



3 presidents, 3 border crises

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The origins of people seeking entry into the U.S. at the southern border have shifted dramatically during the past decade — from a majority of Mexican adults to a diverse mix of children, families and adults from all over the world.

Why it matters: The rapidly changing dynamics — coupled with outdated immigration laws and infrastructure — is a recipe for disaster. It's why Presidents Obama, Trump and now Biden all faced never-before-seen border crises.

Zoom in: The current border crisis has its roots in 2014, when rival gangs in Central America forced families and unaccompanied kids to flee during Obama's second term at unprecedented levels.

- Continued violence in Central America pushed more families and teens to northern Mexico during the Trump presidency, with a notable surge in 2019.
- During Biden's presidency, the pandemic's aftermath, global crises and smuggling networks have pushed migrants to the border from South America and beyond, including Ukraine and China.

Flashback: Border apprehensions in the 1980s came amid civil wars in Central America. Increases in the 1990s stemmed from the peso crisis in Mexico.

- Before the 2010s, the majority of illegal border crossers were not caught by Border Patrol, American Immigration Council's Aaron Reichlin-Melnick notes.

Yes, but: Apprehension numbers have little to do with changes in enforcement tactics or new policies, David J. Bier, associate director of immigration studies at the Cato Institute, tells Axios.

- "It's really primarily reflective of the state of the U.S. economy," he said, which contributes to people migrating for good jobs.
- "The smuggling networks have taken years to build out — but once they're built out, there's nothing you can do to rewind the clock and eliminate those."