

Five Things You Should Know about Border Security

Over the past few years, overall apprehensions at the southern border have dropped significantly and remain near historically low levels. At the same time, there has been an increase in apprehensions of families and children from Central America seeking asylum in the United States. It is important to understand these numbers in the context of historical averages, how investments in infrastructure, technology, and personnel have increased security along the border, and most importantly, to recognize changes in the types of immigrants Border Patrol is apprehending. By taking such factors into consideration and adapting to this change, policy makers will be better able to respond appropriately.

1. Border apprehensions are still near historic lows

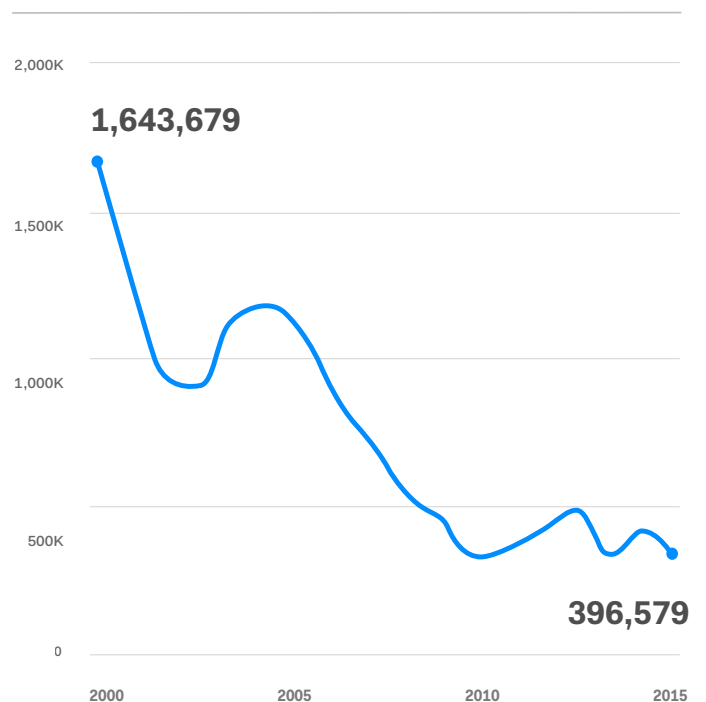
Border apprehensions, the primary indicator of attempts to enter the country without authorization, remain at historic lows, down more than 75% from their highs in the early 2000s. In recent years, there has been an increase in families and children from the Northern Triangle attempting to claim asylum in the US after fleeing violence and persecution in their home countries. In the vast majority of instances, these individuals are presenting themselves at ports of entry and to Border Patrol agents--not trying to evade Border Patrol. For national security reasons, not to mention humanitarian reasons, it is preferable that immigrants seeking asylum present themselves at official ports of entry-- instead of trying to enter between ports of entry and diverting Border Patrol resources that should be focused on actual border security threats.

2. The security of our southwest border is stronger than it has ever been

Congress has invested tens of billions of dollars over the last two decades to deploy infrastructure, technology, and personnel to secure our southwest border - and this investment has paid off. Not only are apprehensions near all time lows, according to the Trump Administration, the estimated number of undetected unlawful entries fell 93% from 2006 to 2016, the last year of data available.

Figure 1

BORDER MIGRANT APPREHENSIONS HAVE DROPPED 76% FROM 2000 TO 2018

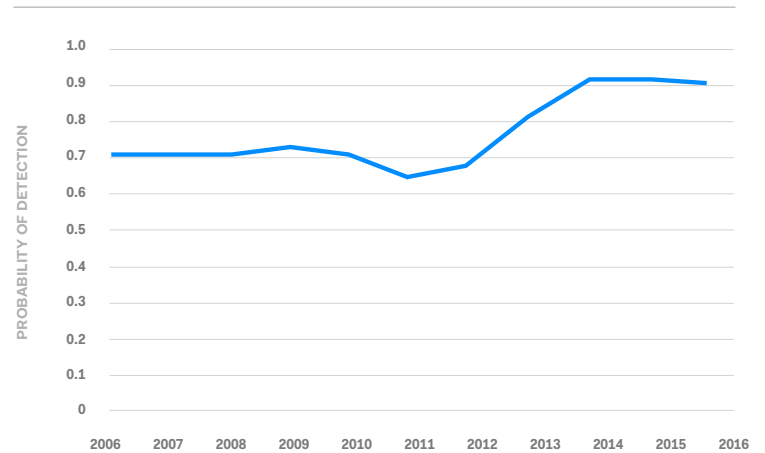


3. DHS has 91% situational awareness along the border

The deployment of Integrated Fixed Towers (IFT) and other technology along the border provides law enforcement with almost full visibility to stop unlawful entries. In fact, the Trump Administration estimates there is a 91% probability of detection. The combination of technology, existing infrastructure, natural barriers, and the more than 16,500 Border Patrol Agents at the southwest border means that it is extremely difficult to enter the country without authorization. On average, a border patrol agent on the southwest border apprehends less than two people per month. There is more infrastructure, technology, and Border Patrol agents at the southwest border than at any point in history, resulting in fewer attempts of unlawful entries and a higher probability of detection.

Figure 2

SOUTHWEST BORDER BETWEEN-PORTS OF ENTRY ESTIMATED PROBABILITY OF DETECTION, FY 2006 - FY 2016



4. The increase in families seeking asylum is a new and unique challenge that requires a thoughtful and humane response

While unlawful entries are near all-time lows, there has been a surge in Family Units (FAMU), particularly from the Northern Triangle countries of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, attempting to enter the United States, from 39,839 in FY2015 to 107,212 in FY2018. In addition, during the last three years, apprehensions of people from countries other than Mexico (OTMs) surpassed the number of apprehensions of individuals from Mexico. The increase of unaccompanied children (UACs) and FAMU from Central America seeking asylum in the US poses a unique challenge to border enforcement because generally, they are fleeing violence in their home countries and seeking asylum in the US because they fear returning to their home country. Under US law and treaty obligations, they are treated differently than economic migrants who attempt to enter the country unlawfully and are subject to expedited removal from the United States.

5. The physical border is only one part of border security.

To truly deal with migration at our southern border, we need a whole-of-government approach. We must ensure our immigration system is properly staffed to quickly and fairly adjudicate immigration cases that are currently backlogged years, utilize Alternatives to Detention (ATD) for those in immigration custody and reject the false choice between family separation and indefinite family detention. To deal with the root causes of mass migration, we should provide international aid-- monetary and otherwise-- to improve economic and security conditions in Central America. We must also re-establish and expand the Central American Minors program, which allowed in-country processing for Honduran, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan minors seeking refuge in the US. Moreover, the US should provide support to the Mexican government to humanely process through its legal system those who are participating in the caravan currently working its way through Mexico. We also need to fix our immigration system comprehensively to provide appropriate legal channels for individuals to apply for entry into the US and deal with the underlying push and pull factors that are driving the current increase in migration.

FWD.us is a bipartisan organization started by key leaders in the tech and business community to promote policies to keep the United States competitive in a global economy, starting with commonsense immigration reform and criminal justice reform. To learn more, go to www.fwd.us.

Sources: American Immigration Council, Cato Institute, Council on Foreign Relations, ForeignPolicy.com, Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) Immigration, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, Vox
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