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Papal security presents 'unprecedented' challenge

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Security was seen in front of the popemobile at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington.

By Matt Rocheleau

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During his historic tour of the United States, Pope Francis will be faithfully followed not just by massive crowds of devout Catholics, but also by a remarkable number of law enforcement and security personnel.

“I would say it’s one of the largest, if not the largest special event we’ve ever seen here,” Paul Abbate, who leads the FBI’s Washington field office, [told CBS News](#).

Papal protection presents “unprecedented challenges,” said [William Bratton](#), police commissioner in New York, one of three cities the pope will visit. His six-day US tour began in Washington, D.C., and will also include Philadelphia.

The US Department of Homeland Security has declared the pontiff’s visit a “national special security event,” which “allows for enhanced cooperation of local, state and federal partners in establishing a safe and secure environment.”

“There is a tremendous amount of advance planning and coordination in the areas of venue security, air space security, training, communications, and credentialing,” Secret Service spokesman Brian Leary said in an e-mail to the Globe on Wednesday.



Papal speech to Congress may be controversial

Pope Francis will likely make members of Congress on both sides of the aisle squirm with

his remarks Thursday.

There are typically only a few national special security events every year in the United States. Prior ones have included presidential inaugurations, State of the Union addresses, Democratic and Republican national conventions, funerals for former presidents, Super Bowls, and Olympics.

The designation puts the Secret Service in charge of the effort to protect His Holiness.

The Secret Service has spent months planning, meeting multiple times with Vatican security officials in both Rome and Washington to learn more about how the pope interacts with crowds. The agency also has a 3-D virtual map at its disposal so officials can study up on areas the pope plans to visit, CBS reported.

Along with the Secret Service, at least 44 other agencies and organizations will lend their expertise and resources to keep Pope Francis safe.

The lengthy list includes: the FBI, FEMA, the TSA, the FAA, the Department of Defense, US Customs and Border Protection, the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office, the US Coast Guard, the National Guard, the Federal Protective Service, and the National Park Service; state and municipal police and fire departments; mayoral offices; Amtrak and public transit agencies; and local health, public works, and transportation departments.

“Our goal is to develop and implement, with the numerous participating/partner agencies, a seamless comprehensive security plan that will create a safe and secure environment for our protectees, other dignitaries, event participants, and the general public,” said Leary.

Francis will also have some of his own security alongside, including the Vatican police chief and two Swiss guards.

At each of the pope's three domestic destinations, there are restrictions and bans on pedestrian access, parking, driving, biking, flying, sailing, and riding public transit.

Traffic barriers are being used to block off four-and-a-half square miles of downtown Philadelphia.

In New York, the pope's visit will coincide with the United Nations General Assembly, creating a particularly tricky security assignment that may require up to 5,000 officers to be deployed to protect the pontiff and dignitaries from around the world.

Security checkpoints will be established to screen people entering areas close to where the pope will be.

The Secret Service has established a list of items that are banned from papal events, from standard contraband — like weapons and large backpacks — to the less obvious — like balloons and selfie sticks.

“Surrendered items will not be returned, or available for pick-up,” the Secret Service said in a press release about the security restrictions.

Officials did not provide figures for the total number of officers that will be deployed for the pope's entire tour, the expected cost of security during his visit, the anticipated crowd sizes, or about how many items have been confiscated.

“We cannot discuss the means, methods, specific resources, or numbers we utilize to carry out our protective responsibilities,” said Leary.

The Secret Service in a press release asked for “the public's cooperation and patience in abiding by these restrictions.”

“While an event of this size has the potential to cause inconveniences, the Secret Service, working together with its law enforcement and public safety partners, will make every effort to anticipate and minimize disruptions,” said Leary.

Material from The Associated Press and The New York Times was used in this report. Matt Rocheleau can be reached at matthew.rocheleau@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter [@mrochele](https://twitter.com/mrochele)

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