

LA Times Raids that did not happen...

Nerves frayed, arrests scarce in raids

Trump's ICE threat petrifies many, but enforcement is slim.



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PROTESTERS IN CHICAGO march to Immigration and Customs Enforcement offices Saturday to decry President Trump's raids.

PROTESTERS IN CHICAGO march to Immigration and Customs Enforcement offices Saturday to decry President Trump's raids. (Nuccio DiNuzzo Getty Images) FEW ICE ARRESTS were reported Sunday, but the threat left many migrants afraid to go out. Above, federal agents conduct an operation in Compton in 2018. (Kent Nishimura Los Angeles Times) By Cindy Carcamo, Andrea Castillo, Molly Hennessy-Fiske, Louis Sahagun and Giulia McDonnell Nieto del Rio

Most Sundays, Elias takes his girlfriend and toddler to the beach or the park. This Sunday, the three hunkered down in his MacArthur Park apartment.

Elias and his family were reacting to the Trump administration's long-threatened Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids, which supposedly were set to begin Sunday morning.

The Guatemalan immigrant, who asked to be identified only by his first name, doesn't have a removal order against him and has a visa that allows him to temporarily live and work in the country legally.

Still, he's petrified to leave his home. He used vacation days to avoid going to work at his cafe job this week. Over the weekend, he ordered meals online for delivery and answered the door only to people he knew.

“I feel like there is no way to hide but just pray to my God to protect me,” he said.

In immigrant communities across the country, the weekend brought anxiety and questions about how extensive the much-hyped ICE action actually would be.

Although there were scattered reports over the weekend of ICE agents poised to sweep into urban areas, and of arrests in a few states, by Sunday evening there was nothing approaching the mass roundups that the White House had suggested could roll out over the next days or weeks.

The anticipated raids — which President Trump last week forecast as a “major operation” — were expected to target several major U.S. cities, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Chicago, Miami, Denver, Atlanta, Baltimore and Houston. ICE was believed to be focusing on about 2,000 immigrants who have missed court appearances or been ordered to be removed from the U.S.

Many local and state elected officials and regional law enforcement agencies across the country have denounced the anticipated raids and pledged not to cooperate with ICE.

This was the second time this summer that presidential vows of large-scale raids have failed to happen. The president announced in a June 17 tweet that ICE soon would start deporting “millions” of migrants; the operation was put on hold days later.

Over the weekend, protests were held in cities including Los Angeles, Chicago, Denver and Philadelphia. At one immigration detention center in Washington state, a man armed with a rifle and throwing incendiary devices died Saturday after four police officers arrived and opened fire. The shooting happened six hours after a peaceful rally in front of the facility.

Louis DeSipio, a political science professor at UC Irvine, said the way the weekend transpired illustrated Trump’s ability to maintain high levels of fear in immigrant communities, regardless of whether his threats materialize.

But Sunday’s lack of action probably further strained the president’s relationship with ICE, because the agency once again had to divert resources into an operation that fell short of expectations, DeSipio said.

By comparison, he said, the George W. Bush administration moved away from highly publicized activities because officials realized that such actions strained resources and inhibited essential day-to-day immigration enforcement operations.

“That means there’s less enforcement, ironically,” under the Trump administration, DeSipio said.

ICE operations are continuing. The agency typically conducts large-scale operations three or four times during the year and generally averages 40 to 50 arrests a day during larger operations, an agent previously told The Times. Those operations target public safety threats, such as convicted criminals and individuals who have violated immigration laws. Last year in California, ICE conducted at least four operations that spanned several days, resulting in nearly 700 arrests.

Agents conducted a targeted enforcement operation in Los Angeles from July 7 to last Thursday, according to an ICE official. Dozens were arrested, the majority with criminal convictions. Similar operations have netted just fewer than 900 arrests nationwide during the last couple of months, the official said.

Last week, as the possibility of large-scale raids surfaced, immigrant-rights advocates mounted a legal counteroffensive. The American Civil Liberties Union filed a preemptive lawsuit Thursday in U.S. District Court in San Francisco seeking a temporary restraining order that would have forced ICE to allow detainees access to legal services — including on Sundays, when immigration processing centers are closed, lawyers said.

Judge James Donato denied the restraining order but said he “expects” that immigrants won’t be deported until they can speak to an attorney.

“This is a serious concern, and access to an attorney for individuals confronted by the police power of the state is a hallowed principle in our republic,” he said.

In Miami on Sunday, ICE agents were seen knocking on doors near the city’s international airport, and on Friday in the rural migrant farming community of Immokalee, Fla., but there were no reports of arrests.

Norelia Sanchez, an immigrant family support worker with Redlands Christian Migrant Assn. in Immokalee, said migrants called her Friday morning when they saw ICE agents going door to door.

Sanchez said she emerged from her home to see mothers rushing through the streets with their children as if they were fleeing a disaster. “You would see parents that were actually with a phone in their hand, nervous and running because there are summer programs and they’re trying to take children to school,” she said.

In New York, three attempted ICE raids were reported Saturday — two in the Sunset Park area of Brooklyn and one in Harlem, according to the New York Mayor’s Office of Immigration Affairs. No arrests were made, the office said in a statement.

Claudia Galicia, a community organizer with Sunset Park Latino Democrats, said families told her that ICE agents showed up at apartment complexes and started ringing doorbells. She said many people, especially those with outstanding deportation orders, left their homes and are staying with family, friends or in sanctuary churches around the city.

But those who stayed home knew to assert their right to not open the door for agents, she said. “One family told us that they hid in their bedroom while ICE knocked on their door for 20 minutes,” Galicia said.

In Mexico and Central America, news of the raids was widely circulated, but official reaction was generally tepid in a region where leaders often are hesitant to criticize U.S. policy directly.

Marcelo Ebrard, the Mexican foreign minister, told reporters Sunday that Mexico would “defend without restriction the rights of our co-nationals in the United States,” repeating the country’s oft-stated position. Any Mexican nationals deported “are going to find in Mexico an opportunity for jobs and support from the Mexican government,” he added.

Mexico’s quasi-independent National Commission on Human Rights said it was watching the raids “with preoccupation,” voicing concern that the enhanced enforcement could prompt “acts of discrimination and xenophobia” against people “who only look for a better opportunity in life for themselves and their families.”

Mexico and Central American nations already receive large numbers of deportees returned on an almost daily basis via the U.S.-Mexico border or flown to Guatemala, El Salvador and other nations.

In Guatemala, President Jimmy Morales canceled a planned visit Monday to Washington amid strong U.S. pressure for Guatemala to accept designation as a “safe third country” for migrants. The Guatemalan government said it has not agreed to such a designation, which could result in Honduran and El Salvadoran asylum seekers detained at the U.S.-Mexico border being sent back to Guatemala for adjudication of their claims.

Critics say that violence-plagued Guatemala, a major source of asylum seekers in the United States, is ill-suited as a safe haven for migrants. Back in MacArthur Park, which for decades has served as a port of entry for new arrivals from Mexico and Central America, the prevailing mood among business owners Sunday was one of unease and anger as the threat of raids kept patrons away.

The 30-acre park — usually a magnet for throngs of people on a summer weekend — was nearly empty.

Leaning against the counter of a Total Wireless store, salesman Biviano Oxlaj, who earns commission on sales, shook his head in dismay.

“I’ve been staring at the front door all day, just hoping a customer shows up,” he said. “Business is down by 75%, and it’s been that way since Saturday. But since this is all because of an order from the White House, there’s not much anyone can do but wait for it to pass like a storm cloud.”

In nearby Koreatown, Edgar Barrera noticed that his neighborhood was quieter than usual Sunday. Fewer people attended the morning church service, he didn’t spot many families walking the streets, and the nearby Guatemalan and Salvadoran bakeries were virtually empty, he said.

Barrera, 59, lives in the country illegally and works seven days a week managing a shop that ships packages to Guatemala. But he said he won’t let fear ruin the life he’s built over the last 20 years.

“I can’t give myself the luxury of not going to work,” he said. “I have to pay rent; I have to pay for food. My mother is sick and needs medicine, and I’m the only person who can pay her medical bills.”

Sunday morning, Barrera took side roads to get to work. But he’s not changing his routine too much.

“I’m tired of running away all the time,” he said. “I’m hoping that if I stay calm, nothing will happen.”

Times staff writers Brittney Mejia in Los Angeles and Patrick McDonnell in Mexico City, with special correspondent Cecilia Sanchez in The Times’ Mexico City bureau, contributed to this report.



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