



Operation Legend: Department of Justice Assistance to Curb Increases in Violent Crime

July 31, 2020

On July 22, 2020, [Attorney General \(AG\) William Barr](#) announced that the Department of Justice (DOJ) was expanding [Operation Legend](#)—which started in Kansas City, MO, on July 8, 2020—to Chicago, IL, and Albuquerque, NM. As a part of Operation Legend, DOJ plans to send agents from the [Federal Bureau of Investigation \(FBI\)](#); the [U.S. Marshals Service \(USMS\)](#); the [Drug Enforcement Administration \(DEA\)](#); and the [Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives \(ATF\)](#) to these cities to work in conjunction with state and local law enforcement to address violent crime. The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS's) [Homeland Security Investigations](#) also is to participate in Operation Legend. On July 29, 2020, [AG Barr](#) announced that DOJ would send additional agents to Detroit, MI; Cleveland, OH; and Milwaukee, WI, in a further expansion of Operation Legend. DOJ is also providing grant funding to the cities targeted for Operation Legend.

State and local law enforcement agencies have worked with federal law enforcement in the past on a variety of task forces, and [federal law enforcement assistance is usually welcome](#). However, in Portland, OR, in a DHS operation ([Operation Diligent Valor](#)), which is separate from Operation Legend, there have been reports of DHS law enforcement officers in [military-style uniforms having detained protestors and placed them in unmarked vehicles](#). These reports have raised concerns about how DOJ and DHS agents deployed under Operation Legend might operate. However, officials in Chicago and New Mexico [appear willing to accept federal assistance as long as agents respect civil rights](#).

Violent Crime in Major Cities

AG Barr [cited increases in violent crime](#) in Chicago, Albuquerque, Detroit, Cleveland, and Milwaukee as the reason for expanding Operation Legend to these cities, highlighting crimes committed by gangs or in which a firearm is used.

The Administration has not publicly specified any criteria for determining which cities would be targeted for DOJ law enforcement assistance. [Data from the Major Cities Chiefs Association \(MCCA\)](#) that compare the number of reported violent crimes (homicides, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) in the first quarter of 2020 to the first quarter of 2019 in 65 jurisdictions suggests that if DOJ is targeting cities with increases in violent crime, there are numerous candidates for assistance. Compared to the first quarter of 2019, 50 jurisdictions other than the six targeted for Operation Legend also reported an

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increase in the number of violent crimes in one or more categories in the first quarter of 2020. Of the six cities targeted for Operation Legend, Milwaukee had the highest percentage increase in homicides (100.0%), robberies (24.6%), and aggravated assaults (18.7%) in the first quarter of 2020, while Kansas City was the only city that had an increase in rapes (11.5%). Of the non-Operation Legend jurisdictions, 5 had the same or a greater percentage increase in homicides than Milwaukee, 6 had a greater percentage increase in robberies, and 11 had a greater percentage increase in aggravated assaults. Twelve jurisdictions had a greater percentage increase in rapes than Kansas City.

DOJ-Lead Task Forces

AG Barr indicated that DOJ will provide assistance to Kansas City, Chicago, Albuquerque, Detroit, Cleveland, and Milwaukee through anti-violence task forces in these cities. DOJ operates numerous existing task forces with state and local law enforcement that could be utilized to assist jurisdictions with reducing violent crime.

- The FBI operates [160 Violent Gang Safe Streets Task Forces across the country](#). According to the FBI, these task forces promote cooperation between federal, state, and local law enforcement to “pursue violent gangs through sustained, proactive, coordinated investigations to obtain prosecutions on violations such as racketeering, drug conspiracy, and firearms violations.”
- DEA operates [271 state and local task forces](#), through which it coordinates drug enforcement efforts with state and local law enforcement agencies. DEA notes that the task forces allow it to draw upon the expertise of state or local law enforcement, share resources, and deputize state and local police as federal drug agents.
- USMS operates [seven regional and 60 local fugitive task forces](#). According to USMS, the task forces combine the efforts of “federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies to locate and apprehend the most dangerous fugitives and assist in high profile investigations.”
- In addition to the task forces lead by DOJ law enforcement agencies, the Bureau of Justice Assistance, through its [Project Safe Neighborhoods \(PSN\) program](#), funds task forces headed by the U.S. Attorney’s Office that “create and foster safer neighborhoods through a sustained reduction in violent crime, including, but not limited to, addressing criminal gangs and the felonious possession and use of firearms.”

Task Forces’ Effects on Crime

It will be some time before it is known whether DOJ’s efforts to support local law enforcement by expanding anti-violence task forces have reduced the number of violent crimes. [While far from definitive, there are some indications](#) that multi-jurisdictional violent crime task forces can be effective at reducing violent crime (in this case, homicide), but also that a critical component of effective task forces is that they are [well integrated into the jurisdictions’ overall violent crime reduction strategy](#). Some research also suggests that the collaborative approach utilized by PSN task forces [can reduce violent crime](#).

Police-Community Relations

[The events in Portland, OR](#), where DHS has deployed agents, have led some local officials to [raise concerns](#) about DOJ and DHS agents being deployed under Operation Legend into their cities and states and the actions they may engage in while they are deployed. When the police engage in actions that are

viewed as violating people's civil rights or targeting people of color, it might hamper their ability to solve crimes because people might be less likely to cooperate with them. [Two criminologists who study race and crime assert](#) that when citizens question whether police act in a fair and impartial manner, when they fear that the police will cause them unwarranted bodily harm, and when they doubt that police will thoroughly investigate the use of force by their own, they start to perceive the law as illegitimate, unresponsive, and unable to ensure public safety.

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