

Southwest Detroit small businesses reeling amid Trump immigration crackdown: 'A disaster'

; say the commercial slowdown represents an unravelling of the community's

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Detroit — The "Quinceañera," or 15th birthday, for girls in many Latino cultures marks a transition to womanhood.

That's why it's customary for many to get their hair and makeup done in preparation for the celebration. In the largely Latino immigrant community of southwest Detroit, Araceli Hernandez's Florbella Salon is a go-to spot.

She recently had one such appointment on the books. But it was abruptly canceled after the prospective client's father was detained by Immigration Customs and Enforcement and deported, Hernandez said.

The girl was one lost customer among many for the small business owner amid the Trump administration's crackdown on illegal immigration. In typical times, she's booked "two-three weeks in advance" but now that's far from the case. Hernandez estimates that she's doing 50% less in sales on the busiest day of the week this summer compared to last year.

She wonders if her shop on Michigan Avenue will be in business at this time next year. "There's days where I sit here and I'm like, OK, what's going on?" Hernandez said.

Small business owners in Michigan's largest Latino community say they are reeling amid President Donald Trump's aggressive mass deportation campaign. With some longtime customers being deported and others increasingly electing to leave the area, they describe a

pervasive climate of fear around immigration enforcement that's deterring locals from being out in public, and in turn depressing foot traffic and sales.

"Economically, it's been a disaster," said Maria Hayes, who owns Ideas Marketing, a graphic design and printing service on southwest Detroit's main corridor, Vernor Highway.

More than financial strains, small business owners, an elected official and advocacy groups told The Detroit News that the marked slowdown in business represents an unraveling of the community's social fabric. The tight-knit neighborhood is rife with small businesses — many of them passed through generations — and their clientele is hyper-local.

"For us, as business owners, we feel this a lot, because it's our people, and we want our people to be with us," said Maria Gonzalez of La Mexicana Supermercado on a recent late morning, her grocery store empty of customers.

The sales slowdown in southwest Detroit is consistent with a broader trend.

The most recent available data from analytics firm Kantar shows that food and beverage sales among Hispanics in the United States dropped 4.3 percentage points from the first quarter of 2024 to that of 2025, while they slid only 0.1 percentage points among non-Hispanics in the same time frame. In the apparel category, sales among Hispanics slid 8.3 percentage points, and 0.1 percentage points for non-Hispanics.

"President Trump was elected with a mandate to carry out the largest mass deportation operation in history — and he is following through on the promise he made the American people," White House spokesperson Abigail Jackson said in a statement issued Thursday. "President Trump's America First policies ushered in historic job, wage, investment, and economic growth in his first term — and that same agenda of The One Big Beautiful Bill's tax cuts and deregulation is again building up small businesses and local economies. The President has proven it's possible to grow our economy while also enforcing federal immigration laws."

Southwest Detroit's commercial downturn coincides with mounting scrutiny of the deportation campaign's effect on the economy. On the campaign trail last year, Trump routinely criticized former President Joe Biden for the stagnant economy while vowing to revitalize it.

But seven months on from Trump's second inauguration, the unemployment rate is **ticking up**, companies are increasingly **passing** tariff-related costs to consumers, and major industries have **warned** that the deportation campaign is reducing the workforce.

Julie Powers, executive director of Immigration Law and Justice Michigan, noted the state's agricultural industry, for example, is largely powered by immigrant labor, adding that she believes the immigration crackdown could have grave impacts on it.

"If you really care about money, fine," she said. "Then why are you cheering on a death blow to Michigan's economy?"

Businesses adjust

Business owners in southwest Detroit said they're looking for ways to boost sales and even out their balance sheets in spite of the slowdown.

Nancy Diaz, who owns La Palapa del Parian restaurant on Lawndale Street, said monthly revenues are dropping, and that typically busy times like the Memorial Day and July 4 weekends have been slow this year.

So it was, too, on a recent Wednesday around 1 p.m. After one group eating at a table in the outside section left, the colorfully-decorated restaurant was empty except for servers, chefs and a boy at a table in the sitting room playing on an iPad.

To boost sales, Diaz said she's trying to do more marketing "outside the area" and advertising the restaurant's "Taco Tuesday" deal: 30 tacos for \$55.

Hernandez of Florbella Salon is also offering special deals: "If they're going to get a couple things done, I can just give them something else for free." However, that's becoming a heavier lift as the prices she pays for certain imported hair care supplies are increasing because of Trump's tariffs.

"I don't know how much can I do without affecting my own profits, my own pockets," Hernandez said.

The success of Hayes' business — Ideas Marketing — is largely predicated on the success of other businesses in the area. Most of her clients are other business owners in need of things

like promotional materials, webpage design and branded uniforms. Because those clients are struggling themselves, Hayes said her business is feeling the strain acutely.

She's noticed a particular pullback in orders from construction companies, which make up a large share of her business. As laborers for those companies leave the area or stop showing up to work for fear of immigration enforcement, Hayes said owners aren't ordering as many uniforms as they typically do.

To soften the blow from the drop in sales, Hayes said she's had to raise prices and shorten employees' hours.

"It's super scary," Hayes said, workers behind her rolling out material, measuring and snipping it. The music video for Puerto Rican pop star Rauw Alejandro's hit "Tu Con Él" softly played from a television mounted on the wall.

'Fast, quickly and quietly'

While Trump sought to ramp up deportations in his first term, southwest Detroit small business owners said they saw no drop off in sales attributable to his immigration enforcement.

But since he returned to office in January — and has deployed a number of new, controversial tactics to ramp up deportations — they describe a wholly unprecedented impact on businesses and the community.

Those methods have included arresting people at courthouses once they exit their immigration hearings, raiding workplaces to make arrests, and broadening enforcement to encompass "collaterals" — people who aren't targets of ICE operations but whom agents come across in the course of business.

As part of the effort, the Trump administration has tapped several agencies for help that are typically uninvolved with immigration enforcement, ranging from the [National Guard](#) to the [Drug Enforcement Administration](#) and even the [U.S. Postal Inspection Service](#).

Furthermore, Trump's signature tax and spending legislation, the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act," allocates about \$170 billion for border security and immigration enforcement.

ICE arrests under Trump include a growing proportion of people with no U.S. criminal convictions or pending charges — 37% in July, compared with 13% in December, the

Associated Press reported last week. It cited federal data compiled by the University of California at Berkeley's Deportation Data Project.

"Many of the individuals that are counted as 'non-criminals' are actually terrorists, human rights abusers, gangsters and more," Tricia McLaughlin, assistant secretary of public affairs at the Department of Homeland Security, told the AP. "They just don't have a rap sheet in the U.S."

The Guardian, a leading British newspaper, reported in June on a [memo](#) from ICE officials to subordinates encouraging them to "turn the creative knob up to 11" in immigration enforcement and "push the envelope" in conceiving new ways to ramp up deportations. White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller told Fox News in May that the administration had set a goal of 3,000 ICE arrests per day.

The government's broad efforts appear to have taken root in southwest Detroit. At the end of fiscal year 2024, there were 29,677 cases pending in Detroit immigration court, according to the Michigan Immigrant Rights Center. Now, over halfway through fiscal year 2025, the backlog of cases has increased by nearly 1,000, to 30,670.

City Councilwoman Gabriela Santiago-Romero, whose district includes southwest Detroit, said she's getting calls from constituents "every single day" about new ICE detentions in the community.

ICE operations in cities like Chicago and Los Angeles have attracted much public attention because of how atypical it is for immigration enforcement to be so pronounced in areas like those, which aren't on the U.S. border, she said. Because Detroit sits on the border with Canada, by comparison, Santiago-Romero said it's not "shocking" to see agents from ICE and U.S. Customs and Border Protection in the area.

That doesn't mean the efforts in the area haven't been uniquely concerted of late, she said: "Here, it doesn't look like the raids that you're seeing in those other cities, but here it's happening fast, quickly and quietly."

'They don't want us here'

Business owners and advocacy groups framed the strains that southwest Detroit's economy is facing as undue punishment for the entire community.

"They're going after people who have legal status here, people who've lived here for 20 years, have businesses, homes, children," said Lex Zavala, the interim executive director of the Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation. "Our business district is empty now. Restaurants and construction can't find enough workers to fill their space. It's not even just undocumented people that are scared."

The slowdown, he continued, is hurting "hardworking people that are coming here to build the American Dream just like previous immigrant populations in the past."

Hernandez, the salon owner, noted the same widespread effect.

As "one of those persons that tries to do everything legally, have everything, all the permits," she finds it unfair that Trump's immigration policy is, if indirectly, forcing her to consider closing her business.

For the moment, Hernandez is "counting (her) blessings" and remaining grateful for the business she's still seeing: "We're hustlers, so we'll try to stay."

But she also suggested those efforts feel increasingly out of reach: "Sometimes it's hard, when they don't want us here."

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Staff Writer Ben Warren contributed.