



## **NO ICE in the (World) Cup**

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“Of all the unimportant things, football is the most important.” —  
St. John Paul II

If you’re anything like me, you’ve been counting down the days until June 11th. The watch parties, the rituals, the sense of community, the stoppage time upsets—there is simply nothing like the World Cup.

Yet, as this global event arrives on our doorstep, the United States has never felt less safe for immigrants and our federal government is actively making it worse. Beyond the prohibitive ticket prices shutting everyday fans out of stadiums, [Immigration and Customs Enforcement \(ICE\) has confirmed it will have a presence at matches](#) held across the country.

The first kickoff hasn’t even happened, but fear and intimidation are already in the air. And this isn’t accidental. It reflects a broader pattern of our federal government using high-profile public moments to amplify enforcement, sending a message not just to those at the games, but to immigrant communities watching from home.

**For millions of people, what should be a moment of joy and national pride has become a calculation of risk.**

Immigration enforcement at or near matches carries a chilling effect that extends far beyond those directly targeted. When families weigh whether to attend a game,



or even gather publicly together to watch one, and decide it isn't worth the risk, something essential is lost. The World Cup stops being a shared celebration of a game popularized and sustained by immigrant communities, and becomes a reminder of who is and isn't considered fully part of this country.

Fortunately, immigration rights organizations and labor unions are meeting this moment with organized resistance. For example, a broad coalition backed by the Horizons Project just launched [No ICE in the Cup](#), a campaign to bring together artists, organizers, lawyers, athletes, and community members to make clear that ICE has no place in the World Cup. Community organizers have also united behind the [Our Copa](#) campaign, to lift travel bans on fans from Haiti, Iran, Côte d'Ivoire, and Senegal and ensure that everyone can celebrate the game safely and without threat. Stadium workers unions [are even threatening](#) to strike if ICE agents are allowed on stadium grounds.

**These efforts reflect something important: that the sacred fight for immigrant dignity and the love of “the beautiful game” are not separate conversations.**

And the fans themselves hold power. As Maria Stephan, author of the award-winning *Why Civil Resistance Works*, [puts it](#): “while some use the World Cup to fuse patriotism with political loyalty, football supporters—described by researchers as the ‘largest international social movement’—have long used joy, humor, and spectacle to expose abuses and build civic pride outside of state control.”

Even during the regular season, I've seen this firsthand. As a Washington, D.C. resident and devoted [Washington Spirit](#) fan, I regularly get the privilege of watching an entire stadium erupt in a “[Free D.C.!](#)” chant at the 51st minute of every match. This [protest ritual](#) calling for D.C. statehood (as the 51st state) began during the National Guard deployment last summer. Every time it happens, it's a powerful reminder that stadiums have always been

more than just sites of play, but places where collective feeling can become collective action.

Political tension at the World Cup is nothing new, but what's unfolding this summer feels different. The tension isn't just around the tournament. It's inside it, woven into the question of who gets to show up and who gets to belong. And the true fans know the answer.

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