

The U.S.-Mexico Border at Center of the Presidential Election

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The U.S.-Mexico border and immigration have become the center of the U.S. presidential campaign. Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump and the Republican Party are claiming—as they did in 2016 and 20—that murderers, rapists, and drug dealers are carrying out an “invasion” of the United States that jeopardizes national identity and the country itself. Trump says, in Hitlerian fashion, that immigrants “are destroying the blood of our country.” He blames President Joe Biden and the Democrats for failure to defend the country and its heritage.

In response, Biden, who in 2020 promised more humane policies at the border, now says if Congress gives him the authority, he will close the border and establish greater control, appalling some of his supporters.

A PEW poll last summer found that about 75% of Americans believe that the U.S. government is doing a poor job at the border and almost half believe illegal immigration is a big problem. Both parties also agree that there is a crisis at the U.S. southern border that leads to problems in maintaining immigration policy.

The United States accepted 1.8 million legal immigrants last year, a little more than average, but many more are undocumented. In December 2023 U.S. authorities took into custody 225,000 undocumented immigrants crossing the border between official ports of entry and each month it processes another 50,000 who appear at official entry ports. That amounts to more than 3,20,000 per year. About 430,000 of these applied for asylum because they fear violence in their countries. Increasingly these immigrants are families with children from Venezuela and Central America.

The U.S. immigration courts are overwhelmed, with over two million cases pending. The enormous numbers of immigrants along the borders sometimes create chaotic conditions in the border’s cities and towns where local governments and migrant aid organizations are also beyond their capacities.

Republican governor Greg Abbott of Texas has led the fight over the migrant issue, transporting over 100,000 immigrants to northern cities like Washington, D.C., New York City, Chicago, and Philadelphia that are governed by Democrats, leading to crises in housing, education and social welfare in those places. Since 2021 Abbott has ordered the Texas National Guard to place razor wire along the border, though control of the border is a federal not a state responsibility. Biden’s administration has ordered the concertina wire removed, and was upheld by a split 5 to 4 decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court. Texas has defied the court, leading to tensions between the National Guard and U.S. immigration authorities.

Ron DeSantis, Republican governor of Florida, has said he will send 1,000 Florida National Guard troops to support Abbott’s forces. Some 25 of 26 Republican state governors support Abbott.

Now the Republican majority in the House of Representatives is moving to impeach Alejandro Mayorkas, the head of Homeland Security which has responsibility for the border. The Senate,

controlled by the Democrats, would surely not convict him. This is a stunt aimed at winning voters for Trump.

Meanwhile, far-right white Christian nationalists last week organized a caravan called “God’s Army,” that traveled from Virginia to the Texas border— about 1,400 miles—to “take back the border.” With banners emblazoned with the face of Jesus and the American flag, organizers promised to lead 40,000 people to the border but ultimately only a few hundred made the trip. Leaders of Texas border communities, who are largely Mexican American, spoke out against racist convoy.

Border and immigration legislation in Congress is stalled because the Republicans want it to remain an unsolved problem because that’s good for Trump’s campaign.

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