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# Exclusive: FBI scales back staffing, tracking of domestic terrorism probes, sources say


By Andrew Goudsward and Sarah N. Lynch  
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The FBI building in Washington

  
The FBI has scaled back staffing in its headquarters, days after the Trump administration launched a sweeping round of cuts at the Justice Department, in Washington, U.S., February 3, 2025. REUTERS/Kevin Lamarque/File Photo [Purchase Licensing Rights](#)

Summary Companies

- FBI has reassigned staff in domestic terrorism section
- Probes no longer tagged as tied to violent extremism
- Moves follow Republican criticism of earlier efforts

WASHINGTON, March 21 (Reuters) - The FBI has cut staffing in an office focused on domestic terrorism and has scrapped a tool used to track such investigations, in a shift that could undermine law enforcement's ability to counter white supremacists and anti-government extremists, according to sources familiar with the matter.

The moves, sources said, are an indication that domestic terrorism investigations, which in recent years have largely involved violence fueled by right-wing ideologies, may be less of a priority under FBI Director Kash Patel, a prominent critic of the effort.

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Some sources said the changes will reduce the FBI's ability to monitor threats posed by white supremacists and militia groups and potentially hamper law enforcement's ability to disrupt plots. The moves come despite repeated [warnings](#) from U.S. officials in recent

years that domestic violent extremists present some of the most significant security threats to the United States.

"There is a broader desire I think within the administration to at best ignore data and put their head in the sand and at worst to realign resources away from this battle," said Jacob Ware, an expert on domestic terrorism at the Council on Foreign Relations.

The FBI did not directly address Reuters' questions about the changes, but said it is committed to "protecting the U.S. from many threats including terrorism, violent crime, drug trafficking, and cyberattacks."

"All our work is focused on providing safer communities for our citizens every day," the statement said.

FBI leadership recently transferred agents and intelligence analysts from its Domestic Terrorism Operations Section, which supports investigations run out of the FBI's 55 field offices and provides information on domestic threats, according to five sources briefed on the moves.

Two sources familiar with the changes said about 16 people had been reassigned from the section, which would have hundreds of employees if fully staffed. A different source said senior FBI officials have discussed disbanding it entirely, though a final decision has not yet been announced.

The FBI has also discontinued a practice of tagging investigations with a connection to domestic terrorism, two of the sources said. The tags were an important tool in helping the bureau identify trends and track relevant probes across the country.

The Trump administration has separately directed the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Forces, which investigate domestic and international terrorist threats, to assist in President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown, according to a memo seen by Reuters.

Some former officials said that it is not unusual for the FBI to shift resources based on changing threats. Patel has previously vowed to streamline operations at the FBI's Washington headquarters.

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The changes come as the Trump administration has said it will treat attacks at Tesla dealerships and charging stations as domestic terrorism, an effort nearly certain to involve FBI investigators.

Protests have erupted in recent weeks against Tesla CEO Elon Musk for his leading role in Trump's effort to slash the federal government. At least three people have been accused in separate cases of using Molotov cocktails to set fire to Tesla property.

The changes at the FBI also follow Trump's decision to pardon nearly all roughly 1,600 people charged with participating in the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol. The leaders of the far-right Proud Boys and Oath Keepers groups were released from prison as part of Trump's sweeping grant of clemency.

Trump-appointed officials at the Justice Department have said they are reviewing FBI agents' handling of those cases for potential misconduct.

The FBI stepped up its focus on domestic terrorism following the killing of a counterprotester at a 2017 white-nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. The Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol by Trump supporters kicked those efforts into high gear.

The FBI said in a 2023 report that it had about 2,700 active domestic terrorism investigations, about half of which were related to the Capitol riot, up from roughly 1,000 in 2020.

That report identified white supremacists as posing the most consistent threat, though FBI officials have warned that violent extremists are often motivated by a mix of ideologies.

The FBI's previous efforts have drawn criticism from Republican lawmakers and Trump allies like Patel, as part of a broader claim that the FBI improperly targeted conservatives.

50%

Three former FBI agents testified to Congress in 2023 that FBI officials pressured agents to boost the number of cases tagged as domestic terrorism. A Republican-led panel alleged the tagging of cases was used to advance a political narrative favorable to Democrats, a claim a senior FBI official denied.

A spokesperson for Ohio Representative Jim Jordan, a Trump ally who led that panel, called the removal of tagging for domestic terrorism cases a "great step in the right direction of returning the FBI to its primary crime fighting mission."

Two of the FBI witnesses testified that they received financial support from a group founded by Patel.

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Sarah N. Lynch is the lead reporter for Reuters covering the U.S. Justice Department out of Washington, D.C. During her time on the beat, she has covered everything from the Mueller report and the use of federal agents to quell protesters in the wake of George Floyd's murder, to the rampant spread of COVID-19 in prisons and the department's prosecutions following the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol.

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