

<https://www.wired.com/story/ice-invades-airports-across-the-us/>

MAR 23, 2026 12:52 PM

# ICE Invades Airports Across the US

**Agents from ICE are being deployed to over a dozen airports around the country, including New York, Atlanta, and Chicago.**

PHOTOGRAPH: BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES

**OVER THE LAST 24 hours, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents have invaded airports across the United States.**

At Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson, the world's busiest airport, videos and photographs show ICE agents standing next to security screening lines. At Chicago's O'Hare airport, ICE agents are scattered around check-in counters, according to videos shared online. At Newark Liberty International Airport in New Jersey, ICE officers were seen walking through the main United Airlines terminal, wearing vests that said "ICE." And at San Francisco International Airport, multiple videos show what appear to be plainclothes law enforcement officers forcibly detaining a young woman as dozens of onlookers watch and film.

According to reporting from The New York Times, ICE is being deployed to 14 airports across the country, including John F. Kennedy airport and

LaGuardia airport in New York, as well as airports in Houston, New Orleans, Philadelphia, and Phoenix.

One of the eyewitnesses who captured the incident at San Francisco's airport tells WIRED she began filming after hearing a "horrible" scream while walking to her gate. The woman, who did not want to be named due to privacy concerns, said it appeared that "two unidentified men" were grabbing "a woman trying to hold onto her child."

"I ran up and asked who they are with and if they are agents and for proof of who they are," the witness said. She said they never let her see their badge numbers, and she eventually called the police. "When [the San Francisco Police Department] arrived they surrounded the men detaining the woman and [wouldn't] speak to anyone in the crowd asking for answers—just stared blankly ahead. SFPD all had visible badge numbers so I asked them why can I see their badge numbers and what agency they are with but not these two unidentified men. They never identified themselves and eventually police pushed the crowds away and I left to catch my flight."

In other videos of the incident, the officers appear to create a blockade between the individuals arresting the woman and the onlookers. "People around were visibly upset and shaken. Yelling at agents, calling them Nazis," she said.

"It was absolutely horrifying to witness and I felt sick to my stomach," the eyewitness told WIRED. "I didn't sleep last night once I got home."

A spokesperson for San Francisco International Airport confirmed to [NBC San Francisco](#) that federal agents detained a woman at the airport on Sunday, but said it was unrelated to the wider deployment of ICE agents to airports. SFPD did not respond to a request for comment.

The ICE agents are ostensibly at these airports to assist with long security lines caused by the partial government shutdown. Thousands of [Transportation Security Administration](#) (TSA) agents have gone

without pay since the end of January, and many have stopped showing up to work or quit as a result.

White House border czar Tom Homan said the deployment of ICE to US airports would assist with filling these gaps, though in a Truth Social post on March 21, President Donald Trump said that ICE agents would be doing “security like no one has ever seen before, including the immediate arrest of all Illegal Immigrants who have come into our Country, with heavy emphasis on those from Somalia.” The Trump administration has targeted the Somali American community, particularly in Minnesota, after allegations of fraud in some of the state’s childcare centers led the administration to deploy some 3,000 immigration agents to the state.

In an interview with CNN, Homan said that ICE agents would not be doing baggage and passenger screening, but assisting with crowd control and general security. In a post on Truth Social, Trump asked ICE agents to not wear masks at airports. As part of the administration’s immigration crackdown, ICE officers conducting raids have worn masks and used unmarked vehicles to hide their identities.

In response to questions from WIRED, DHS acting assistant secretary Lauren Bis says, “While the Democrats continue to put the safety, dependability, and ease of our air travel at risk, President Trump is taking action to deploy hundreds of ICE officers, that are currently funded by Congress, to airports being adversely impacted. This will help bolster TSA efforts to keep our skies safe and minimize air travel disruptions.” Though TSA and ICE are both under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), ICE continues to have funding through the One Big Beautiful Bill, which was passed in 2025, even as other parts of DHS funding remain in limbo as part of the partial government shutdown.

DHS did not respond to questions about whether ICE officers would also be taking immigration enforcement actions while assisting TSA at the airport, or about what, if any, training agents have received in order to

fill TSA's work. Last year, WIRED reported that airlines were selling passenger data to DHS, and The New York Times revealed that TSA was sharing passenger information with ICE.

ICE's deployment to US airports has already received criticism. In a statement released by the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), the union that represents TSA workers, president Everett Kelley said that "ICE agents are not trained or certified in aviation security. TSA officers spend months learning to detect explosives, weapons, and threats specifically designed to evade detection at checkpoints — skills that require specialized instruction, hands-on practice, and ongoing recertification. You cannot improvise that." In posts across social media, users highlighted instances of ICE officers simply standing around at airports.

Senator Andy Kim, a Democrat from New Jersey, said in a post on Bluesky that "Americans don't want ICE in our airports or in our communities. We just want Republicans to agree to fund TSA so workers can be paid and these lines can go down." ICE has been deployed to Newark Liberty International, an airport in Kim's jurisdiction.

*Matthew Champion contributed reporting.*