



How many miles of border wall did Donald Trump build? It depends on how it's counted

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As he campaigns for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, former President Donald Trump is touting his previous administration's successes on border security and revisiting one of his 2016 signature [campaign promises](#) — building a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.

"We created the most secure border in U.S. history, built nearly 500 miles of border wall," Trump said during a July 29 [campaign rally](#) in Erie, Pennsylvania.

The total number of border wall miles built during Trump's administration varies based on how it's counted. One count, based on U.S. Customs and Border Protection data, puts the total at 458 miles. But the majority of those additions replaced existing smaller, dilapidated barriers and did not add to the total miles of barriers along the southern border.

The amount of new wall is about 10 times smaller than Trump's count.

Here's a detailed look at what border fencing looks like and the Trump administration's contributions to it.

Types of border barriers

The U.S.-Mexico border stretches for 2,000 miles across four states and a variety of terrain. For decades, there have been three types of border barriers — primary, secondary and tertiary.

Primary barriers are the first impediment people encounter if they're trying to cross the border; these barriers can block access for people walking or riding in vehicles. Secondary barriers, which are behind primary barriers, aim to stop pedestrians. Finally, tertiary fencing is used primarily to "delineate property lines rather than deter illegal entries," according to a 2017 U.S. Government Accountability Office [report](#).

Customs and Border Protection defines a border wall system as one that includes physical barriers, detection technology, lighting and patrol access roads, according to a 2021 Government Accountability Office [report](#).

Before Trump's 2017 inauguration as president, the southern border had about 654 miles of primary barriers and 37 miles of secondary barriers, according to Customs and Border Protection information from an unpublished Jan. 22, 2021, report provided to PolitiFact. By January 2021, there were 706 miles of primary barriers and 70 miles of secondary barriers.

Border barrier construction under Trump

The Customs and Border Protection report says the Trump administration built 52 miles of new primary wall systems and 33 miles of new secondary wall systems where there were none before.

Besides the new miles of border barriers, Trump's administration also replaced 351 miles of primary barriers and 22 miles of secondary barriers that were smaller and dilapidated.

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The 2021 GAO report says Trump completed about 69 miles of new border wall systems. The other miles represent "the installation of wall panels, rather than the completion of the entire wall systems," the report says.

Experts and observers have said Trump's replacement barriers shouldn't be discounted because in many cases the new barriers are superior to the old ones.

For example, nearly 200 miles of short fencing, around 3 to 4 feet high, that is intended to stop vehicles was replaced with 18- to 30-foot steel barriers, the libertarian Cato Institute's David Bier wrote in a 2022 report.

Shorter pedestrian barriers also were replaced with the taller fencing.

What is Trump basing his count on?

A Trump campaign spokesperson sent us two sources that cite different figures:

- A Jan. 13, 2021, Verify article that cites a Jan. 8, 2021, CBP Border Wall Status report. At the time, Trump's administration had built 453 miles of border fencing, including both new and replacement primary and secondary barriers.
- A 30-page campaign report that says the Trump administration "constructed approximately 463 miles of border wall system." It's unclear where that figure originated.

"Trump's claim over-states his accomplishments given that most of (the southern border) was fenced previously anyway," said Kenneth Madsen, an Ohio State University geography professor and an expert on border barriers.

Our ruling

Trump said he "built nearly 500 miles of border wall."

The total number of miles built during Trump's administration varies depending on how it's counted.

One count, based on Customs and Border Protection data, puts the total at 458 miles. But the majority of those additions were replacements of existing smaller, dilapidated barriers and therefore did not add to the total miles of barriers along the southern border.

Nevertheless, experts say Trump's replacement barriers shouldn't be discounted because in many cases the new barriers are superior to the old ones.

Trump's statement is partially accurate but leaves out important details or takes things out of context. We rate it Half True.