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What are sanctuary cities?

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AT A press conference two days after Donald Trump was elected president, Bill de Blasio, New York's mayor, sought to assuage the fears of his city's undocumented residents. "We are not going to sacrifice a half-million people who live amongst us, who are part of our communities, whose family members and loved ones happen to be people in many cases who are either permanent residents or citizens—we're not going to tear families apart." During his campaign, Mr Trump vowed to deport millions of undocumented immigrants from America. The leaders of New York and several other "sanctuary" cities such as Seattle, Chicago and San Francisco (pictured) insist they will resist any such dragnet. What is a sanctuary city?



There is no specific legal definition for what constitutes a sanctuary jurisdiction but the term is widely used to refer to American cities, counties or states that protect undocumented immigrants from deportation by limiting cooperation with federal immigration authorities. Some decline to use city or state tax dollars to enforce federal immigration laws. Many prohibit local officials from asking people about their immigration status. Sanctuary policies can be mandated expressly by law or practiced unofficially. Proponents say they help ensure that undocumented immigrants don't avoid reporting crimes, seeking healthcare and enrolling in schools for fear of deportation. Los Angeles was the first to institute such policies in 1979 when the city's police department forbade officers from detaining people with the objective of finding out their immigration status. An unofficial tally by the Centre for Immigration Studies, a non-profit organisation that studies immigration, categorises some 300 cities,

counties and states as sanctuary jurisdictions, including the cities of New Orleans and Boston, and the entire states of California, Connecticut, New Mexico and Colorado.

Scrutiny of sanctuary jurisdictions intensified last July after a young American woman was shot in San Francisco by a man who was in the United States illegally, had seven previous felony convictions and had already been deported five times. In a campaign speech in August, shortly after the shooting, Mr Trump vowed to block funding to areas deemed uncooperative with federal immigration authorities. "We will end the sanctuary cities that have resulted in so many needless deaths," he promised. "[They] will not receive taxpayer dollars." Reince Priebus, Mr Trump's chief of staff, confirmed in a television interview on November 20th that the administration intends to make good on Mr Trump's campaign vow. If the administration proceeds with cuts, the results could be dire: according to CNN, New York alone could lose \$10.4bn in funding for social services and other municipal programs.

Mr de Blasio called Mr Trump's threat to cut funding for sanctuary areas "dangerous" but cast doubts on whether the president-elect would actually follow through. Rahm Emanuel, Chicago's mayor, is also sceptical: "I don't believe they'll do it, because that would mean every major city in the United States would be targeted," he reasoned. "They will make a choice that this is not the battle they want to take on because they have bigger fish to fry." Slashing funding is the surest way to attack sanctuary areas; combatting them legally could prove more difficult. A recent court ruling in Illinois deemed it unconstitutional for federal officials to ask local jails to detain suspected undocumented immigrants without a warrant. Such challenges could make it difficult for the Trump administration to follow through on its threats. Indeed Mr Trump was conspicuously silent on deportation in a YouTube address on November 21st in which he laid out his policy agenda for the first 100 days of his presidency.