



## Fact-Checking the Current Scale of U.S.-Mexico Border Crossings

Maxwell Bruce and Eleanor Kenneweg

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Immigration and border security, always a major issue in U.S. politics, is attracting special attention in a midterm election year — particularly among Republicans who blame President Joe Biden for unusually large numbers of migrants seeking to cross the U.S.-Mexico border.

U.S. Rep. Alex Mooney, R-W.Va., shared a video clip on Twitter showing White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre responding to a reporter's Aug. 29 question about people who illegally cross the border.

In the tweet, Mooney added his own comment: "In June, there were 207,416 migrant encounters at our southern border. There have now been 16 straight months of OVER 150,000 illegal border crossings."

Mooney's statement is accurate, and the trend has continued beyond the 16 months he cited, according to official federal data. Mooney's office did not respond to inquiries for this article. But some additional context is needed.

We turned to the past four years of statistics from Customs and Border Protection, covering encounters between migrants and law enforcement officers on the southwest land border.

After a decline in border encounters at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, the number rose in early 2021 and passed 150,000 in March 2021. Between then and August 2022, the number has never fallen below 150,000 per month.

That's 18 consecutive months.

Alex Nowrasteh, director of economic and social policy studies at the libertarian Cato Institute, confirmed to PolitiFact that CBP's numbers are the most accurate measurement of the scale of illegal border crossings.

However, the number of encounters is not the same as the number of individuals crossing the border, because the same person might cross the border and be encountered by law enforcement more than once.

This many monthly border encounters is unusually high, PolitiFact Wisconsin concluded in July. It rated Mostly True the statement that "with three months remaining in the fiscal year, (the border patrol) has already encountered more illegal immigrants along the Southwest border" than in any previous fiscal year.

Under a public health policy in place to mitigate COVID-19's spread, some immigrants are immediately sent back to the country they came from after encounters with Border Patrol. So, even though these immigrants were included in the encounters data, they were not admitted into the United States.

It's also worth noting that many people who cross the border are seeking asylum. Under immigration law, people must be physically in the United States to request asylum, and may request it even if they entered illegally.

### **Our ruling**

Mooney said, "There have now been 16 straight months of OVER 150,000 illegal border crossings."

CBP data shows that immigrant encounters with the Border Patrol have exceeded 150,000 per month for more than 16 months.

However, the data does not show that more than 150,000 people crossed the border illegally each month. The encounters data tracks events, not people. Also, not all people who crossed the border were admitted into the country; some were expelled under a public health order to stop COVID-19 from spreading.

Mooney's statement is accurate but needs clarification or additional information. We rate it Mostly True.