

RAW EXCLUSIVES

'Terrorized' battlegrounds turn into 'ghost towns' as ICE swarms early voting

By: Jordan Green Oct 14, 2026 7:45AM ET



Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents detain an individual outside a home in Danbury, Connecticut, U.S., August 27, 2026. REUTERS/Vincent Alban

As early voting in the midterm elections gets underway, voting and immigrant rights organizers across the country are bracing for U.S.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement deployments at polling places.

In south Texas and Maine, organizers are mobilizing volunteers to accompany voters who might be worried about racial profiling or that they'll be falsely accused of being non-citizens.

Clergy members in Georgia and New York state are volunteering to serve as de-escalators at polling places so they can mitigate disruption to voting in the event ICE agents try to make arrests.

ALSO READ:

'Terrorized' battlegrounds turn into 'ghost towns' as ICE swarms early voting

And in Arizona, organizers are making contingency plans to redirect voters to alternate early-voting sites to avoid ICE, while organizers in North Carolina are hosted an “election defense call” on Tuesday to address questions about how to respond to immigration agents at polling places.

“We’re seeing a lot of ICE presence down here,” said Chriselda Vera, an organizer in Texas’ Rio Grande Valley. “I feel like it’s going to

ramp up the closer we get to Election Day.”

As an organizer who advocates for families in immigration detention, Vera told Raw Story there’s already a climate of intimidation that discourages eligible voters in families with mixed immigration status from voting. She delivers food to families in colonias, as unincorporated communities with poor services and often squalid conditions on the Mexican border are known.

“Our communities are being terrorized,” she said. The families in the colonias have told her they’re afraid to go to the food bank or go to the doctor, she said. “We want to make sure everyone in our community knows that they’re not alone, and they should not be intimidated. If they’re in a mixed-status family, they might have a family member who is eligible to vote. And if anybody doesn’t feel safe, we will be willing to go along with them to vote.”

Ruben Torres, advocacy and policy director at Maine Immigrants’ Rights Coalition, told Raw Story organizers feel they have to be prepared for “everything and anything that comes down the pipeline after a request from Republican gubernatorial candidate Bobby Charles to the Trump administration to send ICE to polling places.

Tom Homan, the White House immigration czar, said in response to concerns about potential ICE deployments at polling places that “there is no sanctuary for a significant public safety threat or a national security threat” and “we’ll go where we gotta go to apprehend these people.”

Maine and Texas are both states with critical U.S. Senate races where the presence of ICE agents could potentially depress turnout and sway the results. They are also states where ICE has a track record of aggressive enforcement, with agents fatally shooting two men in Houston and Biddeford, Maine, within the space of one week in July, and more recently shooting a man in Austin.

And during the May primary in Texas, ICE agents reportedly “swarmed” the parking lot of a polling location in San Antonio and detained a man before the county sheriff arrived on the scene and ordered them to leave.

In addition to the Senate race, where James Talarico stands a good chance to be the first Texas Democrat elected to the chamber in nearly four decades, Texas also has two house races rated as “toss-ups” by Cook Political Report. Both contested districts are in south Texas, where Hispanics swung towards Trump in the 2020 and 2024 presidential election but are now recoiling against his immigration policies.

Democrats are trying to win back Texas’ 15th Congressional District, which snakes about 275 miles to the Mexican border, after Republican Monica De La Cruz flipped it in 2022. Meanwhile, Democrats are trying to hang on to the 34th Congressional District, hugging the lower Gulf Coast, after Texas’s Republican-controlled legislature redrew it at Trump’s request to make it more GOP-friendly.

“Here, you have to know someone that was affected by ICE,” said Vera, who serves on the Democratic committee for the 15th district. “I don’t think people that voted for Trump realized how it was going to hurt us as a community and economy. You go downtown, and it looks like a ghost town. The south Texas builders, they were all supporting Trump. Now, they’re up in arms because they don’t have people to build houses.”

The uptick in ICE activity seen in Texas is mirrored in Colorado, where a Democratic challenger is seeking to unseat a Republican incumbent in the 8th Congressional District. The outcome of the race in the district north of Denver, which has the highest Latino population in the state, could determine which party holds control of Congress.

“ICE is surging in Colorado right now,” Aly Belknap, the state director of Common Cause, told Raw Story. “We have a lot of fear and concern — and in a lot of places. It is not limited to one county. We’re seeing ICE harass people in Denver, Pueblo and Aurora, which is Trump’s favorite target.”

Common Cause is a plaintiff, alongside other civic groups, the city and county of Denver and Hennepin County in Minnesota, in a lawsuit against the Trump administration seeking a judicial order

to bar the federal government from sending armed officers to polling sites, and intimidating voters and election workers.

Common Cause Colorado and allied groups are attempting to counter the fear through a messaging campaign that emphasizes that there are fewer ICE officers than polling places across the country.

“It’s hard to tell what is a fear tactic, and what is genuine planning to use ICE officers as a voter suppression tool,” Belknap said.

Immigrant rights and voting rights advocates in Georgia have spent more than a year pressing local sheriffs to refrain from collaborating with ICE in enforcement actions near polling places. Georgia is at the center of Trump’s false claim that the 2020 election was stolen from him, with the FBI seizing ballots from Fulton County in a fruitless effort to vindicate him. This year, a Trump loyalist is attempting to reclaim the Senate seat that Republicans lost in 2020.

“We’re hoping local law enforcement is understanding that voting is a sensitive and precious time, and they should refrain from doing enforcement actions like roadblocks that could cross the line

into voter intimidation,” Jennifer Lee, the policy director for Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta, told Raw Story.

Some recently naturalized citizens and eligible voters from mixed-status families in Georgia, particularly in Gwinnett County where almost a third of the population is foreign-born, are “carrying extra documentation” to polling places as a precaution against harassment, Lee said.

“I do think there is a good chance of people being intimidated from voting. If they’re eligible, but they’re in a mixed-status family or they have a loved one [who is undocumented], or they could be affected in some way, they could be deterred,” said Vera, the organizer in the Rio Grande Valley. “That’s sad, because regardless of who you vote for, you should be able to do that without fear of retaliation. Unfortunately, that’s something our community is experiencing in South Texas.”

The same fear is rippling through immigrant communities in Maine.

“As we’ve talked to immigrant communities that have naturalized and entered the voting world, as exciting as it should be, there’s also a lot of fear,” Torres said. “The education we’re doing is letting

people know the different options for voting so they can safely cast their vote.”

Many of the civic groups across the country are deploying the same mix of tactics to counter ICE: an army of friendly volunteers ready to greet immigrant voters at the polls; trainings to help volunteers document and report ICE presence; “buddy systems” and transportation assistance; and clergy ready to de-escalate conflict.

“The media outreach we’re doing right now is creating a chorus of voices that are telling people the facts and telling people we’ll be there,” Belknap said, “And letting them know if we see anything that impacts them, we’ll let them know.”

Report typos and corrections to corrections@rawstory.com. For customer support contact support@rawstory.com.

Top Stories Recommended For You



‘People are going to jail’: Trump admin put on notice if DOJ secretly leaned on MAGA judge



Trump’s woeful new hire commits two cardinal sins in her debut blunderfest



Hopeless Trump is just a step away from committing the unthinkable



Trump was stupid to put his signature on this lie — it will blow up in his face



'Make sure Republicans win': Tumult at DOJ as top-down orders rattle investigators



Trump's election ambush has already been laid

17 Comments

YOUR OPINION MATTERS

Do you think Donald Trump will cost Republicans the midterm elections?

VOTE NOW →

Stay ahead of the political news cycle.

Get the stories driving Washington—and the stories others miss—delivered free to your inbox.

Your email address

SIGN ME UP

Free, unsubscribe anytime

Company

[About Us](#)

[FAQ](#)

[Corrections Policy](#)

[Ethics Policy](#)

[Ownership & Funding](#)

[Contact Us](#)

Sections

[Trending](#)

[U.S. Politics](#)

[Opinion](#)

[World](#)

[Investigations](#)

[Games](#)

Legal

[Terms of Use](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

Support Raw Story

[Subscribe](#)

[Donate](#)

[Gift Subscriptions](#)

[Newsletter](#)

[Podcast](#)

[Mobile App](#)

Connect

[Contact the Newsroom](#)

[Send a News Tip](#)

[Customer Support](#)

[Request a Correction](#)

[Masthead](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Debug Logs](#)

© 2026 Raw Story Media, Inc. All rights reserved.