

**NINA MOINI:** Whiplash, chaotic, dangerous, those are some of the words used in a new report to describe what's happening at the Department of Homeland Security under the Trump administration. More than 80 former and current DHS employees, including Justice Department officials, ICE agents, lawyers, and top leadership, spoke to a team of reporters at *The New York Times* for an extensive piece of reporting that ran in *The New York Times Magazine* this week.

Those officials shared reflections on the full timeline of changes at DHS from Trump's election in 2024 through Operation Metro Surge, and up to the replacement of former DHS Secretary Kristi Noem in early March. Rachel Poser was one of the reporters on the story, and she joins me now to tell me more. Hi, Rachel.

**RACHER** Hi. Great to be here.

**POSER:**

**NINA MOINI:** This is really an incredible piece of reporting. So let's just start with this. Why did you decide to report on this and end this way by interviewing dozens of people?

**RACHER** Well, I don't have to tell people in Minnesota that since he retook office last year, Trump has carried out the

**POSER:** harshest crackdown on immigrants inside the country since the 1950s. And my co-reporters and I really wanted to understand what it was like to be a part of that effort.

We spoke to people across the immigration enforcement arms of DHS from street-level agents up to the executive level. Because I think often there's been so much news coming out of the Department. But it can, first of all, be overwhelming for people to follow.

And so this is structured as a timeline. So you can really see the way that the Trump administration set these targets. Stephen Miller set the target in May last year of 3,000 arrests a day, a million deportations a year.

And we wanted to lay it out on a timeline that every time the administration has faced a barrier or an obstacle, how they have tried to break through it, including by violating hundreds of court orders. And I think putting it in a timeline and hearing it from the people inside just gives it a texture that we haven't seen in the news up till now.

**NINA MOINI:** The timeline narrative was very compelling. I felt very pulled through, and also just a reminder of all the things that have happened in just a little bit more than a year. I'm wondering what you think was the turning point that led some of these people to actually speak to you and your fellow journalists.

**RACHER** Yeah. I mean, I think that this is the third in a series of oral histories that my co-reporter, Emily Bazelon, and I have done about the transformation of the federal workforce. We did one on DOJ. We did one on FBI.

**POSER:**

And we're hearing from a lot of people across these agencies that they feel as though the media is the last open avenue to express some of the concern that they're feeling about the way that their agencies are being transformed. Some of them would say weaponized. Because at DHS, the watchdog arms, the Civil Rights Office, the ombudsman's office were really dismantled by Krist Noem when she came in. And so people feel as though there's no--

The internal routes for expressing some of this dissent either have been shut down or aren't properly functioning. And so I think that they are concerned about retaliation from the Trump administration. A lot of these people spoke to us anonymously, especially the people who are still there. But they felt it was important and felt like talking to the media was really the way-- the only way to get these stories out.

**NINA MOINI:** One agent with Homeland Security Investigations, which is under DHS, said there was, quote, "an incredible amount of pressure for numbers," and quote, "at times there was borderline profiling." Of course, we've heard a lot about quotas and racial profiling concerns. We've done some reporting on ourselves. How widespread was that sentiment across all of these people that you interviewed?

**RACHER  
POSER:** There was a lot of concern. I think that those concerns about profiling were echoed again and again. We talked to one agent who said that their agents were sitting on a house. They had someone on a list that they knew that they were supposed to be picking up. But a different person came out of the house. And just because he was a Hispanic male, the agents pulled this person over and initiated a car stop.

So this agent said to said to them, don't do this. We're just not going to engage in this. Normally, ICE agents are working from lists, where they are given names of people and addresses. There's been an investigation done to determine that this person is indeed out of status, has a final order of removal.

And we report on a meeting that took place in May, where Stephen Miller gathers the heads of the field offices together. And he basically says, there's no list anymore. Everybody's fair game. And so the questions that these agents had, well, then if there's no list, how are we finding these people?

And one of the people we spoke to at that meeting, who himself identifies as a brown person, said, what are we supposed to be doing? Just like walking up to people who are brown and asking for their citizenship status. So the concerns were really widespread.

**NINA MOINI:** Of course, here in Minneapolis, as you noted, the shootings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti were things that just really ramped things up. So I'm curious what you heard about the aftermath of that within the agency.

**RACHER  
POSER:** Yes, so we spoke to two agents who were on the ground in Minneapolis about that, as well as other people throughout the department. And it did really send shockwaves. I mean, I think that opinion varied.

We spoke to people who felt like the reaction was sort of tarring all of them with this broad brush that-- but there was a lot of concern about the quickness with which Kristi Noem had weighed in on the shooting and implied that Good was a domestic terrorist, that Alex Pretti was a domestic terrorist.

We talked to one agent who is a more experienced agent and was there with a lot of new recruits. And this person felt that Kristi Noem going out there and clearing these agents essentially gave the impression that it allowed these new recruits to push the limits.

He describes that they were given these big canisters of MACE, essentially, that they normally wouldn't be carrying, and that he knew, as someone who had been properly trained, that anytime you use that, that's a use of force incident that needs to be investigated. But he was describing seeing these new recruits just going and driving their cars and spraying anybody who was in their path and not reporting it. So it added to a lot of concern. But also agents felt that it increased a sense of immunity and lawlessness among people on the ground.

**NINA MOINI:** Were there any other takeaways of the reflections that people shared with you about the mass campaign here in Minnesota?

**RACHER  
POSER:** Yeah, I mean, it was very interesting to talk to some of the agents about just being the subject of protest and vitriol and the way that they were trying to deal with that. We spoke to mostly people who had concerns, obviously not everyone did.

But they were describing putting Harris-Walz stickers and anti-Trump stickers on their bags so that they wouldn't be identified as ICE agents, using their personal credit cards at hotels so that the hotel staff wouldn't know that they were ICE agents.

There was a real sense of that they felt of being under siege. But I think that the overall impression that that had gone too far. Within the agency, that was the feeling, was that this has been chaotic. It had been dangerous, obviously, for the people of Minnesota and also for the agents themselves.

And removing Greg Bovino and bringing in Tom Homan, the border czar, was an acknowledgment of that by the administration, and that they were going to change their tactics. I think over the past year, we've seen them come out and really try to take a kind of shock-and-awe approach to immigration. And now we're seeing them reconsider the optics. They've certainly not pulled back on their goals for deportation.

**NINA MOINI:** Yeah, your piece ends with several people talking about the distrust that DHS now faces, both internally among those working there-- so many people have left-- and then, of course, externally. So do you have a sense for what's next for DHS after everything that's happened? Is it basically what you just said, the tactics change, but the goals remain?

**RACHER  
POSER:** We're really waiting to see what Markwayne Mullin, the new homeland security secretary, how he will lead the agency. I think that the employees we spoke to, everyone's in a state of suspension.

I think that we're waiting to see what this quieter but probably equally aggressive approach to immigration enforcement will be in the coming year. But certainly, people feel as though the agency's legitimacy has been badly damaged.

People were predicting to us that there's going to be-- have to be some kind of reckoning when a new administration comes in about the things that happened in Minnesota and elsewhere. And there are questions about what that will look like, whether ICE will even survive as an agency, or whether it's going to be folded into something else. I think there's a real sense of uncertainty within DHS right now.

**NINA MOINI:** Thanks so much for taking the time to join us today, Rachel.

**RACHER  
POSER:** Thank you.