

Trump sends ICE thugs into major airports, threatens National Guard deployment ahead of 2026 midterms

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On Monday, President Donald Trump deployed Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Gestapo to 13 major US airports. He further threatened to send National Guard troops into airport terminals, escalating the administration's fascist campaign to turn the immigration police and National Guard elements into Trump's personal armed political force ahead of the 2026 midterm elections.

"We will also bring out, if we don't have enough, the National Guard, where we need it, to help out at the airports. But we are not going to let this happen," Trump said Tuesday in Memphis, Tennessee.

ICE agents were sent to airports, including Chicago O'Hare, Cleveland Hopkins, Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta, Houston's Hobby and Bush Intercontinental, JFK and LaGuardia in New York, Louis Armstrong in New Orleans, Luis Muñoz Marín in San Juan, Newark Liberty, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Phoenix Sky Harbor, and Southwest Florida International in Fort Myers. The deployment comes amid Transportation Security Administration (TSA) staffing shortfalls and a broader Department of Homeland Security (DHS) budget confrontation. As many as 40 percent of TSA screeners did not come into work on Sunday, according to the agency, after going weeks without a paycheck.

It is unclear exactly why some of the airports were chosen. While several, such as Atlanta's airport, are among the busiest in the country and have experienced significant delays during the more than six-week partial government shutdown, others are comparatively small and have not faced the same level of disruption.

Atlanta News First reported Monday from Hartsfield-Jackson that even after the arrival of ICE agents, "lines still remain long." Traveler Michael Montisano summed up ICE's presence: "They're here, they're not helping," adding that he did not expect them to because they are not "trained" to provide airport security. Video from throughout the day shows the agents milling around and menacing passengers at the various airports.

Speaking in Memphis, Trump made clear that the operation had nothing to do with alleviating long security lines. Instead,

he used the airport crisis to demand that Democrats back his attempts to disenfranchise voters. Addressing congressional Republicans, he said, "Don't make any deal on anything unless you include voter ID," adding, "The most important part of Homeland Security is voter ID and proof of citizenship."

Combining anti-immigrant racism and attacks on transgender people, Trump grunted, "[The Democrats] are holding it up because they want to take care of illegal immigrants coming into our country, they want to take care of criminals that are in sanctuary cities, they want to take care of transgender for everybody, literally the mutilization of our children. Men in women sports. But what they don't want to do is give us anything to do with citizenship for voting or voter ID."

He further demanded that Republicans "weld" the SAVE America Act directly into DHS funding legislation. In other words, Trump is using the airport crisis to force through a voter suppression law designed to disenfranchise millions ahead of the 2026 midterms.

The SAVE America Act would require documentary proof of citizenship for voter registration and is aimed at making it more difficult for millions of eligible voters to cast ballots. In a March 23 *New York Times* opinion piece, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (Democrat-New York) warned that the measure was "a system for purging eligible voters from the electorate."

He wrote that the "purge would begin with the Department of Homeland Security. Under the SAVE Act, every state would be required to turn over its voter rolls to the department, an extraordinary federal intrusion into the state administration of elections. It would hand Washington control over voter eligibility, something Democratic- and Republican-led states have long resisted."

Schumer continued: "The next step would involve running the voter rolls through an algorithm that would ostensibly root out noncitizens, a program overhauled by Elon Musk and his so-called Department of Government Efficiency, which has already proved dangerously unreliable. In a trial run of the program in Boone County, Missouri, more than half of the voters flagged as ineligible were, in fact, eligible American

citizens. County clerks in Texas also found many examples of wrongly identified voters. Citizens were removed from the voter rolls anyway.”

But the fatal premise of the Democratic response is that the assault on democratic rights can be stopped through appeals to the same capitalist institutions and party that enabled Trump’s return and refused to hold him accountable for his previous coup attempt.

Schumer’s conclusion made clear the political dead end of this perspective. “Democrats are united in opposing the SAVE Act,” he wrote. “We know the right to vote is not a partisan advantage to be engineered or withheld. It is the foundation of American democracy.”

Speaking from Newark Liberty International Airport, Senator Cory Booker made clear that “Democrats want to fund TSA” and were demanding immediate funding for the agency, while also calling for the removal of ICE agents from airports. Booker was obliged to acknowledge the deep hostility felt by broad layers of the population toward ICE, an agency identified with raids, detentions and killings. But he stopped far short of calling for its abolition. Instead, the Democratic response remained within the framework of cosmetic reform: demands that ICE “abide by civil rights,” “use warrants” and “don’t kill people with no accountability.” He said nothing about Trump’s threats to deploy ICE agents to polling stations, nothing about the National Guard threat, and nothing about the broader drive toward dictatorship.

That danger was underscored Monday by Trump co-conspirator Steve Bannon, who declared on his War Room podcast that the airport deployment was a “test run” for the 2026 midterm elections. Democracy Docket reported Bannon saying, “We can use this as a test run, as a test case, to really perfect ICE’s involvement in the 2026 midterms,” before going further and insisting that “ICE is going to be there in the fall of ’26, just like they’re in airports today.”

The attacks on immigrants are the spearhead for broader attacks on the democratic rights of the entire working class. Trump is using airports, as he has used cities and border operations, as laboratories for new forms of domestic repression. The administration is normalizing the use of armed immigration agents in major civilian spaces under the pretext of “security,” while its political allies openly describe these measures as preparation for election intervention.

Lessons must be drawn. The failure of Trump’s January 6, 2021 coup was not due to any principled or determined resistance from the Democratic Party or the trade union apparatus. Its failure lay above all in the inexperience, confusion and ineptitude of Trump’s paramilitary allies, including the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers and Three Percenters, who were unable to secure hostages, seize the Electoral College ballots and consolidate control of the Capitol. In the aftermath, the Democrats worked to contain and suppress mass opposition, channeling everything back behind the institutions of the

capitalist state.

Their central line after the failed coup was the construction of a “strong Republican Party” in the name of “national unity,” including waging war against Russia in Ukraine and supporting Israel’s genocide in Gaza. Trump and his principal co-conspirators were never held to account politically or legally in any serious way for the attempt to overturn the election. He was allowed to return to the White House and resume the same conspiracy under conditions far more advanced than in 2021.

Since returning to office, Trump has continued to insist that he did not lose the 2020 election, has threatened to stay in office past 2028, and has already overseen confirmed seizures of election materials in Georgia, where the FBI took ballots, voter rolls and tabulator tapes from Fulton County, and in Puerto Rico, where federal officials seized voting machines and related data. In Arizona, the FBI has subpoenaed election audit records. Trump’s threat to send National Guard troops into airports comes amid the ongoing military occupation of Washington D.C., where the Guard deployment was already extended through the end of 2026 and is now reportedly under consideration for continuation through early 2029, to the end of Trump’s term.

Under conditions of historic unpopularity, intensified by war, rising prices and mass deportation operations that have provoked outrage among workers, students and immigrant communities, Trump and the financial oligarchy he represents know that they cannot rely on a democratic process. Hence, the SAVE America Act is aimed at stripping millions of their voting rights through forced re-registration, citizenship checks and the integration of election procedures with the DHS apparatus, giving the administration another weapon to target those it regards as politically hostile.

The task facing workers and youth is not to place their faith in the Democrats, who have again demonstrated that they will not mount a serious struggle against dictatorship and war. It is to turn to the working class, the only revolutionary social force in capitalist society, and build a mass movement independent of both big business parties to drive the fascists and their agents out of the airports, the neighborhoods and Washington itself.



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