



Donald Trump's World Series ad said he cut illegal immigration in half. That's False

Miriam Valverde

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President Donald Trump launched a high-profile re-election ad during Game 7 of the World Series, claiming that he's delivered on a signature issue of his administration by "cutting illegal immigration in half."

"President Trump is changing Washington, creating 6 million new jobs, 500,000 new manufacturing jobs, cutting illegal immigration in half, obliterating ISIS, their caliphate destroyed, their terrorist leader dead," the ad narrator says, going on to attack Democrats for impeachment inquiry proceedings as well as Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election.

This fact-check will focus on the immigration portion of the Oct. 30 ad — whether Trump has cut illegal immigration in half. That part of the ad shows Trump at the southwest border, standing in front of border fencing and shaking hands with Border Patrol agents.

We did not hear back from the White House nor from Trump's re-election campaign by publication time. But the ad cites "Fox News, 9/10/2019" as the source for his claim about immigration.

An immigration official in September spoke of a drop of more than 50% in southwest border apprehensions in a three-month period. But that snapshot creates the wrong impression. On average, apprehensions under Trump have been higher than under his predecessor, Barack Obama. Also, apprehensions have more than doubled in fiscal year 2019, compared to fiscal year 2018.

Ken Cuccinelli's Fox News interview

In a Sept. 10 interview, Ken Cuccinelli, the acting director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, appeared on Fox News' "Fox & Friends" and spoke about a drop in border apprehensions in August, the latest monthly tally available at the time. (Apprehension data is commonly used as a tally of illegal immigration.)

"The president has literally thrown every domestic and international effort he can at this and it's paid off," Cuccinelli said to Fox host Brian Kilmeade. "As you noted Brian, we are down more than 50% since May in just three months."

U.S. Customs and Border Protection data shows that in May there were 132,856 apprehensions at the southwest border. In August, there were 50,684. That's a nearly 62% decline in apprehensions.

Evaluating apprehension data

A three-month period is a relatively short period of time to know whether any changes are long-term or temporary, said Theresa Cardinal Brown, director of immigration and cross-border policy at the Bipartisan Policy Center.

"You can only look at trends at the border in longer time spans," Brown said. It's also important to analyze how various factors affect any immigration changes, she said.

Trump's ad claiming he cut illegal immigration in half was also presented without any context, omitting the time period, Brown said, which might lead people to wrongly presume that the comparison is before and after Trump took office.

But the claim takes a period of time when illegal immigration increased under Trump and decreased under Trump, said Alex Nowrasteh, director of immigration studies at the libertarian Cato Institute. "It's just a silly claim, it's comparing Trump to Trump," he said.

To evaluate whether Trump is "cutting illegal immigration in half" one should look at data on apprehensions before and during his time in office, experts said.

Southwest border apprehensions during Obama's tenure on average were around 400,000 a year. That average is higher for Trump.

Apprehensions declined about 26% from fiscal years 2016 to 2017, but picked up again in 2018 and 2019. (2017 included about four months of Obama's presidency.)

There were roughly 548,000 more apprehensions in 2019 than there were in 2017.

Border Patrol agents recorded a total 851,508 apprehensions in fiscal year 2019.

That is nearly a 115% increase from the 396,579 apprehensions in 2018.

Our ruling

Trump's re-election ad said he's "cutting illegal immigration in half."

It isn't apparent in the commercial that the claim is based on data for three months during fiscal year 2019, which show a drop of more than 60%. But that snapshot creates the wrong impression.

Apprehensions on the southwest border have been higher during Trump's presidency on average than compared with when he took office. The data overall shows that apprehensions in 2019 spiked significantly when compared to both 2018 and 2017.

We rate the ad's claim False.