

# Follow the Money

*How the Glass House Farms Raid Reaffirms the Need For  
Corruption Prevention Policy at the Local Level*

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### ***AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION***

*I have been working on this White Paper for the better part of the last six months. Though while other projects have intermittently gotten in the way, putting off completing and publishing it was no longer an option after the Department of Homeland Security's raid of the Glass House Farms facilities in the areas of Carpinteria and Camarillo, California, on July 10, 2025. In the days that have followed the raids - which resulted in over 300 immigrant detentions, the detaining of numerous United States citizen protestors, including a professor from California State University Channel Islands, firing of weapons and other projectiles at federal agents, the uncovering of fourteen undocumented minors subjected to child labor, protests that bled into secondary locations, tear gas and rubber bullets deployed on peaceful protestors, five*

transports for hospitalization, and a fatality - the community has been left reeling. While the facts of this situation will likely remain murky and subject to personal bias and interpretation, the impact of local politics and corruption only complicate things further.

As I have spoken to residents around the county, who come from all angles and sides of the political spectrum, one question seems to be prevalent in the minds of many, if not most: what could have been done to prevent this from happening? The answer is where people's political views begin to show. Some people believe that the raid was politically motivated - either some Machiavellian scheme by the Trump Administration to assert their authority, or as a message to Governor Newsom, who has been supported in the past by the President of Glass House Brands, Graham Farrar. Many people will argue that the fact that Glass House Farms makes the bulk of their revenue - \$44.8 million in Q1 of 2025 alone - in cannabis cultivation and sales is the problem. Marijuana is legal in California, but still illegal federally, and has been a source of local debate and contention at many points in time since it became legal for both medicinal and, later, recreational use in California. Others argue it is the hiring of undocumented workers that is the problem. Though Glass House Farms is not alone in either practice, especially the latter. Presently, there are approximately 60,000 undocumented immigrants residing in the County of Ventura. The majority of them are employed.

This paper will discuss the issue of corruption in local politics as a possible explanation for how the problems of Glass House Farms led to the raid of July 10, 2025. I will do this first by defining and discussing the complexity of corruption at the local level. I will then consider Glass House Farms and the influence of the agriculture industry on the whole as a case study in understanding the potential problem. The connection between the decline of local journalistic outlets and corruption will be discussed. Finally, I will conclude with a series of policy recommendations as a preventative measure to combat local corruption in government.

*My thoughts remain with those impacted by the July 10, 2025 Glass House Farms raid, as well as people the world all over affected by corruption in local government every day.*

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION: A PROBLEM IN THE MAKING**

Corruption among local government officials accounts for 37.3% of all corruption cases in North America<sup>1</sup>. This ranks the highest group engaged in corrupt activities, including above that occurring in private and non profit sectors. Though complicating the matter is the difficulty with which we struggle to define the problem.

Settling on a concrete definition of corruption is complicated for many reasons. Chief among them is the difficulty of measuring or quantifying the gamut of actions that are often considered corrupt by members of the general public<sup>2</sup>. Further, the various contexts in which corruption may occur, the difficulty of accumulating prosecutable evidence, corruption that is technically legal to engage in, and the sheer volume of acts qualifying or considered - all make settling on a singular definition, one that is quantifiable and testable, essentially impossible.

Nevertheless, it is broadly agreed that corruption "implies the abuse of entrusted power for private gain."<sup>3</sup> In the context of local government officials, the leading charge against prosecuted individuals in recent years surveyed was for theft or bribery in programs receiving federal funds, with bribery of public officials and

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<sup>1</sup> Ortiz-Ospina, E., & Roser, M. (2019, May 10). *Corruption*. Our World in Data. <https://ourworldindata.org/corruption>

<sup>2</sup> Kenny, C. (2022, November 7). *Measuring corruption: Still hard after all these years* | Center for Global Development. Center for Global Development. <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/measuring-corruption-still-hard-after-all-these-years>

<sup>3</sup> Ortiz-Ospina, E., & Roser, M. (2019, May 10). *Corruption*. Our World in Data. <https://ourworldindata.org/corruption>

witnesses coming in second among leading charges brought to trial<sup>4</sup>. This clearly identifies a personal or private gain among local government officials, though the third and fourth leading charges - different types of fraud - are where we see the understanding and identification of corruption become more complex. Say you live in a city where the mayor owns investment properties in the city limits, but secretly lives in the neighboring town. Has this local government official actually committed a chargeable offense? Does living in the neighboring city count as “private gain” when they still own properties they could very well live in within the city limits? Clearly the mayor has engaged in some type of defrauding of the public, but given the context and circumstances, and the difficulty of accumulating evidence, whether or not it is prosecutable is another issue. Is it still corruption if not able to be brought to trial? We see in this example why defining and studying the issue is so difficult.

Additional problems arise through legally allowable corruption, such as in the case of lobbying or political donations<sup>5</sup>. Even vocalized support for a candidate or government official could be considered legalized corruption when it results in decisions in governance favoring the individual or organization offering the support. Perhaps the clearest example of this at the local level has been the impact of political donations made by property investors and rental and real estate markets, and the decisions made by local governments across the entire United States in their favor that has led to the insurmountable homelessness and housing affordability crisis being witnessed today.

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<sup>4</sup> *Modest increase in official corruption convictions in 2023*. Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse - FBI. (n.d.). <https://tracreports.org/reports/737/>  
#:~:text=The%20latest%20fiscal%20year%20data,of%20these%20convictions%20or%2041.

<sup>5</sup> Kenny, C. (2022, November 7). *Measuring corruption: Still hard after all these years* | Center for Global Development. Center for Global Development. <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/measuring-corruption-still-hard-after-all-these-years>

Though while we remain murky - at best - on providing a simple definition of what corruption is or is not, the consequences are clear as day. Corruption is tied to (a) price instability, destabilized trade, and regional inflation; (b) increased mortality; (c) decreased life expectancy; (d) lowered standards of education and living; (e) loss of public trust; (f) over \$3.6 trillion in economic losses the world all over; and more.<sup>6</sup> In other words: local government corruption (or corruption in general) is a problem in the making. As cases of corruption increase, the problems that arise from that corruption increase in tandem.

### **CASE STUDY: THE GLASS HOUSE FARMS RAID**

The raids conducted by the Department of Homeland Security on July 10, 2025 on two Glass House Brands facilities - in Carpinteria and Camarillo, CA - offer us a real time example of how complicated and interconnected the issues of immigration, workers rights, deportations, protest, politics, and community care are today. Though the real story is about what led up to the moment that DHS/ICE agents issued warrants on both of the facilities, the morning of the 10th.

Prior to the morning of the 10th, the Department of Homeland Security had attempted to enter the Glass House Farms facilities, but were denied entry without a warrant. The judicial warrant that eventually allowed them to enter was specific to the owner/s of the farm - it was not even for the purposes of deportation activities (allegedly). The result - of course - was the detaining of some 300 undocumented workers between the two facilities, including 14 minors, and numerous injuries, 1 resulting in death.

Though what preceded even all of this were numerous civil complaints against Glass House Brands, as well as the California labor contractor out of the Camarillo

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<sup>6</sup> Matherly, T., & Greenwood, B. N. (2024, June 1). *No news is bad news: The internet, corruption, and the decline of the Fourth Estate*. MIS Quarterly. <https://misq.umn.edu/no-news-is-bad-news-the-internet-corruption-and-the-decline-of-the-fourth-estate.html>

location, with many cases still pending in civil court. In the two years since both farms obtained permitting to operate cannabis farming, they have been accused in Ventura County Courts of failing to pay overtime, refusing meal breaks, sexual harassment, and discrimination, among other things<sup>7</sup>. Additionally, there have been accusations outside of court made relative to child labor, exploitation, and trafficking. Yet operations have continued as usual, and in fact resumed without further interruption the morning after the raids were conducted. In response to the allegations of labor law violations, Glass House Brands and the unnamed California contractor have invoked plausible deniability, since the main contractor further contracts out to two, (also unidentified), subcontractors who supply the labor. When Glass House Farms representatives say they “never knowingly employed minors,” this is likely the case given the number of steps they are removed from the hiring of their workers.

Here we see the ways in which corruption claims in all sectors are complex and subject to interpretation. Ask anyone familiar with the farm in question, or Ventura County agriculture in general, the complaints against Glass House are replicated in other venues, and are in fact common. The practice of contracting and subcontracting is considered a safeguard for farm owners against prosecution for hiring undocumented immigrants, where federal, state, and local authorities may on occasion prosecute in the event paperwork turns out to be fraudulent or improperly filed. Moreover, it is not uncommon for minors to come both unaccompanied and undocumented, and to be hired through subcontractors with falsified documents as a form of repayment for relocating them to the United States. We know that complaints about violations of labor laws and working conditions are common in the agriculture industry. While reaching historic lows, with only around 1,500 complaints filed across

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<sup>7</sup> Gomez, M., Garrison, J., St. John, P., & Marantos, J. (2025, July 11). *Central Coast Pot operation becomes site of massive immigration spectacle*. Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-07-11/pot-farm-in-ventura-becomes-sight-of-massive-immigration-spectacle#:~:text=Court%20filings%20show%20many%20of,and%20has%20never%20employed%20minors.>”

the United States annually, experts estimate this has in part declined due to the influx and exponential increase in undocumented workers since 2021, and their fear of retaliation or deportation should they file a report.<sup>8</sup>

It is then reasonable to ask: how bad were things at Glass House Farms if fear of retaliation and deportation still did not deter them from making the high volume of legal complaints that have been made in recent years? More importantly: why has no one investigated these complaints over the course of over two years, evidently leaving an opening for the federal government to get involved?

Perhaps worth considering are the political contributions made to local, state, and federal officials and organizations that reside or hold jurisdiction/political operations in counties where Glass House Farms operate.

While there exists an incredible sum of political donations either directly to, or associated in some way with, elected officials holding jurisdiction over all or parts of Ventura and Santa Barbara counties over the years, between the two, primary owners of Glass House Farms, we are still left with only loose correlations that may suggest some level of corruption or “blind eye turning” when it comes to business practices. If anything, the donations made to positions at the state and federal levels suggest instead that the raids were in fact political retaliation from current positions in the federal government - that idea that the raids were some Machiavellian play by President Trump. What a better way to keep political rivals in check than by attacking their sources of funding?

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<sup>8</sup> Anderson, J. (2025, January 26). *Federal investigations into labor law violations by farm employers fall to record-low*. Barn Raiser. <https://barnraisingmedia.com/organized-labor-stands-up-for-farmworkers-as-federal-investigations-into-farm-employers-fall-to-record-lows/>  
#:~:text=Since%20complaints%20from%20workers%20or,it%20is%20in%20other%20industries.



Graham Farrar: Co-Founder, President & Board Director

Official/ Organization	Jurisdiction (relevant to GH Farms operations)	Amount (Total)	Positions on Cannabis and Agriculture (if any)	Labor rights issues (if any)
Salud Carbajal (US Congress)	Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties	\$8800	Serves on the Committee on Agriculture, as well as the Subcommittee that oversees agriculture risk management, statutes, and privacy issues	
Gavin Newsom (California Governor)	State of California	\$10,000	Long time supporter of legalization and aid of growers and cannabis operations	
Santa Barbara County Democratic Central Committee	Santa Barbara (local, state, federal elections activities)	\$4000		
Gregg Hart (California State Assembly)	Santa Barbara	\$1000	Platform for California State Assembly was built on supporting agriculture, including access to grant funding	

Kyle Kazan: Co-Founder, Chairman & CEO

Official/ Organization	Jurisdiction (relevant to GH Farms operations)	Amount (Total)	Positions on cannabis and Agriculture (if any)	Labor rights issues (if any)
<p>Fiona Ma*</p> <p>(State Treasurer, 2026 Candidate for Lt. Governor)</p> <p>*Fiona Ma is married to Ventura County firefighter and elected Oxnard Harbor Commissioner, Jason Hodge, and owns real property in Oxnard, CA according to her Form 700 filings</p>	State of California	\$43,000	Sponsored SB51 in 2019 to allow private banks and credit unions to apply for state licenses, allowing licensed cannabis- related operations to open deposit accounts	2021 - allegations by former chief of staff of civil rights complaints, sexual harassment, and wrongful termination; shared a hotel room 13 times with chief of staff in two years prior to allegations
Salud Carbajal (US Congress)	Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties	\$500	Serves on the Committee on Agriculture, as well as the Subcommittee that oversees agriculture risk management, statutes, and privacy issues	
Alex Padilla (US Senate)	State of California	\$2900	Support for decriminalization of recreational marijuana use, as well as SAFE- banking for cannabis growing operations	

Notable are several political donations given to Ventura County Supervisors whose jurisdiction is or is adjacent to the Glass House Farms in Camarillo, CA where various worker complaints have been made. Some examples include: thousands of dollars in donations to supervisors from the Ventura County Agricultural Association, as well as thousands from the Ventura County Alliance for Water Resources. Supervisor Vianey Lopez, whose jurisdiction Glass House Farms is in, has also received campaign contributions from campaign committees that have received direct funds from the owners of Glass House Brands.

Yet still, the difficulty of proving and addressing potential corruption again presents itself, as we find incredible difficulty in evaluating local government officials and their financial contributions that may implicate Glass House Farms, or any of its affiliates and contractors. Since acquiring their permit to cultivate cannabis crops, donors and donor organizations listed as "farmer," "agriculture," "contractor," "investor," or some variation of, have contributed tens of thousands of dollars to local candidates that went on to win, and hold jurisdiction over the regions that Glass House Farms performs their operations. Moreover, "retired" is the leading occupation of donors, and while many individuals that donate are in fact retired, the vast majority of retired designations on campaign donation forms are done so because either an occupation was not garnered by campaign staff at the time of donation, or the donor did not want to share their place of employment. While this may indicate individuals within the organization of Glass House Brands also may have contributed to certain local government officials, it more obviously highlights the sway the agriculture, contracting, and "undefined" communities overall have over local government officials.

More alarming are the number of political donations where the donor's identity is concealed by way of a "personal loan." It isn't uncommon for political candidates to donate or loan to their own campaigns funds, and which they select is dependent upon

campaign contribution limits (in other words, if a candidate wishes to spend from their own personal funds beyond applicable contribution limits, they have to instead give themselves a loan that the campaign then later forgives). Though a more common practice than candidates loaning themselves large sums of money is political donors gifting candidates personal funds, then candidates “loaning” it to their campaigns so as to conceal the identity of the donor. Numerous elected officials in local offices representing the Ventura County and Santa Barbara regions, many of whose jurisdiction includes or is adjacent to the Glass House Farms locations raided on July 10, 2025, reported in campaign finance disclosures having loaned their campaigns for public office large sums of money, some as much as \$75,000.<sup>9</sup>

There also exists numerous gaps in reporting over the two most recent elections covering the jurisdiction of and adjacent to the Camarillo, CA Glass House Farms where labor rights, child labor, and sexual harassment claims have been made. Candidates have not only loaned themselves large sums of money, but lumped together a group of cash or check contributions and reported them as “miscellaneous” donations, without disclosing the identities of those donors - a flagrant and egregious violation of campaign finance law.

While this all may or may not indicate some level of inherent corruption is occurring, the absence of more precise transparency in who has paid for seats in local office leads to concerns about corruption and loss of public trust. In the same ways that Glass House Farms has afforded themselves plausible deniability through layers upon layers of contractors and subcontractors for labor, local government officials have padded their own accountability by requiring the public to weed through a series of foggy layers to even attempt to follow the money, made more difficult by the total and complete failure of local election clerks to do their due diligence in ensuring

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<sup>9</sup> In the interest of disclosure, the author has in the past run for public office and both contributed and loaned and forgiven her campaigns personal funds in amounts that did not exceed \$10,000 in any given instance.

transparency and accuracy of campaign finance disclosures is being upheld. Either done by corruption or incompetence, the public is left with little option but to shrug its collective shoulders and hope for the best, until an incidence such that occurred on July 10, 2025 uncovers a dank den of problems these people elected to prevent such problems have allowed to boil under the surface for years now.

And as if this pandora's box of local government and economy were not enough, the total complicity of local media only complicates the matter. The only notable media remaining that covers the area where Glass House Farms - Camarillo operates is the Camarillo Acorn and the Ventura County Star. Other papers are inconsistent in their reporting and often do not include Camarillo in their publications and distribution. During the 2024 election cycle, the Camarillo Acorn ceased covering of local elections, and temporarily halted printing of their letters to the editor. The Ventura County Star has continued publishing letters, but refuses to publish letters in which local government officials' campaign finance disclosures - publicly available on city and county websites - are discussed. Articles regarding recent elections have failed to meaningfully cover or investigate candidates, and moreover have offered organizations such as Glass House Brands the opportunity to paint with words the picture they want. For whatever reason, local media has become complicit in this cabal of potential corruption that led to the Glass House Farms raids and deportations.

### **CONCLUSION: POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

The de-platforming of local media has been observed for decades. Weekly and Sunday readership of local journalistic outlets maxed out in the early 1990s; today readership across all municipalities in the contiguous United States has halved what it

was just three decades ago.<sup>10</sup> As recently as 2018, half of the counties in the United States had only one circulating newspaper, and over 1300 communities had none.<sup>11</sup> Corruption in local government, again ranking the highest form of corruption in North America and resulting in trillions of dollars of annual economic losses is unequivocally tied to the death of local media. The role local media plays in holding local elected officials accountable is similarly impossible to deny. In communities with a decline or absence of local media, civic engagement declined in tandem.<sup>12</sup> Conversely, in communities with still active and thriving local journalism, charges and arrests for corruption remain strong. Chief among policy recommendations to address corruption in local government officials and organizations is the restoration and independent support of local journalism.

There are many arguments both for and against municipal and county elections clerks being either appointed or elected. Though on the matter of addressing corruption within the organization and of local government officials, appointing elections clerks will result in a higher level of qualifications of those clerks, greater scrutiny of campaign finance declarations, and the erasure of clerks allowing concern over political donations and support for reelection to come in the way of best practices.

Significant election reform at the local level also can work to address the murkiness and complexity of corruption. Campaign finance reform that places limits on not only contributions but on personal loans, as well as state and federal level

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<sup>10</sup> Matherly, T., & Greenwood, B. N. (2024, June 1). *No news is bad news: The internet, corruption, and the decline of the Fourth Estate*. MIS Quarterly. <https://misq.umn.edu/no-news-is-bad-news-the-internet-corruption-and-the-decline-of-the-fourth-estate.html>

<sup>11</sup> Matherly, T., & Greenwood, B. N. (2024, June 1). *No news is bad news: The internet, corruption, and the decline of the Fourth Estate*. MIS Quarterly. <https://misq.umn.edu/no-news-is-bad-news-the-internet-corruption-and-the-decline-of-the-fourth-estate.html>

<sup>12</sup> Matherly, T., & Greenwood, B. N. (2024, June 1). *No news is bad news: The internet, corruption, and the decline of the Fourth Estate*. MIS Quarterly. <https://misq.umn.edu/no-news-is-bad-news-the-internet-corruption-and-the-decline-of-the-fourth-estate.html>

campaign finance reform that requires more disclosure and specificity of donor identities and occupations can clear up gaps in transparency. Movements such as ranked choice voting and disclosure of political parties on local ballots also tout ties to the reduction of corruption in local government organizations.

Whether the case study of Glass House Farms reaching the point of a federal raid was the result of either corruption or simple incompetence remains to be fully understood. It certainly would not have been the first time that an organization in Santa Barbara or Ventura Counties had been raided by the Fed. In 2010, the FBI raided Oxnard City Hall over allegations of misuse of funds. At the time of the raid, the FBI uncovered over 100,000 documents relative to the complaints; however, record keeping at Oxnard City Hall at the time was so poorly managed that the wealth of evidence obtained was still insufficient for any corruption prosecutions. Levels of education and incompetence are tied to the prevention, identification, and eradication of corruption; where incompetence is rampant, corruption typically can be found as well. The complexity and nuance of this topic notwithstanding, significant reforms to address record keeping, competence, transparency, reporting, and more are needed in areas where problems become so unaddressed and insurmountable that the federal government gets involved. Of course that relies on the very individuals who may be engaged in questionable or corrupt acts, even legally allowable ones such as we discussed in the cases of lobbying and political campaign contributions, to desire to make those changes. Follow the money, and you may have a hard time finding one willing.

