurred.
- Respect judicial independence by ending attacks on judges, withdrawing directives that target lawyers and law firms for representing clients, and ensuring DOJ decision-making is insulated from political interference.
- End the practice of mass immigration detention and ensure detention is used only in extraordinary circumstances; end the use of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment in detention and ensure that all allegations of torture, ill-treatment or deaths in custody are promptly, impartially, and effectively investigated, and that perpetrators are held accountable; establish a right to counsel for people in immigration proceedings; respect the principle of non-refoulement at all times and ensure that no one, regardless of status, is returned to a place where their life or safety are at risk; ensure a fair, humane, and rights-based refugee admissions determination.

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<sup>268</sup> The recommendations in this briefing are based on previous more detailed recommendations made by Amnesty International on a wide range of human rights issues cited and can be found [here](#).

- Review and revise federal guidance on the policing of protests to align with international standards, including the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms; develop clear national guidance on the use of tear gas and other so-called less-lethal weapons; and ensure accountability for unlawful force.
- Immediately suspend mass and discriminatory surveillance and AI-driven surveillance used for immigration enforcement or protest monitoring unless and until strict safeguards are in place, including transparency, independent audits, and prohibitions on discriminatory profiling.
- Rescind discriminatory executive actions that restrict access to health care, education, or equal protection and restore and enforce non-discrimination protections, including for women, LGBTI people, refugees and migrants, and racialized communities.
- Rebuild corporate accountability and anti-corruption enforcement by restoring strong enforcement of anti-bribery, consumer protection, and public corruption laws, adequately resourcing enforcement units, and ensuring transparency around conflicts of interest.
- Recommit to international human rights systems and accountability mechanisms by restoring engagement with UN processes, reversing measures that undermine international justice bodies, and ensuring the lawful use of force consistent with international law.
- Abide by international humanitarian and human rights law, prioritize the protection of civilians, and uphold the human rights of all persons deprived of liberty.

## TO THE US CONGRESS:

Congress must use its oversight, appropriations, and legislative powers to protect human rights, uphold the rule of law, and ensure the executive branch operates within the boundaries of the law. Congress should urgently hold oversight hearings and initiate investigations into human rights abuses; enshrine key rights protections in law; ensure any “cost-cutting” measures and appropriations are lawful and human-rights-centered; make no appropriations that fund human rights violations; hold regular public town halls to hear directly from constituents; and not confirm senior executive appointments without explicit assurances that nominees will uphold human rights and the rule of law.

At minimum, Congress should take the following actions aligned to each Alarm Bell:

- Alarm Bell 1 (Press freedom): Conduct oversight of discriminatory press restrictions and regulatory intimidation and advance statutory protections for press freedom and journalist-source confidentiality; protect funding and independence of public-interest media.
- Alarm Bell 2 (Speech and protest): Pass authorizing legislation to enact the development of national guidelines on respecting and facilitating the right to peaceful protest and for all law enforcement agencies to review their policies and the equipment used in the policing of demonstrations; investigate and prohibit the use of immigration authority to punish protected expression, including “Catch and Revoke” style practices, require transparency on visa revocations tied to speech, and ensure due process protections in cases such as Mahmoud Khalil’s.
- Alarm Bell 3 (Civil society and universities): Reject or amend any measures that enable punitive targeting of nonprofits or universities, including tax-status or regulatory threats, and protect academic freedom and non-discrimination in federally funded education.
- Alarm Bell 4 (Retaliation against critics and whistleblowers): Strengthen whistleblower protections, require reporting on retaliation and political retribution, and protect inspectors general and oversight offices from interference or removal.
- Alarm Bell 5 (Judges, lawyers, and the legal system): Defend judicial independence through oversight and legislation, fund protection of judges, investigate retaliation against legal advocates, and ensure access to counsel is protected from intimidation or coercion.
- Alarm Bell 6 (Due process): Ensure effective access to due process, courts, and counsel for all people; establish a right to counsel for all people in immigration proceedings with fully funded appointed counsel and translation services; guarantee due process and transparency in all immigration proceedings; and facilitate the return of individuals deported, expelled, or transferred without due process.
- Alarm Bell 7 (Refugee and migrant rights): End the practice of mass immigration detention and ensure detention is used only in extraordinary circumstances; take immediate steps to cut funding to ICE and CBP; conduct oversight, including unannounced inspections of detention facilities and immigration enforcement; ensure that all allegations of torture, ill-treatment, and deaths are promptly, impartially, and effectively investigated, and that perpetrators are held accountable; decriminalize migration and establish a pathway to citizenship for people within the US.

- Alarm Bell 8 (Militarization): Strengthen guardrails against the domestic use of the military for law enforcement, require transparent reporting and authorization for deployments, and prohibit funding for militarized protest suppression that violates human rights standards.
- Alarm Bell 9 (Surveillance and AI): Strengthen congressional oversight and authorize regulatory mechanisms to ensure that technology companies are not contributing to human rights violations; conduct oversight of relevant contracts and systems; and enact enforceable limits on government surveillance and AI use, including transparency, independent audits, restrictions on data brokerage, and safeguards against discriminatory profiling.
- Alarm Bell 10 (Anti-discrimination rollbacks): Codify and enforce non-discrimination protections, including for women, LGBTI people, refugees and migrants, and racialized communities, and block discriminatory executive actions that restrict access to health care, education, or equal protection.
- Alarm Bell 11 (Corporate accountability and corruption): Protect and resource public integrity and consumer protection enforcement (including CFPB independence), require disclosure and oversight of dropped corporate enforcement actions, and strengthen conflict-of-interest and anti-corruption safeguards.
- Alarm Bell 12 (International human rights systems and global accountability): Protect and restore foreign assistance and humanitarian funding consistent with international standards, ensure compliance with appropriations law, oppose measures that undermine international justice mechanisms and multilateral international instruments and agreements, establish reporting and oversight of US withdrawals from multilateral commitments, and require nonpartisan, non-discriminatory, annual human rights reports; undertake thorough and independent investigations, reaching the highest levels of the US government, to determine responsibility for illegal airstrikes in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific and other military actions; ensure justice and accountability, including both the direct perpetrators and the people who gave the orders for illegal and unlawful military actions.

#### **TO US STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES:**

- Protect the right to peaceful protest by ensuring policing of assemblies complies with international standards on legality, necessity, proportionality, and accountability, including the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms; review tactics and equipment used at demonstrations and investigate all allegations of unlawful force.
- Support and enact the development of national guidelines on respecting and facilitating the right to peaceful protest, and for all law enforcement agencies to review their policies and the equipment used in the policing of demonstrations.
- Limit the use of lethal force by law enforcement to situations strictly necessary to protect life from an imminent threat, and amend state statutes, policies, and training to reflect that standard.
- Ensure military forces are not deployed to conduct law enforcement duties except under exceptional and temporary circumstances, with civilian command and oversight and full application of human rights law.
- Address systemic racism and systemic misuse of force in the US policing system, including by launching independent investigations and ensuring accountability in all cases of unlawful lethal use of force by police.
- Safeguard access to essential services by ensuring schools, hospitals, courts, and places of worship are not turned into fear zones through enforcement actions that deter people from seeking help or services.
- Adopt strong local privacy and data-sharing safeguards, including limits on the use of surveillance technologies and information-sharing that enables rights violations.
- Ensure local oversight and accountability mechanisms can operate without intimidation, and protect community members, journalists, and legal observers during enforcement operations.
- Refrain from indiscriminately and arbitrarily detaining migrants and asylum seekers, and ensure effective oversight, transparency, and accountability mechanisms for all detention facilities, including through independent monitoring by elected officials and human rights and civil society organizations.

#### **TO INTERNATIONAL ACTORS, MULTILATERAL BODIES, AND OTHER GOVERNMENTS:**

- Maintain scrutiny of human rights developments in the United States through multilateral and diplomatic channels, including UN mechanisms, and speak out against measures that shrink civic space or undermine rule of law safeguards.

- Defend international justice and accountability mechanisms from political interference, including opposing reprisals or sanctions against international courts and investigators.
- Support independent monitoring and civil society documentation of human rights violations and ensure safe avenues for at-risk human rights defenders.
- Mitigate humanitarian harms where US assistance is abruptly withdrawn by coordinating support for affected communities and frontline organizations.
- Reaffirm an unequivocal commitment to the universality of human rights; vigorously reassert and champion international humanitarian and human rights law; place the protection of civilians at the highest priority; and ensure the full respect of the rights of all persons deprived of liberty.
- Should there be any denunciations, withdrawals, or attempts to reject, “reform,” and/or replace such international agreements with frameworks that deny people protection from persecution and human rights abuses, express strong disagreement, reiterate support for such treaties, explain their benefits to human lives, peace, and stability, emphasize the negative impacts of actions that undermine such treaties, and urge reversal of such efforts.

## TO TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES AND OTHER CORPORATE ACTORS:

- Meet the responsibility to respect human rights under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights by conducting and publishing meaningful human rights due diligence, especially where products or policies could enable surveillance, discrimination, or repression.
- Minimize data collection and end practices that facilitate discriminatory profiling and targeting; provide effective user controls and transparency about how content is moderated and amplified.
- Resist unlawful or overbroad government demands that would undermine human rights and publish regular transparency reporting on government requests and company responses.
- Ensure that changes to content policies do not enable hate, harassment, or incitement to violence against marginalized groups, and provide accessible appeal and remedy mechanisms.
- Where companies have caused or contributed to harm, cooperate in remediation, including through policy changes, restitution where appropriate, and engagement with affected communities.
- Ensure contractors and vendors supplying surveillance or enforcement systems implement strict safeguards, including independent audits and clear prohibitions on rights-violating uses.

## TO MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC:

- You can join organizations like Amnesty International to take action against authoritarian practices in the United States.
- You can educate others and raise awareness about authoritarian practices by sharing this briefing and by taking Amnesty International Human Rights Education courses at [Amnesty's Human Rights Academy](https://academy.amnesty.org/learn)<sup>269</sup> along with reviewing *Rights Revealed: Human Rights and the Escalation of Authoritarian Practices Around the World: Part 1 and 2*<sup>270</sup>. You can demand that your elected officials implement the recommendations in this briefing (see calls to members of Congress above).
- Support and protect those targeted and whose rights have been undermined, through legal defense funds or rapid-response groups.
- Become a part of local networks to support each other with food, safety, care, and information.
- Create open-source tools to document human rights abuses and map threats.
- Work with trusted legal service providers to take cases to court and seek support from international bodies such as the United Nations and regional human rights bodies.
- Run public campaigns or organize peaceful acts of civil disobedience that challenge unfair laws or practices and spread rights-based solutions and hope-based messaging, including reaffirming a commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which calls on “every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, [to] strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms.”

<sup>269</sup> Amnesty International, “Human Rights Academy”, <https://academy.amnesty.org/learn>

<sup>270</sup> Amnesty International, *Rights Revealed: Human Rights and the Escalation of Authoritarian Practices Around the World: Part 1 – Unpacking Authoritarian Narratives of Fear, Repression and Control* (Index: POL 32/0336/2025), 30 September 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol32/0336/2025/en/>; Amnesty International, “*Rights Revealed: Human Rights and the Escalation of Authoritarian Practices Around the World-Part 2*” (Index: POL 32/0426/2025), 28 October 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/POL3204262025ENGLISH.pdf>

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# RINGING THE ALARM BELLS

## RISING AUTHORITARIAN PRACTICES AND EROSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE UNITED STATES

One year into President Trump’s second administration, the “alarm bells” of authoritarian practice signal a dangerous trajectory. At stake are the rights that enable people to defend all other rights and live without fear from the arbitrary exercise of power and discrimination, including the rights to freedom of the press, expression, and peaceful protest; a fair trial and due process; equality and non-discrimination; and privacy. When these rights are weakened, the harms do not stay contained – they spread.

Ring the Alarm Bells: Rising Authoritarian Practices provides an overview of twelve alarm bells, with calls to federal, state, and local officials, public institutions, civil society, and private actors such as technology companies to match the urgency with practical steps to safeguard civic space, restore rule-of-law safeguards, and prevent the normalization of repression and human rights violations.