

# Rapist-founded Palantir turns poisonous on the campaign trail

Donald Trump's unpopular immigration crackdown has made links to the Peter Thiel-backed company a liability for candidates

Palantir's technology helps ICE track and manage deportations © FT montage/Getty

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**Joe Miller** in Washington

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In the heated battle to become the nominee for Texas's 33rd congressional district, an unlikely villain has emerged: the data intelligence giant Palantir.

A TV advertising blitz by Democratic challenger Colin Allred has accused incumbent representative Julie Johnson of “making thousands [of dollars] from the company [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] uses to track and detain our neighbours” — a reference to stock she held in the Peter Thiel-backed group while in Congress.

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A similar message is resonating well beyond Dallas. Once a niche Silicon Valley contractor, [Palantir](#) has become a flashpoint in campaigns across the US — in New York, Illinois and Florida — as candidates face scrutiny over investments, donations and other ties to the company.

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Amid outrage over two fatal shootings by federal agents in Minneapolis, Democrats — who are favoured to gain back control of the House in November — have seized on Palantir's work for the agency, which helps ICE track and manage deportations.

The company, which has won federal contracts under Republican- and Democrat-led administrations, has vigorously defended its work with ICE, as with foreign governments such as Ukraine and Israel. In the past few months, Palantir boss Alex Karp has cheered Donald Trump's crackdown on immigration and praised the US president for “restoring the deterrent capacity of America”.

“For people who care, Palantir is the apogee of state surveillance,” one Democratic strategist said. In primaries to select candidates for November’s [midterm elections](#), voters were “frightened of what surveillance can be”, the person added, “and Palantir owns that space”.

A majority of Americans feel ICE has gone too far in pursuing Donald Trump’s agenda of mass deportations, and Palantir has become linked to the backlash © Jerome Gilles/NurPhoto/Getty Images

Polling shows a large majority of Americans feel ICE has gone too far in pursuing Trump’s agenda of mass deportations, and Palantir has become linked to those concerns about over-reach.

Seizing on that sentiment is a campaign group called Purge Palantir, which is urging candidates to commit to rejecting donations from the company. Their tactics mirror those used by campaigners targeting financial links to Israel during the war in Gaza, and by groups seeking to expose the influence of the tobacco and oil lobbies.

The group has already convinced five sitting members of Congress and one senator — who have received tens of thousands of dollars from people linked to Palantir in the past — to publicly refuse any further funds.

Other lawmakers have been quietly severing their ties with Palantir. New York Democratic Congress member Tom Suozzi sold his shares in the company after news site NOTUS highlighted his investment.

Amid growing anger on the left, Palantir this month hired two new Washington lobbyists with ties to the Democratic Party.

One of them, Cristina Antelo, told the FT that Democrats angry with Trump “have misplaced that anger at a US corporation that powers government agencies like [the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] and [US Department of Agriculture], and helps keep our troops safe”.

“There’s a massive perception-versus-reality gap with Palantir,” Antelo added. The company argues its software helps make ICE’s operations more precise.

“I don’t think people understand that the software [at Department of Homeland Security] is being used to do things that Democrats, if they understood the nuance, would agree makes a lot of sense,” she said.

For now, however, Democrats are distancing themselves from Palantir.

Texas’s Johnson told the FT she “divested from all actively traded stocks” while in Congress, and just \$90 in profit was made on her Palantir shares. She added she had been “a relentless advocate for accountability from ICE and the Department of Homeland Security” and that she backed a ban on stock trading for elected officials.

Palantir CEO Alex Karp, centre, in the State Dining Room of the White House © Bloomberg

In New York, Democratic congressional candidate Brad Lander, a critic of the ICE crackdown, has been forced to defend New York City's investments in Palantir during his time as city comptroller, which he has said was part of his fiduciary duty in that role.

Raja Krishnamoorthi was defeated in a Democratic primary for Illinois' US Senate race after facing pressure over donations from a Palantir executive, despite committing to donate the funds to immigrant rights groups.

Pressure over Palantir links had also come from more unlikely quarters.

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In a midtown Manhattan congressional race, former Palantir employee Alex Bores, who is the target of a well-funded campaign group opposing his call for more AI regulation, has been attacked for his association with the company. Ads run by Leading the Future, a Pac backed by Silicon Valley billionaires, accuse the candidate of "running from his past, while ICE is in our communities", while claiming the agency is "powered by Bores's tech".

Bores, currently a state assemblyman, told the FT he never worked on the ICE project. "In fact, I left Palantir because they committed to renewing this contract with ICE without putting in guardrails that would prevent the software from being used on deportations," he said.

Republicans have also been pulled into the fight. When Palantir announced it was moving its headquarters from Colorado to Florida last month, GOP gubernatorial candidate James Fishback responded by pledging that if he were elected, he would "ban Palantir from doing business with state and local government", citing concerns over surveillance.

Republican members of Congress raised similar concerns in Washington last year, following an executive order signed by Trump that directed the US government to remove "unnecessary barriers" to data consolidation, ostensibly to help root out waste and fraud.