

# FBI agents are again pulled from their day jobs to address a Trump priority

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FBI agents and Secret Service Police officers patrol the Navy Yard neighborhood in Washington, DC, on August 12.

Evelyn Hockstein/Reuters

FBI agents – thrust into yet another role for which they are not trained – have been put on patrol duties with local police as part of President Donald Trump’s declaration of a crime emergency in Washington, DC.

In the past several months, the agency’s rank-and-file, who specialize in complex threat investigations, have been assigned to fulfill a bevy of roles outside their lanes of expertise, spending overnight and weekend shifts poring over old Jeffrey Epstein files looking for necessary redactions, assisting ICE in finding and removing illegal immigrants and now patrolling the streets of the nation’s capital.

While federal agencies including the FBI often link up with local police departments to help with specific investigations and task forces or to build out certain tools they may need, such as gun tracing, agents are not trained or equipped for community policing, multiple federal law enforcement officials told CNN.

FBI Director Kash Patel took office vowing to “let cops be cops.” But in recent years, the FBI has touted how many new agents don’t come from former police backgrounds and instead come from backgrounds in technology, law and other disciplines. One 2024 class of new agents included more than 44% with advanced degrees, according to an internal newsletter.

“FBI agents are not police officers,” Former FBI deputy director and CNN law enforcement analyst Andrew McCabe said Tuesday. “Most of them don’t come to the FBI from a background as a police officer. So they don’t have the training and the skillset and the experience of doing that work, which can be dangerous both for them and for the people they would be policing.”

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For many FBI agents, much of the job is done largely at a desk, and training necessary to de-escalate situations in the field, or what beat cops are looking for when trying to identify threats or potential hostile situations, are not comprehensively part of training for agents.

What’s more, the FBI use-of-force policy generally has a much lower threshold for when agents are allowed to use their firearms to protect themselves than most police departments – in the case of Washington, DC, officers, have options to use tasers and pepper spray before using lethal force, not standard equipment for agents.

Federal agents are also typically only minimally trained in conducting vehicle stops, which remains one of the most dangerous aspects of a police officer’s job. Unlike routine police encounters with suspects, which may only involve one or two officers, when agencies like the FBI conduct an arrest, they typically plan out the operation methodically in advance and execute it with a complement of agents that far outnumbers the suspect.

Several law enforcement officers told CNN that many agents now tasked with patrolling the streets of DC alongside the Metropolitan Police Department are in a wait-it-out posture, hoping they'll be able to turn their complete focus back to the cases they were investigating previously when Trump's 30-day period of controlling the MPD is currently set to come to an end.

"This isn't hard: If we're doing (policing) we're not covering down on those other threats," said one person.

Other federal agencies involved in the surge of resources to DC, like the Secret Service, US Marshals Service, Federal Protective Service, ICE and Border Patrol have officers with far more experience arresting individuals or conducting more standard, on-the-ground police work than the FBI.

The difference in training was an issue that arose most recently in the protests following the police killing of George Floyd in 2020.

Agents with no significant training in crowd control were thrust into the streets to help protect federal buildings and found themselves outnumbered by protesters. To try to deescalate tensions, some agents took a knee in a symbolic gesture that has since become a flashpoint in the Trump administration's retribution against so-called "woke" policies associated with political opponents. Under Patel, some of those agents have faced reassignments to less-prestigious jobs and internal disciplinary investigations.

The FBI declined to comment on multiple questions from CNN for this story.

Since the weekend, FBI agents have been embedding with Metropolitan Police Officers and, according to Patel, were involved in 10 of the 23 arrests that occurred in DC Monday night. It's unclear to what extent FBI agents participated in the arrests.

The arrests included unlawful possessions of firearms, DUI warrants, one on a search warrant for a prior murder charge and more, Patel [touted](#) on social media.

"When you let good cops be cops they can clean up our streets and do it fast," Patel wrote on X. "More to come. Your nation's Capital WILL be safe again."

## **Epstein files and immigration**

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In 2025, hundreds of FBI agents were reassigned to immigration-related duties, which raised concerns at the time among some agents that the switch could hinder important national security investigations, including into espionage by foreign countries and terror threats.

At the time of the push for more federal agents to help with immigration enforcement, FBI agents involved were told by supervisors not to document moving resources away from high-priority cases.

Behind the scenes, some FBI agents clashed with their immigration enforcement counterparts, with major flashpoints involving the refusal by those agents to engage in what they viewed as racial profiling and other tactics that could violate the Constitution, according to law enforcement sources. While agency leaders have publicly touted a very close and cooperative working relationship between organizations, the situation has at times been much different on the ground, sources said.

Then came the files of Jeffrey Epstein, the sex offender and accused sex trafficker who killed himself in prison in 2019 before the case against him could go to trial.

FBI agents in March worked tirelessly, sometimes in 12-hour shifts, to [review documents and evidence](#) against Epstein in order to make redactions on the Justice Departments failed attempt to cull conspiracy theories and accusations that they were continuing to hide imagined crimes against the rich and powerful. Much of which stemmed from Trump's allies, including those in key leadership positions.

Agents were ordered to put aside investigations related to threats from China and Iran, as well as cases in order to complete the Epstein redactions, something every division in the bureau was ordered to supply agents for.







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“There is no other entity that does that work if the FBI is not doing it,” McCabe said. “And that is really important stuff that needs to be done every day in this country by a limited resource of FBI agents. And so every time you distract them into doing something like this, you’re doing less of that.”

Patel and his deputy director, Dan Bongino, often tout the work of the FBI online, recently highlighting the bust of an alleged human trafficking operation in Nebraska, fentanyl seizures, and other FBI successes.

## **Volatile time at FBI**

The new reassignments to help patrol DC come days after two senior FBI officials, including the acting-director before Patel was appointed by Trump to lead the agency, along with other agents, were summarily fired following perceived opposition to the administration.

The firings, including of former acting director Brian Driscoll after he fought the administration’s plans to quickly fire more than 100 mid-level and senior employees in the early days of Trump’s second administration, has also spread an air of concern among agents over who could be targeted next or what past actions could land them in trouble with Trump-appointed leadership.

Law enforcement sources fear this volatile period inside the FBI could lead to a brain drain amid constantly evolving threats as numerous agents, analysts and professional staff consider departing for other agencies, or into the private sector where their national security and investigative skills remain highly sought.

“Morale is the worst I’ve seen,” said one law enforcement source. “The bureau is becoming unrecognizable. Lots of people are weighing really difficult decisions right now.”