



## **Donald Trump off-base in comparison of U.S., Mexico border laws**

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President Donald Trump offered an unflattering comparison between immigration laws in the United States and those of its southern neighbor, Mexico, in a series of immigration tweets.

"Mexico is making a fortune on NAFTA...They have very strong border laws -- ours are pathetic. With all of the money they make from the U.S., hopefully they will stop people from coming through their country and into ours, at least until Congress changes our immigration laws!" Trump tweeted on April 2.

We decided to take a closer look at Trump's comparison of the countries' immigration policies. Is Mexico really more strict about who it admits?

### **White House cites an old law**

The White House held up an article published in the conservative-leaning *Washington Times* in 2010 as support for Trump's statement.

Among other points, the article said that Mexican law since 2000 "mandates that federal, local and municipal police cooperate with federal immigration authorities in that country in the arrests of illegal immigrants."

The article outlines steep felony penalties for violations and says Mexico can use the law to kick out foreigners for a variety of reasons, including a lack of financial self-support.

There's a problem with citing this nearly eight-year-old article, however: The 2000 law has largely been superseded by a law enacted in 2011.

Notably, the 2011 measure decriminalized the act of entering the country without documentation and allowed undocumented immigrants to use education and health services. It also set criminal penalties for abuse of migrants by immigration agents.

The 2011 law stemmed from two impulses, said Andrew Selee, president of the Migration Policy Institute, a group that generally opposes a hard-line approach to immigration.

"They wanted to create a law that respected immigrants and cleaned up human-rights violations," Selee said. "They also didn't want to embarrass themselves with the United States. Mexican human-rights advocates would beat them over the head for the punitive aspects of the old law, while also enabling enforcement capabilities. It was a delicate balance."

Meanwhile, the article's point about requiring local Mexican jurisdictions to cooperate with the federal government is a red herring for the United States, said David Bier, an immigration policy analyst at the libertarian Cato Institute. "The requirement for states and localities to cooperate is neither here nor there, because the U.S. system of federalism prevents any such law from existing," Bier said.

Immigration policy specialists added that there's a difference between the Mexican laws on the books and enforcement of those laws.

"As anywhere, individuals who are caught without proper authorization in Mexico will be deported from the country," said Sonja Wolf, a researcher with the Drug Policy Program at the Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE), a think tank in Aguascalientes, Mexico. "The question is to what extent the authorities have the capacity and the will to implement the legal requirements."

### **Some missing context**

One point bolstering Trump's position is that Mexico does allow a much lower rate of immigration as a percentage of its population than the United States does. In that sense, Trump has a point that the United States is broadly more open to immigration than Mexico.

But most of the additional evidence weakens Trump's argument in the tweet.

For starters, it's important to remember that the enforcement mechanism of U.S. immigration laws is robust and has become more so in recent years.

The U.S. Border Patrol "has 19,000 officers with a budget of \$3.8 billion," said Douglas S. Massey, a professor of public policy and sociology at Princeton University who specializes in immigration between the United States and Mexico. "It is the most controlled and hardened border anywhere in the world with the exception of Korea's DMZ."

Since the late 2000s, increases in Border Patrol resources have combined with a tougher protocol for handling incoming migrants, including more deportation proceedings and incarceration.

"Based on the previous 20 years' experience, we would have expected increased apprehensions of Mexicans after 2009 as the U.S. economy improved and unemployment plummeted," said Jeffrey Passel, a senior demographer at the Pew Research Center. "Instead, apprehensions of Mexicans continued to decline."

The United States removed more than 3 million non-citizens from the United States between 2008 and 2016.

"Immigration crimes are still the No. 1 reason for a federal criminal arrest in the United States," Bier said.

Another important point: In recent years, Central Americans have accounted for a growing share of migrants coming into Mexico, due to deteriorating conditions in countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

While Mexico has taken a variety of measures to limit illegal immigration and asylum for Central Americans, specialists have deemed efforts on Mexico's southern border to be largely unsuccessful.

"Mexico's borders are quite porous," said Wolf of the Mexican think tank. "There are many areas where people and goods can pass through fairly easily, and there is little that the migration authorities or the security forces could do about that."

A final note: In recent years, the United States and Mexico have significantly increased their cooperation on cross-border issues, such as drug trafficking and terrorism.

This cooperation deepened due to the Merida Initiative during the presidencies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama, "and, at least up until now, it has continued through the Trump administration," said Christopher Wilson, deputy director of the Wilson Center's Mexico Institute.

### **Our ruling**

Trump tweeted that Mexico has "very strong border laws — ours are pathetic."

Broadly, Mexico does admit fewer immigrants than the United States. But the strict Mexican law cited by the White House as evidence has largely been supplanted by a softer 2011 law. In addition, Trump underplays the increasing robustness of U.S. immigration laws and enforcement even under his predecessors, while downplaying how porous Mexico's own southern border is.

We rate the statement Mostly False.