

Report: Trump administration 'most active' on immigration in US history

'The U.S.-Mexico border is more closed off than perhaps any time in U.S. history'

McALLEN, Texas (Border Report) — The Trump administration has enacted the most sweeping immigration reforms of any U.S. presidency and has accomplished this through broad-brush measures, as well as utilizing minute technical loopholes in the law, and the coronavirus pandemic to get around Congress, according to a report released Friday by the Migration Policy Institute.

The report, "Dismantling and Reconstructing the U.S. Immigration System — A Catalog of Changes under the Trump Presidency," found immigration to be President Donald Trump's No. 1 goal during his first term and that he was able more than any predecessor before him to enact change by issuing over 400 executive actions, taking advantage of existing laws and shutting down the Southwest border to all asylum-seekers under the guise of COVID-19.

"The administration of President Donald J. Trump has dramatically transformed the U.S. immigration system, in bold-brush, sweeping ways but also in small technical details across the immigration portfolio. After pledging to take one of the most activist agendas on immigration in modern times, the administration has delivered on nearly everything the president promised on the campaign trail, almost exclusively via executive fiat, ignoring a Congress he had originally pledged to work with on systemic reform," the report found. "Trump has dismantled and reconstructed many elements of a U.S. immigration system that was last reformed in 1996. Humanitarian protections have been severely diminished. The U.S.-Mexico border is more closed off than perhaps any time in U.S. history. Immigration enforcement appears more random. And legal immigration has experienced a historic contraction."

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Report co-author Sarah Pierce told Border Report that the Trump White House has “moved at a rapid-fire pace doing executive action after executive action — some of them have been bold sweeping motions, but a lot of them have been very small technical changes that haven’t really risen to the public’s attention.”

US borders with Mexico and Canada close to non-essential travel

This includes the utilization of a 1944 relatively unknown law called the Title 42 Public Health Charge, which the administration cited in shutting down the U.S. borders with Mexico and Canada on March 20 to stop the coronavirus from spreading. The administration has extended the restrictions at least through the end of August and many analysts believe he will continue to keep the borders closed until the Nov. 3 election.

“With this dual crisis of a public health crisis and an economic crisis on the back of this pandemic you’d expect this administration’s agenda to take a backseat, and that just hasn’t been true at all. They’ve been more active than ever and have used the pandemic as an opening to accomplish some of the things they weren’t able to accomplish previously including completely closing off the Southwest border from asylum-seekers, limiting the number of legal immigrants coming into the country, and limiting the number of temp workers coming into the country,” said Pierce, who is an immigration policy analyst for the nonpartisan think-tank based in Washington, D.C.

Extension of border restrictions hurting asylum-seekers most, migrant advocates say

The 115-page report found that during Trump’s time in office, his administration has successfully been able to limit entry into the United States, especially arrivals from the Mexico border, by implementing policies such as the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) program, which forces migrants to remain in Mexico during their U.S. immigration hearings, and third-country agreements that the Department of Homeland Security reached with Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, which require migrants to claim asylum in the countries they pass first after leaving their homelands.

“Together, the policy regime blocked asylum access or eligibility for the vast majority of asylum seekers,” the report found.

The vast majority of those placed in MPP have not been granted asylum, with only a sliver of applicants actually being accepted into the United States, migrant

advocates say. Many have waited for over a year in tent encampments, such as one in Matamoros, Mexico, during their court proceedings, which have been placed on hold indefinitely with the coronavirus pandemic.



Migrants are seen on Jan. 28, 2020, living at a tent encampment in Matamoros, Mexico, across from Brownsville, Texas. about 1,200 migrants have lived at the encampment since July 2019, many sent there as part of the Trump Administration's Migrant Protection Protocols Program, which requires migrants to remain in Mexico during their U.S. immigration court proceedings. (Sandra Sanchez/Border Report file photo)

The president has been successful certainly in sealing off the southern border from arrivals," Pierce said.

The report found the administration has successfully limited U.S. immigration through: travel bans; reduced visa processing; enhanced border security; interior enforcement; tougher immigration courts rules and regulations; and repeated

efforts to stop programs like Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.

A couple of areas that Trump has not been as successful is in nationwide implementation of an E-Verify system that would electronically verify that all employed workers have proper work authorization. He also has not been able to implement measures to verify birthright citizenship, as he has promised during his campaign. And, if re-elected, Pierce says she expects these are two areas the Trump administration would stress during its next four years.

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