

Trump's ICE raids on thousands of immigrants are 'a big show to scare people' and won't solve anything, immigration experts warn

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President Donald Trump on Friday confirmed that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) will move forward on Sunday with raids across the country to arrest thousands of undocumented immigrants.

"I have an obligation to do it," Trump said to reporters at the White House. "They came in illegally, they go out."

The president added, "We'll be taking them out by the thousands."

The Trump administration has faced a great deal of criticism over the planned raids in recent days from Democrats in Congress, as well as from mayors and police chiefs in major US cities, but acting ICE director Mark Morgan has said they're just upholding and enforcing the law of the land.

"My duty is not to look at the political optics or the will of the American people. That's for the politicians to decide. What the American people should want us to do as law enforcement officials is to enforce the rule of law and maintain the integrity of that system," Morgan told NPR in late June. "If you're here in violation of federal immigration law, if you've had due process and you have a final order, what are we supposed to do?"

But immigration law experts say these raids, which were previously postponed and are set to occur in at least 10 major US cities, are primarily designed to spread "fear" through the immigrant community and won't address or solve the root causes of the problems plaguing America's immigration system.

'A big show to scare people'

"The main design is to send a message that the current administration is willing to enforce the existing immigration laws, and the raids also act as a deterrent," Matthew Kolken, an immigration attorney in Buffalo, New York, told INSIDER. "The problem is that the deterrent won't work."

"Individuals fleeing Central America are trying to save their lives," Kolken added. "They are faced with the 'Sophie's Choice' of having to stay and die in the burning building, or take a leap of faith, and plummet to their death."

Echoing these sentiments, Lily Axelrod, an immigration lawyer in Memphis, Tennessee, told INSIDER, "The point of the raids, along with most of Trump's immigration 'enforcement' policies, is not actually to 'thwart undocumented immigration' but rather to put immigrant communities in fear."

Axelrod characterized the planned nationwide raids as a "big show to scare people," adding that the operation distracts from what she said is a much bigger problem: "the administration's systematic, widespread attack on due process in the immigration courts, and its inhumane treatment of noncitizens in detention centers in the interior and at the border."

The president realizes that Homeland Security and the Justice Department "don't have the resources to find and remove every person who is here without status, nor to prevent people from coming to the US or remaining without permission," Axelrod added. "Instead, they can please their conservative base and put immigrant communities in fear, perhaps deterring some would-be immigrants or persuading others to give up and go home," she said.

Meanwhile, some experts are skeptical about how successful the raids will be in terms of the administration's stated goals.

"These raids will not arrest many illegal immigrants — even if they go forward as planned," Alex Nowrasteh, a senior policy analyst at the libertarian Cato Institute, told INSIDER. "The point of these raids is for the political establishment to signal to their supporters that they are actually trying to enforce immigration laws even though the numbers deported will be minuscule."

Expressing similar views, Kolken said, "As for the effectiveness of the raids, the backlog of pending deportations has grown so large that it will take years to process all of the cases pending before the courts. If you look at the raw statistics, Trump will never achieve the amount of deportations amassed by [former President Barack Obama]."

According to numbers from ICE, 256,085 people were deported in fiscal year 2018, which was an increase from 226,119 removals in fiscal year 2017. Trump's deportation numbers are still lower than Obama's, however, whose administration deported over 400,000 people in fiscal year 2012 alone.

'This certainly creates fear within the immigrant community'

Up to 2,000 immigrants who have been ordered deported will be targeted by the ICE operation, according to a recent New York Times report, with intention of deporting them as soon as possible.

Karla McKanders, a law professor and Immigration Practice Clinic director at Vanderbilt University, told INSIDER that based on what's been said by the administration "other immigrants who are in the presence of the targeted individuals may be arrested as well."

"Recently, the administration has stated that they are going to workplaces and has tapped into state driver's license databases to locate people," McKanders said. "In the past immigration raids

have taken place at workplaces, which allows for rounding up mass numbers of undocumented immigrants versus going to individual places of residence. ICE, however, may utilize both of these methods."

McKanders said the raids will impact mixed-status families in particular, or families "with US citizen children and undocumented family members or parents." She said that previous administrations typically prioritized the removal of immigrants who committed crimes and "not long-term individuals who have remained in the United States and who are a part of mixed status families."

"The concern is that the raids will simply be an interior separation of families with undocumented parents with United States citizen children," McKanders said. "This certainly creates fear within the immigrant community."

McKanders also said that the raids are "congruent" with Trump's more general efforts to stop migration from Central America and deport immigrants, and "without regards to the Immigration and Nationality Act or due process rights to which immigrants are entitled."

Under Trump, ICE has become increasingly zealous in carrying out its mission of enforcing US immigration laws within the nation's borders, and in the process has been accused of human rights violations.

Dozens of immigrants have died while in ICE custody, which has compounded criticism of the law enforcement agency from human rights and immigration groups as well as some Democrats in Congress.

Amnesty International USA's advocacy director for the Americas, Charanya Krishnaswami, in a statement on Thursday said the raids are an "extension of President Trump's relentless hostility to immigrants" and serve "to encourage hate and discrimination toward immigrants and communities of color, creating a climate of fear for many people including those fearing racial profiling.

The raids are expected to take place in Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, New York, and San Francisco.