

# POLICY FOCUS

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## **Border Security is Pro-Immigration and Pro-Security**

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### **HIGHLIGHT**

Border security and immigration have become top concerns for Americans, reflecting deep worries about national safety and community preservation. Recent polls show a significant majority perceives the U.S.-Mexico border situation as a crisis, with bipartisan dissatisfaction over government handling. We need secure borders as a first step to comprehensive reform that will allow for legal immigration that works in America's best interests.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The sanctity, integrity, and security of our homeland should be a priority for the federal government. By and large, Americans agree.

Over the last year, the issue of border security and immigration has ascended to the forefront of American public concern, reflecting what appear to be deep-seated concerns about the protection of our homeland and the preservation of our communities. Recent polling data underscores the significance of this sentiment and highlights the complexities policymakers face in addressing these concerns.

A [Pew Research Center survey](#), conducted in early 2024, reveals that a vast majority of Americans (78 percent) perceive the influx of migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border as either a crisis or a major problem. This sentiment spans across party lines, although the intensity varies significantly; 70 percent of Republicans view the situation as a crisis compared to only 22 percent of Democrats. This widespread concern is further amplified by the fact that [80 percent of respondents believe the federal government is mishandling](#) the situation, with dissatisfaction cutting across both Republican and Democratic respondents. A clear majority (58 percent) believe the influx of migrants is due to U.S. immigration policies that will make it easy to stay in the country illegally once they arrive.

Similarly, a [Gallup poll conducted in February 2024](#) shows that for the first time since 2019, immigration has been identified as the most pressing issue facing the nation, with 28 percent of Americans citing it as their top concern. This marks a notable increase from 20 percent the previous month, driven largely by Republican respondents (57 percent) who increasingly prioritize immigration over other issues. This shift highlights the heightened urgency and political salience of uncontrolled immigration as a national concern.

In April 2024, data from [Global Strategy Group](#), a decidedly left-leaning polling entity, still found that while 81 percent of battleground voters support a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who have been living in the U.S. for many years, pass a background check, and pay taxes, it also found strong support for robust border security solutions. More than 70 percent of voters support investing in

border security measures such as increased screening capacity, improving technology and infrastructure at the border, and increasing the number of border officials. This sentiment is echoed in a [Wall Street Journal poll from March 2024](#), where 59 percent of respondents support a bipartisan package that includes both tougher border security and a pathway to citizenship for immigrants who have been in the country for many years.

Together, these findings demonstrate a clear demand for comprehensive and pragmatic border security and a nuanced approach to immigration reform. This dual approach reflects the complex perspectives of the American public, who seek to safeguard the nation's borders but also view legal immigration as a fundamental aspect of the American promise.

However, it is clear based on both the data and the current political climate that comprehensive immigration reform is not possible (nor tolerable) without first addressing border security.

A secure border is a necessary precursor to having a functional immigration system that allows good people to come to our country to pursue the American dream. It is not “anti-immigrant” or even “anti-immigration” to demand a safeguarded border. Rather, it is a pro-legal, pro-American stance that advances the interests of our citizens and nations. Arguably, having wildly unregulated immigration is the path to have everyone become “anti-immigration.”

## **BY THE NUMBERS: CURRENT ILLEGAL ENTRY DATA**

The polling above is reflective of the U.S. experience of unprecedented levels of illegal



border crossings and migrant encounters over the past few years. Naturally, historic highs of illegal entries raise substantial concerns about the impact of that influx on neighborhoods and communities. The surge in migrants, including a significant number of “gotaways”—those who evade apprehension—poses myriad risks to American communities.

In fiscal year 2021, there were **1.66 million encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border**, surpassing previous records. This **number increased to 2.2 million in 2022, with a slight decrease to 2 million in 2023**. The first quarter of **2024 has already seen over 1.17 million encounters**, indicating an upward trend and an international perception that the border is navigable and that current policy makes for relatively easy illegal entry. This is **substantiated by evidence that demonstrates** China, and others, use social media to exploit the vulnerabilities in our border. This includes **tutorials on how to best cross the border** and how to successfully engage with the U.S. Border and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to receive asylum.

Additionally, the number of “gotaways” **has risen dramatically, from 389,515 in 2021 to 860,000 in 2023**. Under the current Biden administration, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) sources confirmed over 1.7 million known “gotaways” at the Southwest border. More concerning, in a **March 2023 field hearing**, then-U.S. Border Patrol Chief Raul Ortiz testified that the number of total “gotaways” could be **as much as 20 percent higher than the publicly reported numbers**. This trend highlights significant gaps in border security and enforcement capabilities.

## SECURITY IMPLICATIONS

The apprehension of individuals on the terrorist watchlist attempting to enter the U.S. illegally exacerbates these concerns, with **294 suspected terrorists** apprehended at the Southwest border since the beginning of fiscal year 2021. Moreover, **over 35,000 aliens with criminal convictions or outstanding warrants**, including 598 known gang members, were arrested in 2021, underscoring the ongoing threat posed by individuals with criminal backgrounds entering the U.S. undetected. Alarmingly, during a **hearing on global threats to the U.S. homeland and America’s interests** around the world, FBI Director Christopher Wray confirmed joint terrorism task forces in all of the agency’s field offices are engaged with countering threats coming across the U.S. border.

The high volume of illegal crossings and encounters, coupled with significant numbers of “gotaways” and the apprehension of individuals on the terrorist watchlist and from adversarial nations, underscores severe national security threats.

There have been repeated attempts by Chinese nationals to infiltrate U.S. military bases. In the last calendar year, **100 incidents were documented** where Chinese nationals, posing as tourists, tried to gain unauthorized access to sensitive sites, including missile ranges and intelligence centers. Such espionage activities highlight severe security lapses and present a direct threat to national security as it comes amid an 8,000 percent surge in Chinese migrants at the southern border.

Moreover, the unprecedented number of migrant encounters and the necessity to process and release many individuals strain

Border Patrol resources. This diversion from frontline security tasks allows more individuals to cross the border undetected, exacerbating security vulnerabilities.

## **BORDER ‘BUSINESS’: CARTELS, DRUGS, AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

Criminal activities pose another significant threat. Over the past few years, the U.S.-Mexico border has experienced a significant increase in both drug trafficking and human trafficking, driven by the adaptability and resilience of cartel operations. The amount of illicit drugs seized at the border has risen steadily from 2021 to 2024. For instance, [fentanyl seizures grew](#) from 11,201 pounds in 2021 to over 27,000 pounds in 2023. With 2 milligrams of fentanyl being a lethal dose, 27,000 pounds would have [represented more than 6 billion lethal doses](#) coming into the U.S. during fiscal year 2023. Methamphetamine seizures surged during the same period. These figures highlight the escalating efforts of cartels to smuggle large quantities of dangerous substances into the United States, leveraging sophisticated networks and advanced smuggling techniques to evade detection.

The [Sinaloa Cartel, one of the most powerful cartels](#), has been estimated to control a significant portion of the drug trade between Mexico and the United States, particularly in producing and smuggling fentanyl into the United States. Fentanyl has become the [leading cause of death for Americans aged 18 to 49](#), further exacerbating the opioid crisis that has devastated American families and communities for nearly a decade. From [2019 to 2021](#), the number of fatal overdoses surged by about 94 percent, with fentanyl claiming the lives of approximately 196 Americans daily.

This cartel functions as a network of drug traffickers and money launderers who source precursor chemicals, primarily from China, to manufacture synthetic drugs in Mexico. These drugs are then smuggled into the United States, where the cartel manages the collection, laundering, and transfer of drug trafficking proceeds. [The Drug Enforcement Administration \(DEA\)](#) reports that the cost to produce fentanyl is minimal compared to its street value. For instance, 10 kilograms of fentanyl, which costs around \$50,000 to produce, can be sold for approximately \$20 million. Annual profits for the cartels are estimated to be [at least \\$6 billion](#).

Efforts by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to combat these crimes have been substantial, involving increased border security measures and international cooperation. Despite these efforts, the cartels’ ability to adapt their strategies continuously poses significant challenges. For example, while CBP and the DEA have enhanced surveillance and interdiction capabilities, cartels have responded by diversifying their smuggling routes and employing new technologies to avoid capture. [Over 1,000 drone incursions](#) are reported monthly along the southern border, often linked to drug and human traffickers.

The latter cartel “business” is equally concerning. Unlike the often-simplified portrayal of human trafficking being solely the domain of large cartels, it involves a complex web of smaller, localized crime groups, family clans, and independent coyotes. These groups exploit vulnerable migrants, particularly women and children, who are frequently trafficked through border hotspots.

To date, the government of Mexico does not meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. The U.S. [Department of State's most recent trafficking in persons report](#) found that Mexico identified significantly fewer victims and did not allocate funds to a legally mandated victim assistance program. Services provided to victims were insufficient, particularly for males, forced labor victims, and those in rural regions. Additionally, the government did not investigate, prosecute, or convict any officials involved in trafficking. Despite widespread fraudulent recruitment practices for jobs within Mexico and abroad, the Mexican government did not hold recruiters or labor agents accountable. Just as cartels are taking advantage of the porous U.S. border and exploiting its vulnerabilities, so too are they taking advantage of Mexico's lax enforcement of trafficking laws. In light of these facts, it is unsurprising [one U.S. sheriff reported his department arrested 169](#) human smugglers in 2021, and more than 900 in 2023.

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## **STATE ACTION: TEXAS TAKING MATTERS INTO ITS OWN HANDS**

The totality of the border crisis was of such concern to Texas' governor, Governor Greg Abbot, that he launched Operation Lone Star in March 2021 to address the escalating crisis at the Texas-Mexico border. Governor Abbott, along with other state leaders, argued that federal immigration policies under the Biden administration were insufficient in managing the situation. The operation was designed

to supplement federal efforts and provide additional resources to border communities facing increased pressure.

Operation Lone Star involves the deployment of thousands of state troopers, Texas National Guard members, and resources from various state agencies. The operation has reported significant results in terms of arrests and seizures. To date, thousands of individuals have been apprehended for state crimes, including trespassing and human smuggling. Large quantities of drugs, such as fentanyl and methamphetamine, have been confiscated. The increased law enforcement presence, along with the construction of border barriers in strategic locations left halted by federal projects, has led to a reduction in illegal border crossings and the epicenter of the migration crisis shifting from Texas to California and Arizona.

Operation Lone Star has not been without criticism. The operation has been costly,

with expenses running into billions of dollars. Critics argue that the funds could be better allocated to other state needs. Advocacy groups have raised concerns about the treatment of migrants, including allegations of civil rights violations and inhumane conditions in detention facilities. Some question the long-term effectiveness of the operation, arguing that it addresses symptoms rather than root causes of immigration and smuggling. Additionally, the operation has faced legal challenges,

including lawsuits alleging overreach and conflicts with federal immigration authority. It's also unfortunately placed undue stress and tension on the relationship between Texas law enforcement agencies and the U.S. Border Patrol.

## **BORDER PATROL: MORALE, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION**

Given all the above, the U.S. Border Patrol is facing significant challenges related to morale, recruitment, and retention, all of which could make securing our border even harder in the future. Morale among agents is notably low due to being overworked and assigned tasks outside their primary mission, leading to frustration and fatigue. This low morale is compounded by the pressures of managing overtime and frequent changes in immigration policies, which have left many agents feeling unsupported by the administration. An audit revealed that about [one in four CBP and ICE employees](#) plan to leave their jobs within the year due to these difficulties.

In response to these challenges, [CBP has introduced various incentives](#) to improve recruitment and retention. Recruitment bonuses have been increased to as much as \$30,000 for newly appointed agents who commit to working in remote locations. This includes a \$20,000 bonus for completing the academy and three years of service, with an additional \$10,000 for accepting positions in remote areas.

In the past, [legislation has been introduced](#) to enhance hiring flexibility, particularly in rural and remote areas. Efforts, like the CBP HiRe Act, include measures such as expedited hiring authority, recruitment and relocation bonuses, retention bonuses, special pay rates,

and student loan repayment options for eligible employees. These steps aim to address the long hiring process, [which can take up to 400 days](#), and the difficulty of staffing in less desirable locations.

Despite these efforts, [the staffing levels have remained relatively stagnant](#), while the number of migrants stopped at the southern border has surged, further straining the existing workforce. This situation highlights the need for continued and enhanced support for Border Patrol agents to improve morale, recruitment, and retention effectively.

## **UNDERMINING SUPPORT FOR LEGAL IMMIGRATION**

One of the greatest victims of unchecked illegal immigration is support for legal immigration. Americans—alarmed by the rising crime, national security threats, and strained public social services—are at risk of embracing support for restricting immigration entirely, and overlooking the very real benefits that legal immigration brings. Legal immigration leads to economic benefits and solidifies America's reputation as the land of opportunity for those who dream of freedom and are willing to work hard.

The explosion of high-profile crimes—from the [murder of Laken Riley](#) to the [beating of cops in New York City](#)—creates the misimpression that immigrants are naturally more lawless than citizens and we ought to just close our doors.

Americans need confidence that we have a trustworthy system that allows in the deserving while minimizing the threats and costs to struggling American families.

Creating a true, enforced border is essentially to maintain support for legal immigration.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Enhancing border security is a multifaceted challenge that requires a comprehensive, multi-domain approach. Securing the border must occur prior to the needed overhaul of our current immigration system.

It is clear that physical and geographic barriers act as deterrents and work to prevent migration. The wall should be built alongside improving and deploying in greater quantities **advanced surveillance technologies** such as drones, ground sensors, and AI-powered monitoring systems. Together, this can increase border monitoring efficiency and reduce illegal crossings. This real-time data will enable border patrol agents to respond more quickly, thereby reducing the number of “gotaways.”

Improving infrastructure at ports of entry is another key aspect. Investing in modernizing infrastructure, expanding screening and inspection capacities, and implementing advanced biometric identification systems will facilitate legitimate trade and travel while preventing illegal activities.

Additionally, increasing border patrol staffing and support is essential. Implementing targeted recruitment campaigns and increasing bonuses for remote and high-need areas will alleviate the current staffing shortages. Enhanced support systems for agents, including mental health services, will reduce burnout and improve retention rates. To deter illegal immigration, we must strengthen legal consequences for illegal crossings and human smuggling.

Implementing stricter penalties and ensuring consistent enforcement will provide clear repercussions, serving as a deterrent to potential illegal immigrants and smugglers.

Expanding collaboration with border communities is another vital strategy. Establishing joint task forces with local law enforcement and funding community programs that support border security efforts will foster a cooperative environment. Regular consultations with border communities will ensure that security measures address their specific concerns, leveraging local knowledge and resources to enhance the overall security framework.

International cooperation is also crucial in addressing the root causes of migration and improving cross-border security measures. Strengthening diplomatic efforts with Mexico and Central American countries to combat human trafficking and drug smuggling, improve information sharing, and support economic development programs in source countries will help reduce the push factors driving illegal immigration and enhance regional security collaboration.

Lastly, increasing funding for counter-narcotics operations is essential to disrupt drug trafficking networks and reduce the flow of illegal drugs into the U.S. Allocating additional resources to the DEA and CBP for counter-narcotics operations, including specialized training and advanced equipment, will curb the availability of illegal drugs, addressing the associated social and health crises.

It's in everyone's interests for America to have a lawful, secure border that allows for legal entry to our country. Policymakers need to take immediate action to make this happen.



## WHAT YOU CAN DO

### Get Informed

Learn more about homelessness in the U.S. Check out:

- [Petition: Safe Borders](#)
- [Biden's Border Debacle](#)
- [One Asylum Rule is Opening the Immigration Floodgates Even Wider](#)

### Talk to Your Friends

Help your friends and family understand these important issues. Share this information, tell them about what's going on, and encourage them to join you in getting involved.

### Become a Leader in the Community

Start an Independent Women's Network chapter group so you can get together with friends each month to talk about a political/policy issue (it will be fun!). Write a letter to the editor. Show up at local government meetings and make your opinions known. Go to rallies. Better yet, organize rallies! A few motivated people can change the world.

### Remain Engaged Politically

Too many good citizens see election time as the only time they need to pay attention to politics. We need everyone to pay attention and hold elected officials accountable. Let your Representatives know your opinions. After all, they are supposed to work for you!

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