



## Trump Enacts Radical Approach to Migration Policy and Securing U.S. Borders

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Donald Trump's prioritisation of combating irregular migration, including by sealing borders, is affecting citizens of Latin America and has an impact on the situation in Canada. The draconian actions taken since the beginning of his term are aimed at shifting responsibility for controlling and blocking migration to countries in the United States' southern neighbourhood. Failure to effectively address the root causes of migration will muddle the administration's long-term immigration policy as well as the image of the Republican Party before next year's midterm elections.

President Trump is fulfilling a key campaign promise to counter irregular migration. According to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), there are about 11-12 million undocumented persons in the U.S. They primarily are from [Latin American](#) countries (e.g., Brazil, Guatemala, Mexico, and El Salvador) and from Asia (China, the Philippines, and India). The main pathway for migration into the U.S. is via the southern border with Mexico, where between 2021 and 2024 the number of irregular crossings was 8.72 million. Incidents at the northern border with Canada have also increased significantly, with about 490,000 recorded cases of irregular migration in the same period.

**The Republican Party's Approach to Migration.** The focus of Trump and Republican (GOP) politicians on the issue of migration stems from fears among their electorate that crime in the U.S. is exceptionally high and attributable to immigrants. According to research conducted by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, in 2024 up to 83% of GOP supporters believed that irregular migration posed a threat to U.S. security. Trump's personal position, which has [influenced the GOP for years now](#), has stemmed from a policy position both formulated and backed by conservative, "America First" think tanks and advisors. The ["Project 2025"](#) plan initiated by some of them prioritises securing the border and strict enforcement of immigration law as a basic tool to protect the U.S. from terrorism and crime. Among GOP members of the U.S. Congress, especially

those from southern border states (e.g., Arizona, Florida, Texas), irregular migration is viewed as a crisis caused by inconsistent policies under the previous, Joe Biden administration. They argue that the immigration system requires major reform and federal funds at the expense of other programmes (including [support for Ukraine](#)). This approach is in line with Trump's, who exacerbated the perception of a crisis when he linked increased crime in the U.S. to irregular migration, linking it to a feeling of expanded Latin American gang activity (e.g., MS-13, Tren de Aragua), including increased drug smuggling. In a recent YouGov poll, the majority of Americans (53%) support Trump's solutions to irregular migration, stating that such policies will effectively control the problem in the short to medium term.

### **Implementation of Policy and the Administration's Tools.**

Trump began his term by expanding his administration's freedom to act, signing Executive Orders declaring a national emergency at the southern border and designating drug cartels and gangs from Latin American countries operating in the U.S. as terrorist organisations. The administration's approach to border protection and irregular migration is tied to combating drug smuggling, particularly fentanyl. In 2024, 87,000 people in the U.S. died from a drug overdose, with about 70% of those cases due to fentanyl. According to Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) data, in 2024, 98% of the illegal type of this drug was smuggled through the southern border. The Trump administration has identified organised

crime groups and cartels from Latin America as the main culprits in smuggling and producing this drug, while blaming China for irresponsibly supplying them with the necessary chemicals to make it. Trump has deployed military forces to strengthen the southern border, including 10,000 soldiers, about 100 combat vehicles, and reconnaissance aircraft. The president also suggested the U.S. could conduct precision drone strikes against cartels in Mexico. Warships are also supporting U.S. Coast Guard patrols in the Gulf of Mexico (or “Gulf of America” in the U.S.), which are aimed at deterring and stopping irregular migration and drug smuggling into the United States.

To carry out his policies, Trump has appointed people with many years of experience in law enforcement and support his uncompromising stance or politicians associated with his “Make America Great Again” (MAGA) movement who will implement policy without hesitation to lead key federal agencies (e.g. CBP; Immigration and Customs Enforcement, ICE). Attorney General Pam Bondi said that combating irregular migration is a top priority for the FBI. To improve interagency cooperation on this policy, a special coordinator for immigration was appointed—Tom Homan, a former deputy director of ICE for law enforcement and deportation operations (2014-2016) and ICE acting director in 2017-2018. However, migration policy is also made by people in Trump’s inner circle, demonstrating loyalty and readiness to implement the president’s vision (e.g., Deputy Chief of Staff to the White House Stephen Miller). These actions have increased tensions with states or cities governed by Democratic Party politicians (e.g., Boston and Chicago), who see Trump’s actions as violations of human rights, a militarising of policy, and usurpation of their powers by the federal government.

### **Policy Results and Means of Influencing Other Countries.**

The strengthening of the southern border and public announcements of mass deportations by Trump have led to fewer migrants entering the U.S. on this route. In February this year, there were about 11,700 reported cases, which is a dramatic decrease in relation to instances recorded in the same month in the years of the Biden presidency (189,900 in 2024; 156,600 in 2023; 166,000 in 2022). However, contrary to the Trump administration’s declarations, the average number of mass deportations is lower than under Biden.

Trump’s immigration actions are affecting relations with countries in the Americas, which the president wants to submit to his policy. He is pursuing an [increasingly aggressive approach](#) towards Latin America so that the countries there actively participate in the U.S. deportation process and stop migration in their jurisdictions before it reaches the southern border. He is also using [tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico](#) as a means of pressuring their leaders to seal the borders and combat drug smuggling. The Mexican president

followed through on a plan to send 10,000 troops to guard the border with the U.S. and extradited 29 cartel leaders. Although the fentanyl flow through Canada is less than 1%, [now former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau](#) tried to convince Trump that he was a reliable partner in combating it in order to avoid, albeit unsuccessfully, a trade war. He announced closer cooperation between the federal Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the CBP and FBI, designated cartels as terrorist groups, and allocated an additional \$139 million to combat the smuggling, production, and distribution of fentanyl in Canada. In addition, Canada will invest \$900 million to strengthen border monitoring and patrolling measures.

**Conclusions.** The Trump administration’s aggressive migration policy can be considered partially effective domestically. Significant decreases in the number of irregular crossings at the southern border indicate that the new approach to U.S. border security is effectively deterring migrants. However, the administration has had difficulty in achieving higher efficiency rates despite a more rapid and broad deportation programme than during the Biden presidency. This is due to financial constraints and staff shortages, such as ICE officers. Therefore, in order to increase this rate, the U.S. authorities are bending the law even further and even refraining from complying with some court decisions. In addition, they are making mistakes and using questionable premises for some deportees.

To maintain support, Trump will continue to present himself as a president effectively implementing his promises. On the other hand, focusing the responsibilities of federal agencies responsible for U.S. national security (e.g., the FBI) on irregular migration will make it more difficult to track different threats and conduct counterintelligence protection against, among others, Russian or Chinese intelligence activities in the U.S.

In the foreign policy context, Trump’s expectations towards partners in the region, including Mexico and some Central American and Caribbean countries, are crucial for implementing his policy aimed at blocking migration from the south. Political pressure and threats of higher duties, such as those against Canada, may work in the short term for the administration, but they will make building long-term relations with partners very difficult. Trump’s desire to accelerate a resolution of this problem may include more involvement of U.S. troops, which may raise further concerns about the actual ability of the U.S. to quickly project power in several regions of the world in the event of a potential escalation of tensions by Russia, China, Iran, or North Korea. Also, in the political context, the administration’s focus on [policy in the Western Hemisphere](#) will limit Trump’s ability to quickly respond to threats in other parts of the world.