

In run-up to midterms, Trump steps up drive to rig the elections

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With less than three weeks to go before the midterm elections, inflation is up, Trump's poll numbers are down and the White House is intensifying its efforts to block or overturn the vote.

On Tuesday, the Department of Justice (DOJ) demanded that California election officials refuse to count the ballots of voters it has tagged as ineligible, threatening legal action if they do not comply. In letters to California Secretary of State Shirley Weber and Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder Dean Logan, acting Deputy Attorney General R. Trent McCotter gave them 48 hours to review a list of people the federal government says are likely noncitizens.

The letters order the state to withhold ballots from those named until their citizenship is "determined." Ballots already mailed to them must be "segregated" when returned, and ballots already returned must not be tabulated. If officials refuse, McCotter wrote, the department "will have no choice but to seek emergency relief."

The demand follows repeated threats to prosecute state and local officials who refuse to hand over voter data and purge their rolls on command. In July, Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin warned that officials who declined to use the Department of Homeland Security's SAVE database could face "fines ... penalties, and even, depending on how far it goes, prison time." That same month, Assistant Attorney General Harmeet Dhillon, the head of the DOJ's Civil Rights Division, sent letters to election officials in all 50 states and Washington D.C. warning of criminal prosecution over alleged noncitizen voting.

The pretext is a fraud. Voting by noncitizens is vanishingly rare. Reuters reported in September that states may have added some 30,000 noncitizens to their rolls since 2000 through software glitches and clerical errors, with no clear indication how many ever voted, against 170 million registered voters. When Texas became the first state to use the overhauled SAVE system, it flagged 2,724 "potential noncitizens," and county officials later found that at least 21 percent of them were citizens.

The California demand comes after a ruling this month by a federal judge in Washington barring the DOJ from using voter data collected from the states. On October 9, US District Judge Sparkle Sooknanan vacated the DOJ's nationwide "list maintenance project," under which the department demanded unredacted voter rolls from 49 states and the District of Columbia, passed the data of the 18 states that complied to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and ICE's Homeland Security Investigations, and pressed states to remove flagged voters within 45 days. The judge

found that the DOJ exceeded its statutory authority and ignored the risk that federal databases misidentify citizens as noncitizens.

"DOJ cannot run roughshod over longstanding laws that were carefully crafted to protect the rights of the American people," Sooknanan wrote. She said the policy "has removed United States citizens from the voter rolls in their home states and risks disenfranchising many more."

The attack on California voters comes one day after federal agents raided the Washington home of Minnesota Congresswoman Ilhan Omar, a blatant act of political repression timed to intimidate opposition to Trump on the eve of the election. As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained in its October 12 perspective statement, the raid by Homeland Security Investigations, carried out on a warrant secured by the Justice Department, came 22 days before the vote, in open disregard of the longstanding DOJ practice of avoiding overt steps against candidates within 60 days of an election.

Trump's repeated attacks on Omar have been accompanied by overtly racist incitement against the Somali immigrant population of Minnesota. On October 8, he posted on Truth Social that the state "is being taken over by Somali Immigrants" and urged: "Fight back Minnesota, fight back!" Two days later, at a rally in Clarksville, Tennessee, he said of Somalia: "All they have is crime and squalor." On Monday morning, the agents arrived at Omar's door.

On Tuesday, the witch-hunt was expanded. US Attorney Jeanine Pirro announced on Fox News that her office is investigating Omar's financial disclosures, adding allegations of financial misdeeds to the trumped up immigration-related case.

All this comes as polls indicate a political debacle for the Republicans, with the Democrats likely to take control of the House and possibly the Senate. A Reuters/Ipsos poll released October 5 put Trump's approval rating at a record low of 32 percent.

These developments coincide with Trump's campaign tour of Republican states, in which he is seeking to whip up his fascist base. That base could be thrown against voters in Democratic districts or prepared for an attack on the Capitol on January 3, when Congress votes to certify the election results, in a repeat of the January 6, 2021 coup attempt.

The administration is also preparing a presence at the polls. On October 2, the NAACP sued the Justice Department for records on its announced plan to deploy 1,000 personnel to polling places on

Election Day. That is the largest such deployment in the department's history. By comparison, the DOJ sent roughly 289 monitors in the 2022 midterms and 714 in the 2024 presidential election. The suit demands to know who these people are, where they are going, what they have been instructed to do and what legal authority they claim.

Assistant Attorney General Dhillon has been calling them "observers," not monitors. The distinction matters. Federal observers authorized under the Voting Rights Act can receive special statutory authority to enter polling places, while ordinary DOJ monitors can be restricted by state law and local officials.

The administration has suffered a number of court setbacks. The first was the ruling against Trump's March 31, 2026 executive order making the US Postal Service the arbiter of who receives a mail-in ballot and who is denied one. The order directs DHS to compile lists of citizens eligible to vote and instructs the Postal Service to withhold mail ballots from voters not on those lists. US District Judge Indira Talwani blocked it, ruling that Article I, Section 4 of the Constitution delegates the conduct of federal elections to the states, with Congress empowered to alter the rules, and grants the executive branch no power over elections. In mid-September, the Supreme Court left the block on the Postal Service in place, without ruling on the legality of Trump's plan.

Then came Sooknanan's October 9 final ruling, which barred states from sending their voter rolls to the DOJ and barred the DOJ from using the data it had already obtained from 18 states. The DOJ has sued 30 states for their voter rolls. According to Reuters, it has lost 26 of those cases and has not won a single one.

The setbacks are real but limited. On September 25, the Supreme Court stayed Sooknanan's earlier injunction against the expanded federal voter database, and the administration may appeal her latest ruling. The decisions mean that to impose restrictions on voting, Trump would have to rely on brute force, and he has refused to rule it out.

On the podcast of ultra-right broadcaster Wayne Allyn Root on August 11, Trump responded to an appeal by the host that he declare a national security emergency for the midterms and impose restrictions on voting with the remark: "Let me just say that stranger things have happened, OK? I'll leave it at that."

Homeland Security Secretary Mullin, for his part, has asked the Justice Department to investigate whether a commonly used voting machine can be trusted, an attempt to cast doubt on electronic voting and lay the ground for claiming that votes are invalid.

Election officials are taking the threat seriously. In September, the *Washington Post* ran an article headlined "The new threat election officials fear: Trump's federal government." It reported:

With seven weeks until Election Day, officials are preparing for seized ballots, ICE agents at the polls and a postal system that could reject ballots by the batch. ... Election officials are contemplating ideas that once sounded outlandish, such as troops seizing voting machines, the president dictating last-minute election rules or rogue officials blocking the certification of results.

As the WSWS wrote on August 26:

Whether or not Trump's executive order is implemented in time for the November elections, he is pursuing a definite strategy. Opinion polls point to a defeat for the Republican Party in November, the social, economic and political crisis of US capitalism is being intensified by the debacle in Iran, and there is an accelerating political shift among workers and youth to the left.

Against these dangers, Trump is seeking to promote the specter of voting by masses of "illegal aliens" to entrench himself as dictator-president without any check on executive power. He is acting not as an individual, but as the criminal representative of the corporate-financial oligarchy.

In prosecuting the attack on mail-in voting, the administration is mobilizing the far-right majority on the Supreme Court, the Department of Homeland Security—parent agency of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)—and a weaponized Postal Service. It is creating the conditions for potentially dispatching ICE, the FBI and/or the National Guard to seize voting machines and arrest state and local election officials in order to block or override the midterm elections, or future elections.

In the face of this open plot to consolidate a dictatorship, the Democratic Party is doing nothing more than filing legal suits. It is making no appeal for the population to mobilize to stop the attack on the elections. It fears an independent movement of the working class far more than a presidential dictatorship. Its major disagreement with Trump is not authoritarian rule or the destruction of living standards, but his reluctance to pursue a more aggressive war against Russia.

The defense of democratic rights will come not from the capitalist parties, Congress or the courts but from the independent mobilization of the working class on the basis of a socialist program.



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