

Trump's First Two Weeks: A Recap from the U.S.-Mexico Border

By Megan Robinson*

The new administration's aggressive policies on immigration, trade, and executive power are reshaping the U.S.-Mexico border—and sparking widespread upheaval.

Donald J. Trump's second time around as president of the United States began on January 20, 2025. Trump signed a record number of 44 executive orders by the end of his first week. Emboldened by a Republican Party reshaped in his image and a broad vision of presidential immunity announced by a conservative Supreme Court majority last term, Trump appears unshackled by the rule of law.

In his first two weeks, Trump is intent on centralizing power and reshaping the federal bureaucracy to reflect his ideological priorities. To reduce the size of the federal government he has [dismissed civil servants](#) who do not align with his agenda, [dismantled diversity, equity, and inclusion \(DEI\)](#) initiatives, and [halted federal](#) and [international aid](#) spending for programs that conflict with his “America First” vision.

Some fear Trump's vision will lead the country into the [next recession](#). His freeze on federal funding is expected to slash essential social services, undermine healthcare access, and [weaken Medicaid](#), threatening communities worldwide that rely on American aid and exacerbating an already dire [international humanitarian crisis](#). Domestically, Trump is targeting everything from abortion to gender, public services, and foreign policy, disproportionately harming women, LGBTQI+ people, and the working class. Yet the area in which his administration is having some of the most detrimental effects is immigration, where he is already making headway towards enacting the [mass deportation operation](#) promised to those who helped him win the election.

At the U.S.-Mexico border and on American soil, the following summarizes Trump's immigration policies over the last two weeks:

Trump's Border Policies

This week, Trump has rolled out some of his most contentious immigration measures to date. He [declared a national emergency at the southern border](#), [deployed armed forces to the region](#), [suspended refugee resettlement programs](#), and [escalated ICE raids](#). Among the most controversial proposals are plans to [detain undocumented migrants at Guantánamo Bay](#) and attempts to [end birthright citizenship](#). Additionally, he terminated a [parole program](#) that allowed Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans to legally work in the U.S. for up to two years—a move that has drawn sharp [criticism](#) from Latino/a-Hispanic communities. The immediate effects of these policies have been widespread confusion, fear, and uncertainty, both for migrants arriving at the border and for those already living in the U.S.

Anti-Immigrant Executive Orders

Two key executive orders have significantly expanded Trump's authority. The first, [“Declaring a National Emergency at the Southern Border of the United States,”](#) frames migrant crossings as a national emergency, unlocking funds for border security without congressional approval. This has allowed Trump to deploy 1,500 military personnel to the border and allocate resources for further construction of the border wall, bypassing legislative oversight.

The second order, [“Protecting the American People Against Invasion,”](#) is a sweeping directive that overturns many Biden-era immigration policies. It shifts focus away from addressing national security threats and instead targets undocumented migrants, even those without criminal records. The order mandates that individuals lacking immigration status must register with the U.S. government; failure to do so makes them priority targets for deportation, regardless of their criminal background. It also strips protections from deportation and work permits from previously eligible individuals.

In a further escalation, Trump directed the Departments of Homeland Security and Treasury to [designate cartels as foreign “terrorist” organizations](#) and classify illegal border crossings as an “invasion.” This move could invoke the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, a law that grants the president wartime powers to deport individuals from nations “at war” with the U.S. without due process. Constitutional lawyers have [criticized](#) this as an overreach, arguing that such terms should apply only to military threats, not migration.

Termination of Bi-Partisan Legal Assistance Programs

The executive orders also [target non-governmental organizations \(NGOs\) providing services to undocumented individuals](#). The Department of Justice and Department of Homeland Security have been instructed to review and terminate federal funding for NGOs that do not align with Trump's priorities. Combined with the broader freeze on federal funding, this has created widespread uncertainty for schools, hospitals, churches, homeless shelters, and food banks that serve undocumented populations. Legal service providers have already been forced to [halt critical programs](#), such as the Legal Orientation Program, the Immigration Court Helpdesk, and the Counsel for Children Initiative—longstanding initiatives with bipartisan support. The loss of these services leaves migrants, including children and families, without access to legal representation, likely slowing immigration cases, increasing detention costs, and undermining judicial efficiency.

Trump has also closed legal pathways for asylum seekers. The CBP One app, which allowed migrants to schedule asylum appointments at the border, was [shut down immediately](#) after he took office. The refugee resettlement program, which provided a legal route for persecuted individuals to enter the U.S., has been indefinitely paused. By militarizing the border to deter illegal crossings while simultaneously shutting down legal avenues, Trump has left thousands of migrants stranded in overcrowded and dangerous camps along the border. Without access to legal services or pathways to apply for asylum, they face prolonged uncertainty and hardship.

Punitive Immigration Enforcement

The consequences of these policies extend beyond the border. The backlog of immigration cases and the overcrowding of border camps are straining public services. Meanwhile, Mexico, already struggling to manage the influx of migrants, faces the added burden of [receiving thousands of deportees](#) from the U.S. This dual approach—combining aggressive immigration enforcement with punitive measures—has created chaos for migrants, border communities, and the broader U.S.-Mexico relationship.

On American soil, the effects of Trump’s policies and threats are already taking effect. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) [claims](#) to have arrested over 8000 undocumented migrants since the start of Trump’s second term. According to Tom Homan, Trump’s “border czar,” [no undocumented migrant is safe from arrest](#)—even in previously protected “[sensitive](#)” [spaces](#) like schools, churches, and homes—regardless of criminal history. However, details of these arrests remain scarce. [Reports](#) suggest that only 52% of those detained had criminal records, with the rest likely swept up in “collateral arrests,” a practice that ensnares nonviolent individuals during immigration enforcement operations. This climate of fear has left migrant communities hesitant to access essential services, such as hospitals, further isolating already vulnerable populations. Two weeks to the day that Trump came in as president, on February 3rd, the first flights containing undocumented migrants left the U.S. to Guantánamo Bay, the offshore detention center shrouded in secrecy and echoing a history of torture. Who exactly is on the flights, how long they will be held for, and how many will be taken there, not to mention the legality of it all, is, once again, murky.

Trump has also [expanded expedited removal](#), a process that allows for deportations without court hearings for those deemed to lack credible asylum claims. Previously limited to individuals in the U.S. for less than two weeks, the policy now applies to anyone unable to prove they have been in the country for more than two years. For undocumented immigrants already in the U.S., this has created profound uncertainty about their status and prospects for citizenship, leaving many in legal limbo.

Chaotic Consequences from Trump’s Immigration Policies

The ripple effects of Trump’s policies extend beyond migrant communities, disrupting the lives of U.S. and Mexican families and businesses in border towns. The U.S. and Mexico [share deeply intertwined economies](#), with border cities like Ciudad Juárez heavily reliant on cross-border trade and manufacturing. In Juárez, 60% of formal employment depends on the maquiladora industry—factories, often owned by U.S. parent companies, that produce goods for export. Trump’s 25% tariffs on Mexican imports, coupled with threats of mass deportations, threaten to overwhelm Mexican public services and economic infrastructure. Already, [three maquiladoras in Juárez have closed this week](#), laying off 4,000 workers. These tariffs not only harm Mexican businesses but also disrupt U.S. supply chains, raising costs for American consumers and companies.

For families and businesses in border towns, the ability to move seamlessly across the border is essential for work, education, and healthcare. Trump’s dual approach—combining restrictive immigration policies with punitive tariffs—has created what some call an “immigration and tariff wall.” This strategy is unlikely to achieve its stated goals: curbing illegal immigration, stemming

the flow of [fentanyl](#), dismantling cartels, or addressing trade imbalances with China. Instead, it risks destabilizing both Mexican and U.S. industries, inflating costs for American consumers, and causing widespread economic and social disruption.

Trump's policies are not only reshaping immigration enforcement but also straining the social and economic fabric of border communities. While the administration claims these measures are necessary to secure the border and protect American interests, the collateral damage—fear among migrant communities, economic instability, and strained U.S.-Mexico relations—suggests a high price for uncertain gains. As the chaos unfolds, the human and economic costs of this approach continue to mount, leaving many to question its long-term viability.

In just two weeks, Trump's presidency has unleashed widespread confusion and upheaval. Though he inherited [historically low levels](#) of apprehended illegal border crossings, his aggressive militarization of the border aims to reduce those numbers further. However, this approach has effectively shut down legal pathways for migration, leaving thousands stranded in precarious conditions. For undocumented migrants already in the U.S., the threat of mass deportations has sown fear and panic, while Mexico [faces the added burden of receiving deported individuals](#), even as it struggles to manage the growing number of migrants stranded at the border. Meanwhile, Trump's punitive tariffs threaten to [destabilize](#) the U.S. (and global) economy, disrupt North American supply chains, and inflict hardship on border communities, businesses, and families.

Trump's early actions signal a dramatic [expansion of presidential power](#) and a troubling erosion of democratic norms. By declaring a national emergency at the southern border—framing migrant crossings and cartels as an “invasion” and “terrorist” threat—he has laid the groundwork for what could become a new chapter in the war on drugs. For U.S. citizens and migrants alike, this presidency promises heightened uncertainty and hardship, as the chaos of Trump's policies continues to unfold.

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