

White House pressure for increased immigration arrests strains law enforcement agencies

CNN www.cnn.com/2025/05/29/politics/white-house-immigration-arrests-law-enforcement-agencies

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May 29, 2025



US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents enter an apartment building during a multi-agency targeted enforcement operation in Chicago on January 26.

Christopher Dilts/Bloomberg/Getty Images
CNN —

The Trump administration is building up federal manpower and resources to meet the White House's desire to triple the number of daily immigration arrests – signaling a renewed push to go well beyond efforts from previous administrations.

The White House is putting intense pressure on law enforcement agencies across the government to meet a goal of a million deportations a year. That's led to a surge of agents and officers across the federal government focusing their attention on arrests and deportation efforts – and in some cases straining resources.

At the FBI, hundreds of agents have been reassigned to immigration-related duties, raising concerns among agents that the shift could hinder important national security investigations, including into terror threats and espionage by China and Russia, according to people familiar

with the matter.

Top FBI officials have provided little guidance to field offices on how agents are expected to increase immigration arrest numbers while also working their top priority cases, the sources said.

FBI agents have been told by supervisors not to document moving resources away from high-priority cases toward immigration-related work, according to one person familiar with the matter.

FBI agents typically log hours toward specific threats or assignments, but officials appear to be trying to avoid creating a paper trail that would show that the FBI is pulling resources away from national security threats to immigration, the source said. As a result, some field offices are declining to take on new investigations of certain threats.

There are also incentive efforts underway.

Senior FBI officials in New York this week sent an email to its workforce of more than 1,000 agents promising overtime pay if they helped with “enforcement and removal operations,” according to an email obtained by CNN.

FBI agents who work on the enforcement and removal “surge” through the end of the fiscal year, which is September 30, could earn a transfer “to the division of their choosing,” the email said.

Some FBI offices in border states have already diverted resources from countering cybercrime toward immigration issues, said a former FBI agent who spoke on the condition of anonymity to preserve their relationship with former colleagues.

“While the FBI does not comment on specific personnel decisions, our agents and support staff are dedicated professionals working around the clock to defend the homeland and crush violent crime — a mission which certainly overlaps with the consequences of the previous administration’s four-year open border policies,” FBI spokesperson Ben Williamson said in a statement to CNN. “We are proud to work with our interagency partners to keep the American people safe.”

Trump officials initially said arrests of immigrants would focus on those who pose public safety or national security threats. And while people who fall under that category are still being detained, the aperture has widened as people without criminal records have been picked up and deported.

The all-hands-on-deck-for-immigration approach is raising critical questions inside the FBI and other law enforcement agencies about how they use limited resources to execute their mission.

“Should we have highly trained FBI agents going to support DHS priorities?” the former FBI agent said. “Is this just a surge that’s going to be temporary?”

Tripling the number of arrests

This isn’t the first time that the FBI and other law enforcement agencies have shifted resources dramatically to address an administration’s priorities. After 9/11, for example, the FBI invested heavily in counterterrorism. Previous administrations have had to navigate limited resources and personnel to arrest people inside the US and deport them.

Other law enforcement agencies have felt the pressure of the immigration crackdown, too. The US Marshals Service – an agency already stretched thin by increased protection for federal officials and judges in recent years – has diverted personnel to help with ICE deportations, further straining the agency, a law enforcement official told CNN.

Immigration arrests have hovered around 1,000 a day, but Trump officials are pushing for that to be tripled as they also seek to accelerate the pace of deportations.

White House border czar Tom Homan told reporters last week he was “happy” with the number of arrests, which, he argued, outpaced former President Joe Biden’s administration, but “not satisfied.”



Homan speaks to reporters outside the White House on May 5, in Washington, DC.

Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images

“We need to arrest three times the amount of people we’re arresting right now and more money to allow us to,” he said. Homan reiterated that message on Thursday, saying: “We’ve increased the teams a lot. We’ve increased targeting a lot, so we expect a vast increased number of arrests every day.”

Last week, White House deputy chief of staff Stephen Miller took that message to senior ICE officials in a tense meeting, [first reported by Axios](#), where he pushed agents to significantly increase arrests, according to a source familiar with the meeting.

“We are committed to aggressively and efficiently removing illegal aliens from the United States, and ensuring our law enforcement officers have the resources necessary to do so,” White House spokesperson Abigail Jackson said in a statement to CNN.

The administration has bolstered its force of 6,000 ICE agents – all under tremendous pressure to meet quotas that Miller previously called the “floor, not a ceiling” – by supplementing it with outside agencies, offering overtime and re-assignment incentives to federal agents.

Amid the pressure, there’s been another shakeup in ICE senior leadership. Ken Genalo, the official leading the branch charged with carrying out arrests and deportations, is retiring, while Robert Hammer, who helms ICE’s Homeland Security Investigations is being reassigned, ICE announced Thursday. In its announcement, ICE said “organizational realignments will help ICE achieve President Trump and the American people’s mandate of arresting and deporting criminal illegal aliens and making American communities safe.”

But the administration is still limited, without additional funding, in how much it can increase detentions and acquire more planes for deportations. Trump’s massive reconciliation bill, which is still winding through Congress, includes billions of dollars for immigration enforcement.

In the meantime, the administration is relying on resources available: around [500 Customs and Border Protection officers](#) have been asked to fan out across the country to arrest undocumented immigrants – a responsibility typically handled by ICE. The immigration effort is also expected to include 600 personnel from the Drug Enforcement Administration, 300 from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and 300 from the US Marshals Service, according to two sources familiar with planning.

CNN requested comment from these agencies.

CNN [previously reported](#) that DHS also requested 20,000 National Guard members to help with immigration enforcement.