

Trump's torture boxes for immigrant detainees: Guantánamo Bay comes to America

Jacob Crosse
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In a report dated September 11 and released Monday, the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General documented the use of metal torture boxes against immigrants at the Florida concentration camp that US President Donald Trump and his fascist allies promoted as "Alligator Alcatraz."

The images of the cages recall the open-air cages of Guantánamo Bay and the confinement boxes the CIA used to torture prisoners at its secret prisons. The criminal methods pioneered in decades of American wars abroad and in the "war on terror" are being brought home and used against immigrant workers inside the US.

Between July 17, 2025 and January 18, 2026, staff at the Florida Soft-Sided Facility confined 79 people in cages measuring roughly four feet on a side, about 18 square feet of floor space, for periods ranging from several minutes to nearly two hours. Inspectors described the practice as "unlike any OIG team has observed in ICE facilities" and wrote that it "does not align with standards for humane treatment."

Staff called the cages "calming areas" and claimed detainees were not locked inside, but inspectors observed locking mechanisms. A facility record shows at least one man held in a cage for 26 minutes for having "failed to comply with a lawful command." Former detainees interviewed by Amnesty International last year called it "the box," described it as punishment, and said they were shackled to the ground inside it.

On January 21, 2026, the day of the inspection, 1,467 people were held at the south Florida concentration camp, hastily built on an airport tarmac in the Everglades. The punitive cages were just one form of torture inspectors observed inflicted on immigrants.

Immigrants at the facility have reported guard abuse and being denied legal counsel, medical care, clean water, recreation time and edible food. Housing units built for up to 32 people provided as little as 28 square feet per detainee,

against a required minimum of 75.

DHS refused to address the inspector general's recommendations, claiming it had no authority over day-to-day operations. The administration of Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, for its part, defended the torture boxes. The governor's communications director, Alex Lanfranconi, said the "left-wing media wants to focus on a confinement area for violent criminal aliens who have proven they cannot remain peaceful while awaiting deportation. While it adheres to all federal standards for criminal confinement, we'd make it even smaller if we could."

The Everglades camp was a prototype, not an aberration. Last year's budget law handed ICE some \$45 billion for detention, part of roughly \$170 billion for immigration enforcement, and the tent-camp model was replicated at Fort Bliss in Texas, now the largest detention site in the country, and at new facilities in Indiana, Nebraska and Louisiana.

It is fitting that the report bears the date of September 11, the 25th anniversary of the attacks. In the name of the "war on terror," the Bush administration built the CIA's network of black sites, where confinement boxes were among the approved "techniques," along with the torture chambers of Abu Ghraib and the prison at Guantánamo Bay, which still operates. Barack Obama acknowledged that "we tortured some folks" while insisting that no one be held to account. Every administration since has expanded the apparatus of surveillance, detention and extrajudicial killing that the "war on terror" established.

Methods developed for use against "enemies abroad" have been brought home and applied inside the United States, first against immigrants. Trump has called his political opponents "the enemy from within" and has suggested using the military against the "radical left." As of July 11, 2026, over 65,000 people per TRAC (Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse) were being held in US immigration detention facilities across the United States. More than 70 percent have no criminal conviction.

This year has already produced a record number of killings by the immigration police. Renee Nicole Good was shot dead in Minneapolis on January 7 during the federal occupation of the city. Alex Pretti, an intensive care nurse at the Veterans Affairs hospital, was killed by Customs and Border Protection agents on January 24. Lorenzo Salgado Araujo, a construction worker, was shot by an ICE agent in Houston on July 7, and Johan Sebastián Durán Guerrero was killed by an ICE agent in Biddeford, Maine, six days later.

None of the agents responsible have been arrested. Inside the camps the toll is higher still. Deaths in ICE custody reached a two-decade high last year, and 2026 is on pace to exceed it.

Trump's Gestapo was built with bipartisan hands. Obama deported more people than any president before him, some 3 million, and revived family detention, opening camps for mothers and children in Texas in 2014. Biden kept Trump's Title 42 expulsions in place for more than two years, imposed his own asylum ban in 2024 and left office with immigration detention near 39,000 people a day, the highest level since 2019. The budgets, agents, camps, contracts and legal architecture that Trump inherited were the work of both parties. Congressional Democrats have continued to vote the money through.

The Democrats' response to the mass protests earlier this year confirmed where they stand. When more than 100,000 people marched in Minneapolis in subzero temperatures on January 23, following the killing of Good, the Democratic Governor Tim Walz moved to deepen cooperation between state police and federal agents. On February 7, state troopers and sheriff's deputies arrested 54 demonstrators outside the federal building that houses ICE and CBP. In New Jersey, when detainees at Delaney Hall in Newark went on hunger strike and supporters gathered outside, Governor Mikie Sherrill sent in the state police alongside ICE and Mayor Ras Baraka imposed a curfew.

Since then, the Democratic Party has said next to nothing, dropping even minimal demands for the removal of ICE from airports. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) who won her seat in 2018 in part by pledging to "abolish ICE," had not issued a statement on the inspector general's report as of this writing. Her silence is that of the Democrats as a whole, who have all but dropped the defense of immigrants from their vocabulary ahead of the midterm elections.

Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders went further. In an October 2025 appearance on *The Tim Dillon Show*, Sanders compared Trump's and Biden's border policies and declared, "Trump did a better job." He added, "You need a border, let's have a border. And we have certainly the technology and the manpower to make that happen."

The DSA and *Jacobin* publication have the theory for this retreat. *Jacobin* has published a report by the Center for Working-Class Politics, based on a survey of 40,000 respondents, that turns the question of ICE into a matter of campaign messaging. A path to citizenship for immigrants who "worked and paid taxes," the report finds, is "resonant" with working-class voters; "abolish ICE" is not. The recommendation to Democrats is to lead with "affordability" and treat the immigration police as a wedge issue best avoided.

Under conditions in which ICE is arresting tens of thousands of people a month and caging some of them, the growth of a police state is reduced to a dial on a "Win-O-Meter."

The premise of the exercise is that abolishing ICE is one "position" among others, to be adopted or dropped according to polling. It is nothing of the kind. ICE is an organ of the capitalist state, armed and funded by both parties. Dismantling it cannot be achieved by electing better Democrats, because the Democrats have no intention of dismantling it. It requires the independent mobilization of the working class, immigrant and native-born, against the state itself, and that is precisely what the DSA's strategy of working inside the Democratic Party is designed to prevent.

This is why the protests of January, for all their scale and determination, ran into the ground. What they lacked was not courage but a perspective: one that connected the defense of immigrants to the class struggle as a whole and refused to subordinate it to the electoral needs of a party that builds the camps.

The continuity of torture across Democratic and Republican administrations, from the black sites to the Everglades, expresses the shared defense of the capitalist state by both parties. Neither exists to protect the rights of the working class. The task of abolishing the immigration police, freeing those held in its prisons and defending democratic rights for all falls to the working class, organized independently of both.



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