

Case #1: Using Public Funds to Protect Renters and Homeowners

Background

Our housing crisis is a widely known and deeply felt experience for families across the country. Rent is getting more and more unaffordable; **wages aren't making up the difference**. Corporations see profit in this housing crisis. While the roots of **our housing crisis are deep**, since the 2008 recession, companies specializing in finance have **expanded their control** over multi-family and single-family rental properties nationwide. In 2021, investors **bought one in seven homes sold in top metropolitan areas nationwide**, particularly in majority Black, Southern states. Corporations also block our public power to protect vulnerable tenants and produce affordable housing. Despite popular support and local wins for rent controls and minimum wage increases, corporations have successfully lobbied to block or overturn such protections nationwide.



Image Source: [Mona Chalabi](#) (data from Census Bureau's American Community Surveys)

Let's consider the case of corporate control of housing in the East Bay and how communities and governments are responding:

The Corporate Overreach

In February 2021, an East Bay grandmother **Jocelyn Foreman found out that the single-family home she was renting in Pinole, California was up for auction**, just a few weeks before it was to go for sale. Wedgewood Inc., a real estate and house flipping company that gained infamy in the **Moms4Housing campaign**, put up the winning auction bid at \$600,000. Wedgewood is an example of many corporations that see the housing crisis as an opportunity. During the last financial crisis a decade ago, private equity firms swooped into auctions of foreclosed homes in the East Bay. With real estate in distress again during the COVID-19 pandemic, corporations like Wedgewood and Blackstone are at it again, this time going after a wide variety of struggling properties.

The Community and Government Response

With the support of the community, her own organization, and a Bay Area community land trust, Ms. Foreman was able to put down a \$100,000 down payment to buy the property, instead of the home-flipping company Wedgewood, Inc. This success motivated Governor Gavin Newsom to include \$500 million for a new five-year Foreclosure Intervention Housing Preservation Program in his \$12 billion housing and homelessness assistance bill. The dollars will go out as low-interest loans for eligible organizations, including community land trusts, to buy and rehabilitate residential properties. Similarly, a **new California state law, SB 1079, signed into law in September 2020 thanks to the organizing efforts of Moms4Housing**, provides tenants the first opportunity to buy properties when auctioned. This public policy is an example of how governments can support collective models of ownership and protect land from corporations who invest in times of distress.



Case #2: Ending Corporate Data Surveillance of Migrants

Background

In this day and age, the data on where we've been, who we know, or what we buy makes profit for data collecting companies, from social media platforms to phone service providers. It can also be profitable to *sell* this data to companies who create detailed data profiles of individuals or communities. This is called data brokerage, a **multibillion-dollar industry** that spends millions **lobbying against privacy legislation**. Corporate data surveillance affects us all, but it has its worst effects on communities already the most vulnerable - from migrants to public housing residents - and where there is profit to be made by selling data to law enforcement. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) **invests in such technologies and data sharing agreements** that expand the border to every city.

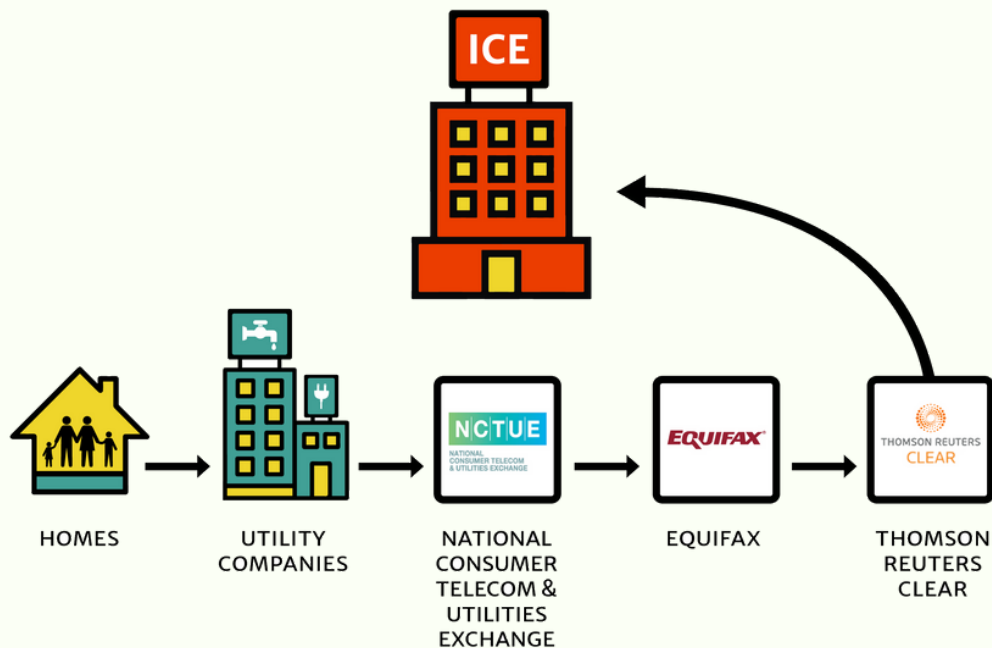


Image Source: [Georgetown Law Center on Privacy and Technology's American Dragnet Project](#)

Let's consider the case of a household's phone plan or electricity bill data being bought by immigration enforcement and how communities and governments are responding:

The Corporate Overreach

Immigrant rights organizations have **exposed an ecosystem of actors** who sell our data to law enforcement, such as local police and ICE. For example, the National Consumer Telecom & Utilities Exchange (NCTUE) - an association of telecom and utilities companies - sells more than 170 million people's names, home addresses, Social Security numbers and other details required to access essential parts of modern life. The simple act of signing up for a new internet service or setting up your water or gas service in a new apartment becomes a data point in a profile about where you've lived, where you've moved from, and who you've lived with. Government authorities have used these private databases to pursue or investigate people without a warrant, in violation of Fourth Amendment rights. The data from the telecom and utilities companies is sold to investigation software services that offer subscriptions directly to police departments, law firms, and government agencies like ICE. From 2017 to 2022, ICE paid **over \$20 million to access these investigation software services**, without a court order.

The Community and Government Response

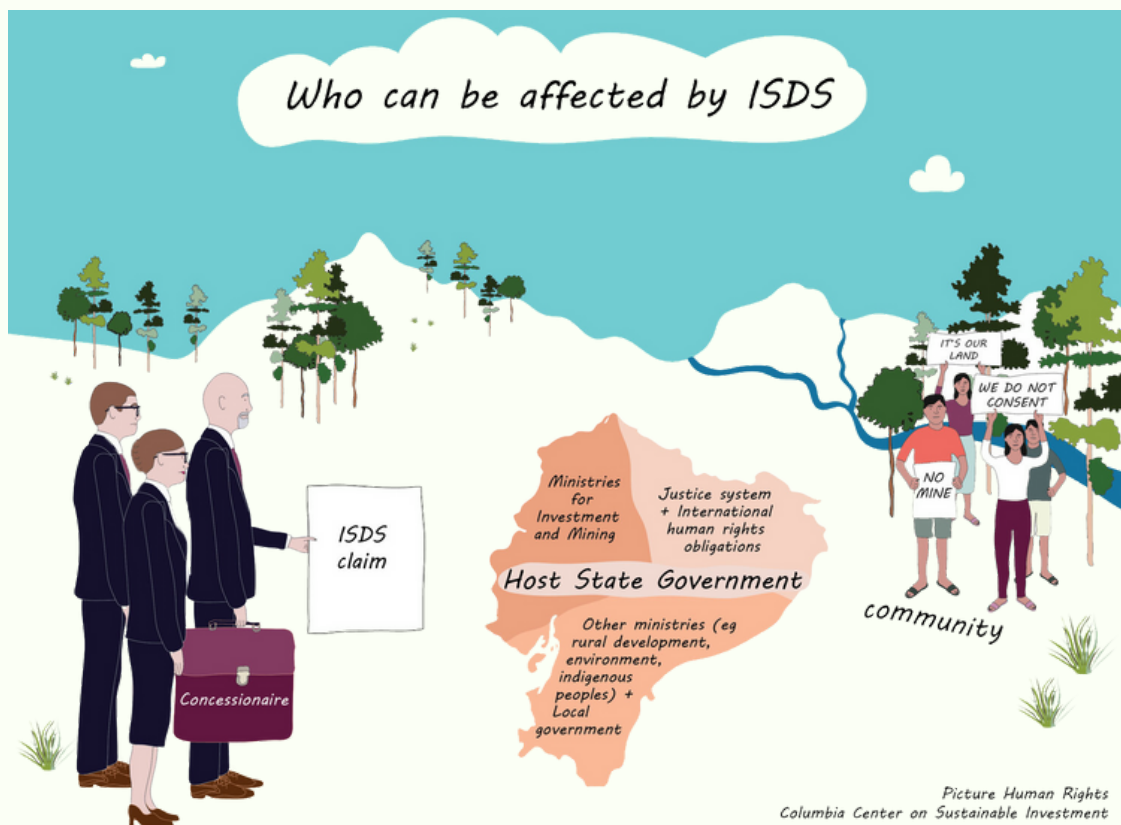
Immigrant rights activists' research and organizing shows that this web of surveillance stemming from a simple activity puts immigrants, their families, and their loved ones at risk. In 2021, this activism **pushed the consortium of telecom and utility companies to stop allowing their data to be included** in these special subscription tools created for police departments and government agencies. In the border town of Chula Vista, California, a committee on surveillance issues got the local police department to **stop providing license plate reader data** about residents to federal immigration authorities. These campaigns for company policy change and local policy change are huge wins on such an evolving issue. Given that data brokers work on a national or even transnational scale, federal policy is an essential next step to securing privacy rights. **Legislation introduced in 2021** would require that law enforcement agencies secure a court order before buying data on people in the United States and about Americans abroad from data brokers.



Case #3: Building Community Power to Protect Biodiverse Land

Background

In pursuit of profit, corporations can abuse their power to override local decisions even when community members have democratically identified a practice unhealthy for the environment and for their community members. A key tactic is the abuse of **preemption laws to override local decisions** to ban harmful practices, like fracking or putting toxic waste near communities of color and indigenous communities. To take a global view, **international law allows corporations to sue governments** if they enact regulations that are “harmful” to a corporation’s interests, but limits the standing rights of civil society, such as citizens and community groups, to sue the corporation in international courts for harming their incomes, livelihoods, or shared lands and waters.



Picture Human Rights
Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment

Image Source: **Picture Human Rights**

Let's consider the case of an oil company's polluting actions in Ecuador and how communities and governments are responding:

The Corporate Overreach

Crude oil was discovered in Ecuador in 1967. During this global oil boom, the oil-rich land of the abundant Amazon and home to **indigenous communities like the Cofàn** was claimed to **create the town of Lago Agrio**. Lago Agrio became the base for Texaco's oil extraction activities from the 1960s to the 1990s. In this time, deforestation exploded, the water turned toxic, fish and other game were infected, and rates of cancer and other infections ballooned. As with many frontline communities today, working for the very industry behind ecological and civic destruction became the only option for survival. In 1993, local residents started a class action lawsuit to force Texaco (acquired by Chevron in 2001) to clean up the area and provide for the care of the 30,000 inhabitants affected by oil contamination. This launched a **nearly 30 year process to achieve legal justice**, as well as a battle of narratives on corporate power and the responsibility transnational corporations have to the earth. Chevron outsources pollution and bad labor practices to the Global South **while advertising social responsibility in the Global North**.

The Community and Government Response

Thanks to the organizing of 30,000 local residents and five Amazonian indigenous groups, the communities impacted by Chevron's polluting activities received international attention and support. In 2011, a local court sentenced the company to a \$9.5 billion fine. However, Chevron appealed to a private international court, which dismissed the Ecuadorian courts' decision. Under current rules of the international legal system, neither the state of Ecuador nor impacted Amazonian communities can challenge the private decision. In the long-term, advocates call for broader changes that would **legally bind states and companies to human rights**, rather than relying on a lengthy battle towards one-time legal settlements. Alongside this lengthy legal battle is the battle of narratives. Campaigns such as **La Mano Sucia de Chevron** ("The Dirty Hand of Chevron") aimed to uncover Chevron's role in the destruction of the Amazon and build support for global investment to help oil-rich countries protect natural resources. Campaign and movement leaders emphasize **the importance of building power of marginalized communities** to win these policy and legal battles, as well as to shape public narratives.

