

Rural Migration News

Blog 295

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Legal and Unauthorized Migration

The US has more immigrants than any other country, 47 million in 2022, making immigrants almost 15 percent of US residents. Unlike other countries with higher shares of immigrants such as Australia and Canada, almost a quarter of the immigrants in the US are unauthorized.

The UN defines an international migrant as a person who moves from one country to another for a year or more, for any reason and with any legal status, including unauthorized status. Some 280 million or 3.6 percent of the world's 7.8 billion people are international migrants. The US has a sixth of the world's migrants, followed by six percent in Germany and four percent each in Russia and Saudi Arabia.

Most Americans are dis-satisfied with US policies that permit large numbers of unauthorized foreigners to enter and remain the country. Almost half say that large-scale illegal immigration is a critical threat.

Americans are divided about the level of immigration. A third want to maintain current levels, a third

want to increase immigration, and a third want to decrease immigration. During the mid-1990s, when unauthorized Mexico-US migration peaked, two thirds of Americans wanted to reduce immigration.

Immigration

Immigrants arrived in the US in four major waves that were influenced by events abroad and US policies. The first wave arrived before newcomers began to be recorded in 1820 and involved mostly migrants from Britain, giving the colonies and eventually the US English and common law. The second immigration wave was dominated by Irish

and German Catholics in the 1840s and 1850s, and led to a Know Nothing restrictionist movement that may have led to policies to reduce Catholic immigration if the Civil War had not reduced immigration in the 1860s.

The third immigration wave witnessed the arrival of large numbers of southern and eastern Europeans, many of whom passed through Ellis Island in New York harbor. WWI stopped the third wave, and legislation in the 1920s tried to preserve the composition of the US population before the third wave arrived by setting national origin quotas for each country based on pre-third-wave US residents, so that Western European countries had the largest quotas.

The 1950s economic miracles in postwar Europe reduced immigration from European nations, and national origins quotas made it hard for Asians and Latin Americans to immigrate. In 1965, the US shifted from national origin to family unification as the major priority for allocating visas, allowing settled immigrants and US citizens to sponsor their relatives. Predictions that immigration patterns would not change proved to be wrong, and immigrants from Asia and Latin America replaced European immigrants.

Half of Americans Say that Large-Scale Illegal Immigration is a Critical Threat

Next, I am going to read you a list of possible threats to the vital interests of the United States in the next 10 years. For each one, please tell me if you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all. Large numbers of immigrants entering the United States illegally

	Critical	Important	Not important	No opinion
	%	%	%	%
2022 Feb 1-17	48	30	22	*
2021 Feb 3-18	46	35	19	*
2019 Feb 1-10	47	30	22	2

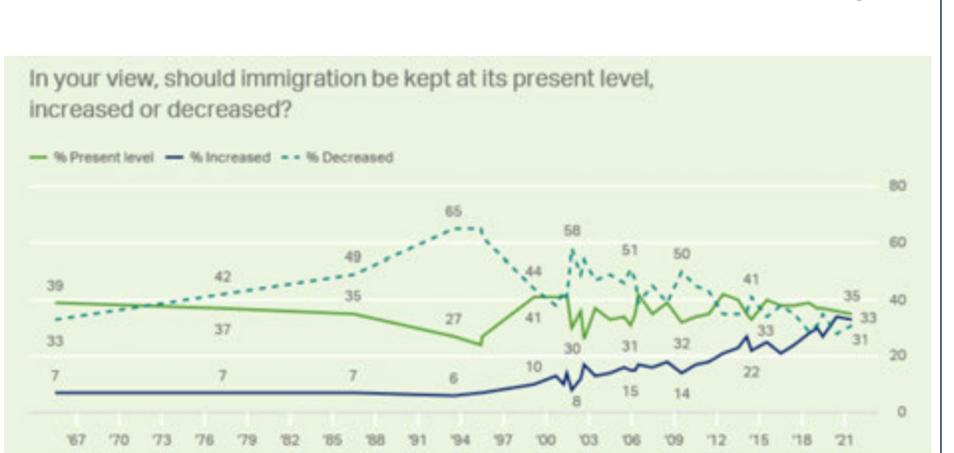
Source: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1660/immigration.aspx>

Almost 80 million immigrants have been admitted since record-keeping began in 1820, including a quarter since 2000. Immigration averages 1.1 million a year, including half who are admitted because they are spouses, children and parents of US citizens, a quarter admitted because they are relatives of settled immigrants or US citizens, and a quarter admitted for employment and humanitarian reasons. Most immigrants are already in the US when they are admitted, meaning that they have a student or work visa or another status.

Legal immigration raises several questions, including how many, from where, and in what status newcomers arrive. The US responses have been an unlimited number of immigrant visas for immediate relatives of US citizens, to favor the immigration of foreigners with US relatives, and to allow foreigners already in the US to become immigrants. The result is that a foreigner who arrives as a student can become an immigrant by marrying a US citizen or being sponsored for an immigrant visa by a US employer. After becoming a naturalized US citizen, this student-immigrant-citizen can sponsor his or her relatives for immigrant visas. The US family unification system allows some migration to beget more migration, as settled immigrants become anchors for a chain of more family-unification immigrants.

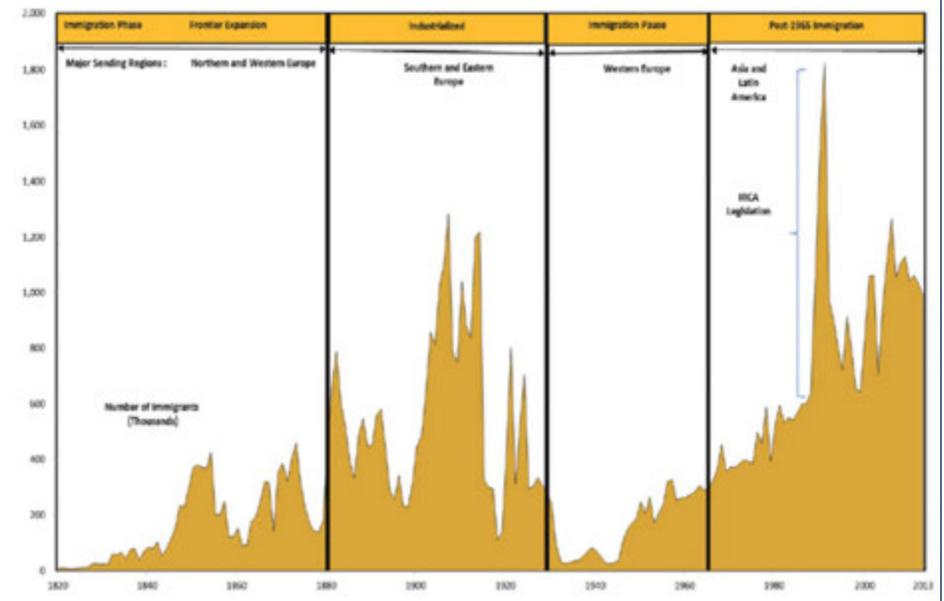
Many economists urge the US follow Australia and Canada and use a point system to select those foreigners most likely to have high US incomes for immigrant visas. Prioritizing youth, education, and US job offers could help the US to select immigrants who would quickly find jobs and could spur economic growth. Some proponents of the current family unification system support a points-based selection system, but not if more

One-Third of Americans want to Maintain, Increase, and Decrease Immigration



Source: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1660/immigration.aspx>

Immigrants Arrived in 4 Major Waves; Numbers and Origins Changed After 1965



employment-based visas means less family-based immigration.

Unauthorized

Illegal immigration became an issue in the 1970s, when the United Farm Workers union complained that unauthorized Mexicans entered the US and went to work on farms where the UFW was on strike, undercutting US farm workers who sought higher wages. The House approved legislation to sanction or fine employers who knowingly hired unauthorized workers, but southern Democrats who were protecting

farm employers blocked action in the Senate.

A Select Commission outlined an immigration compromise in the early 1980s that offered legalization to unauthorized foreigners who had developed US roots and introduced sanctions on employers who hired unauthorized workers. This grand bargain was incorporated into the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which had two legalization programs, one based on being in the US since 1982 and another based on doing farm work for at least 90 days in 1985-86.

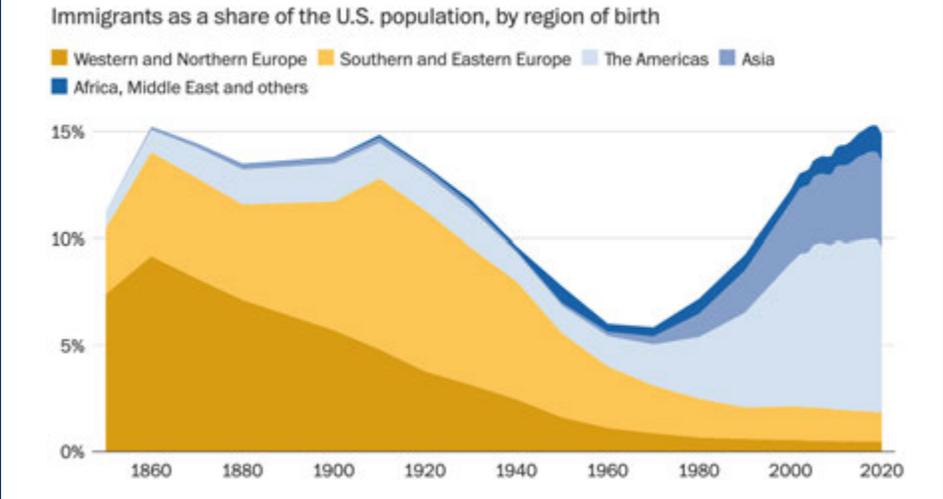
IRCA's legalization programs allowed 2.7 million unauthorized foreigners, 85 percent Mexicans and 40 percent farm workers, to become immigrants and eventually US citizens. At least half of the 1.1 million foreigners legalized under the SAW agricultural program used fraudulent documents to get immigrant visas, and the fraudulent documents industry expanded to provide documents to newly arrived unauthorized foreigners. Legal and unauthorized Mexicans spread from farms in the southwest to all industries and states in the 1990s.

Legalization succeeded too well, while employer sanctions failed. Opposition to Big Brother meant that IRCA did not include a counterfeit-resistant Social Security card or work permit. Workers had to present work authorization documents when hired, but employers did not have to verify these worker-presented documents, so the unauthorized foreigners who arrived in the 1990s continued to be hired with the only risk to the employer of losing employees in the event of enforcement.

The number of foreigners arrested just inside the US rose to a record 1.6 million in FY00, which meant an average 4,500 arrests per day or almost 200 an hour. Apprehensions fell in the 21st century, especially during and after the 2008-09 recession, and remained low during covid before rebounding to an all-time high of 1.7 million in FY21, when at least a quarter of the foreigners encountered had been caught at least once before. Since FY20, DHS combines expulsions and apprehensions in a measure called encounters.

Until 2010, most of the migrants apprehended or encountered just inside the Mexico-US border were Mexicans. However, the number of citizens of Northern Triangle coun-

The 1965 Family Unification System Increased Latin America and Asian Immigration



The UFW Tried to Prevent Unauthorized Workers from Breaking its Strikes in the 1970s



tries, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, began to rise in 2014-15, and over 40 percent of encounters in FY21 involved Central Americans. There was also a jump in the number of Ecuadorans, Brazilians, Nicaraguans, Venezuelans, and Haitians encountered in FY21.

Most border encounters involve solo adults, almost two-thirds in FY21, and most solo adults are returned immediately to Mexico. However, the US often admits families with children and solo children under 18 who arrive enter the US

illegally, which encourages more family units and unaccompanied children to enter the US.

The US border with Mexico is divided into nine sectors from the Rio Grande in the east to San Diego in the west. Most migrant encounters occur in Texas, led by over a third in the Rio Grande sector.

Most foreigners rely on smugglers to migrate illegally to the US, with relatives already in the US often providing the funds to pay smugglers. Smuggling costs, as esti-

mated by CBP and interviews with migrants, increased sharply since 2000, from less than \$1,500 to over \$5,000 per person.

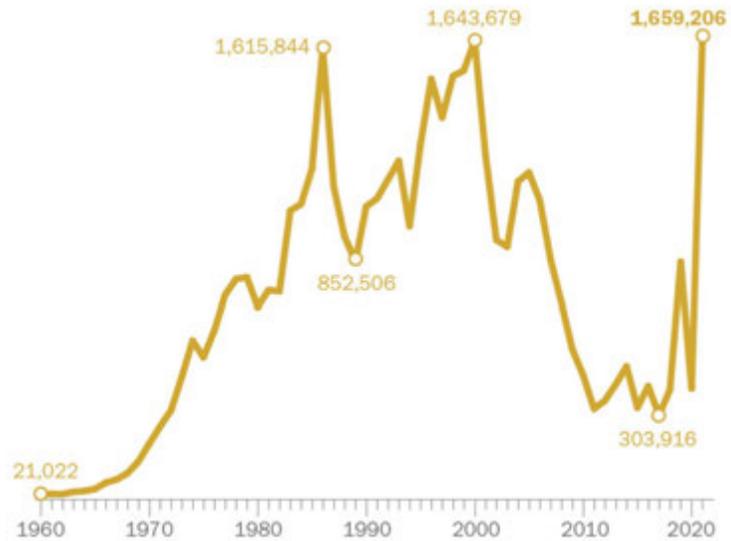
Some smugglers tell journalists that half of the cost sneaking migrants into the US are tolls paid to Mexican drug cartels. In order to maximize profits, smugglers may attempt to pack 100 or more migrants into tractor trailer trucks that are cloned to resemble Fed Ex, UPS, or similar trucks of well-known firms in order to avoid inspections at the CBP checkpoints that are an hour or more north of the border.

Title 42 of the Public Health Act was invoked in March 2020 to allow DHS to expel foreigners to prevent the spread of disease. For most of 2020, over 90 percent of the foreigners encountered by border agents were expelled. The expulsion rate fell in 2021, when half of unauthorized foreigners were paroled into the US.

Historically, border apprehensions peaked in March as Mexicans entered the US to find seasonal farm jobs. In recent years, the peak month for encounters has occurred later, reflecting the fact that most unauthorized foreigners are seeking nonfarm jobs in urban areas and plan to stay in the US. In FY21, the peak month for apprehensions was July.

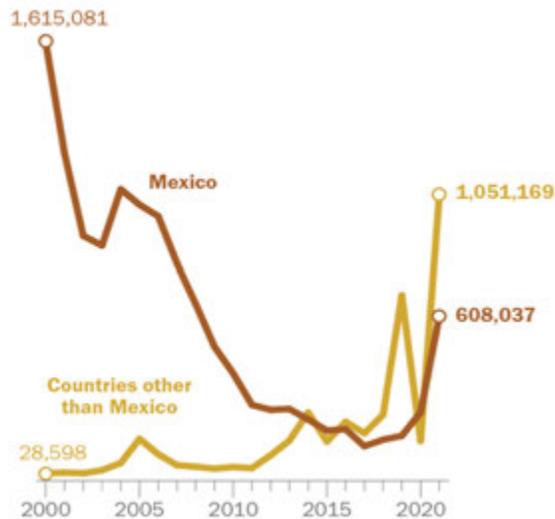
Encounters Just Inside the U.S. Peaked at 1.7 Million in FY21

Migrant encounters at U.S.-Mexico border, by fiscal year

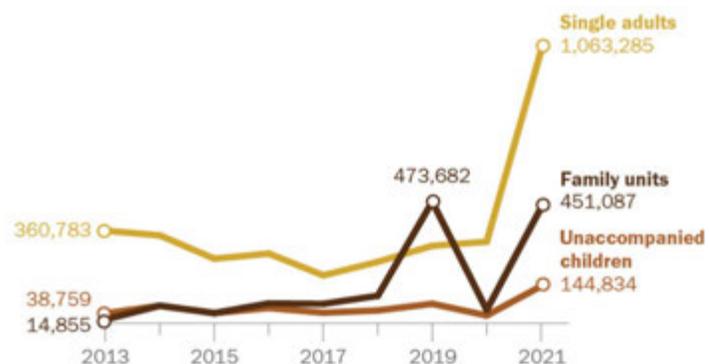


Note: Beginning in fiscal 2020, annual totals combine expulsions and apprehensions into a new category known as encounters. Annual totals before fiscal 2020 include apprehensions only.

Encounters Just Inside the U.S. Peaked at 1.7 Million in FY21



Two-Thirds of the Foreigners Encountered Just Inside the U.S. Border are Solo Adults



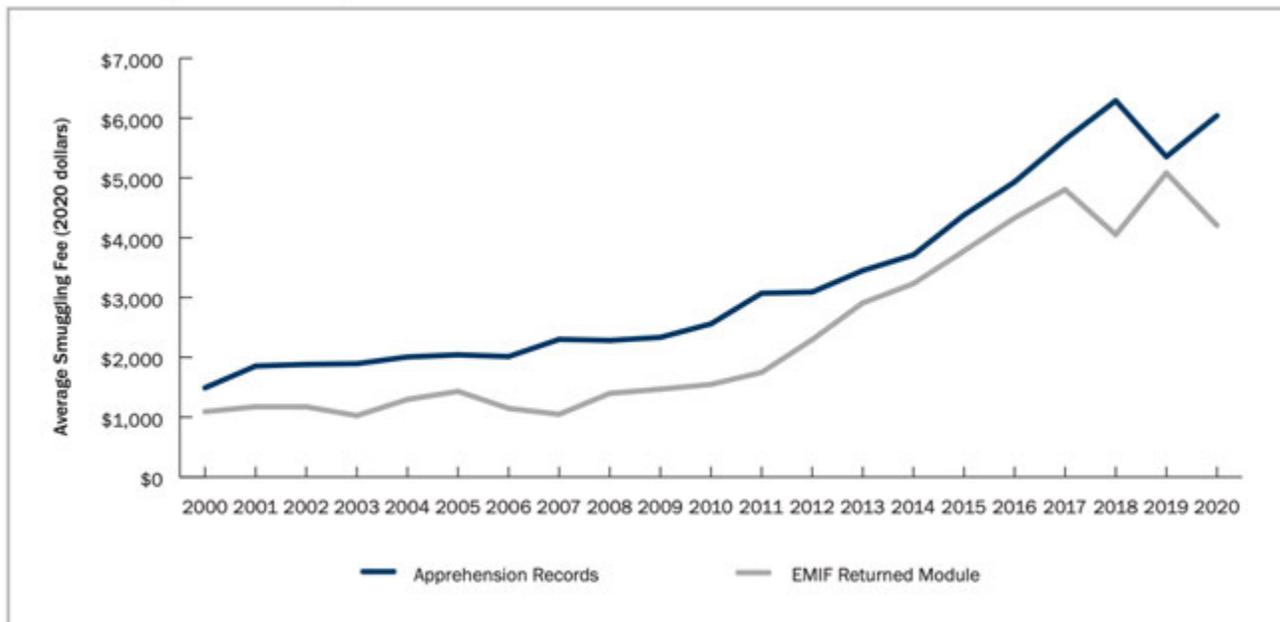
One-Third of Foreigners Encountered Just Inside the U.S. were in the Rio Grande Sector

Change in migrant encounters at U.S.-Mexico border, by sector, fiscal 2020-2021



Smuggling Costs are Over \$5,000 Per Person

Border Crossing Cost Estimates, FY 2000 to 2020



Note: There are methodology differences between the categories, but all categories have been inflation-adjusted to FY 2020 dollars. Estimates for 2000 to 2019 update previously reported estimates. EMIF did not collect survey responses from April 2020 to June 2020. July 2020 to September 2020 EMIF data is used to impute values and responses for the missing months.

Source: USBP apprehension records, EMIF.

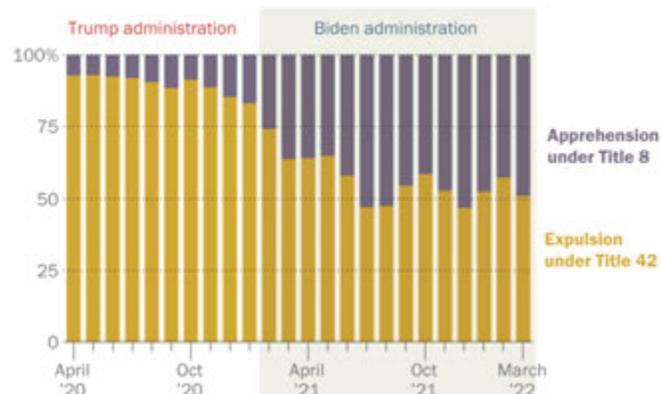
Source: https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2022-06/2022_0427_plcy_border_security_metrics_report_FY2021_%282020_data%29.pdf

Over 50 of the 100+ Migrants in a Trailer Whose AC Unit Died in June 2022 in San Antonio



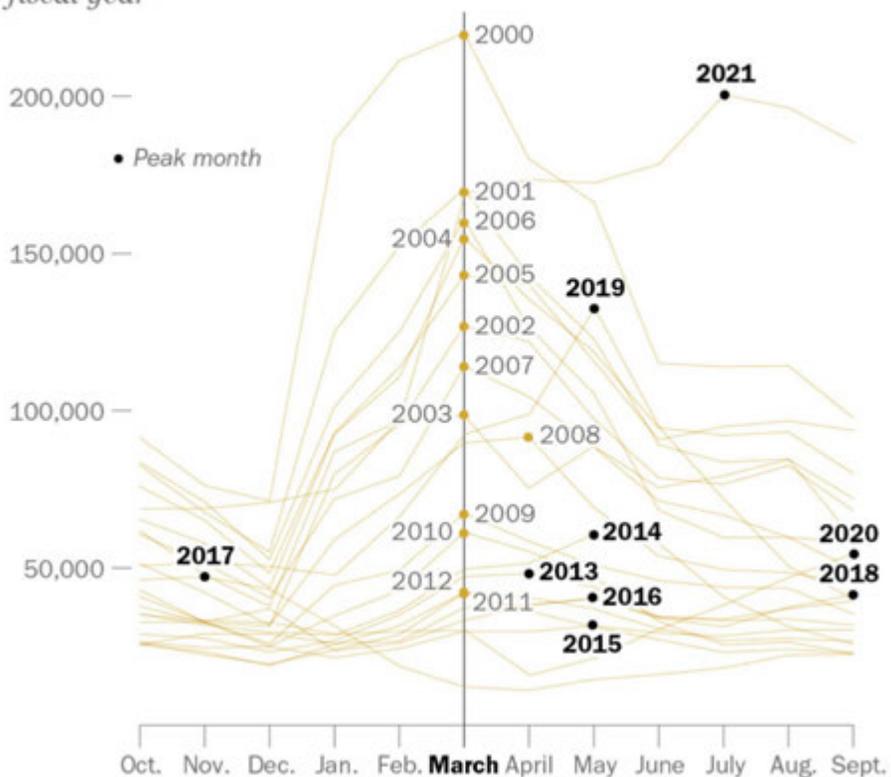
90% of Foreigners Encountered in 2020 were Expelled; About Half were Expelled in 2021

% of migrant encounters at U.S.-Mexico border that resulted in ...



The Peak Month for Apprehensions is No Longer March as Fewer Foreigners Seek Seasonal Farm Jobs

Peak month for encounters at southwest border in each fiscal year



Almost 80 Million Immigrants have Been Admitted Since 1820

Table 1.
PERSONS OBTAINING LAWFUL PERMANENT RESIDENT STATUS: FISCAL YEARS 1820 TO 2020

Year	Number	Year	Number	Year	Number	Year	Number
1820	8,385	1871	321,350	1922	309,556	1973	398,515
1821	9,127	1872	404,806	1923	522,919	1974	393,919
1822	6,911	1873	459,803	1924	706,896	1975	385,378
1823	6,354	1874	313,339	1925	294,314	1976 ¹	499,093
1824	7,912	1875	227,498	1926	304,488	1977	458,755
1825	10,199	1876	169,986	1927	335,175	1978	589,810
1826	10,837	1877	141,857	1928	307,255	1979	394,244
1827	18,875	1878	138,469	1929	279,678	1980	524,295
1828	27,382	1879	177,826	1930	241,700	1981	595,014
1829	22,520	1880	457,257	1931	97,139	1982	533,624
1830	23,322	1881	669,431	1932	35,576	1983	550,052
1831	22,633	1882	788,992	1933	23,068	1984	541,811
1832	60,482	1883	603,322	1934	29,470	1985	568,149
1833	58,640	1884	518,592	1935	34,956	1986	600,027
1834	65,365	1885	395,346	1936	36,329	1987	599,889
1835	45,374	1886	334,203	1937	50,244	1988	641,346
1836	76,242	1887	490,109	1938	67,895	1989	1,090,172
1837	79,340	1888	546,889	1939	82,998	1990	1,535,872
1838	38,914	1889	444,427	1940	70,756	1991	1,826,595
1839	68,069	1890	455,302	1941	51,776	1992	973,445
1840	84,066	1891	560,319	1942	28,781	1993	903,916
1841	80,289	1892	579,663	1943	23,725	1994	803,993
1842	104,565	1893	439,730	1944	28,551	1995	720,177
1843	52,496	1894	285,631	1945	38,119	1996	915,560
1844	78,615	1895	258,536	1946	108,721	1997	797,847
1845	114,371	1896	343,267	1947	147,292	1998	653,206
1846	154,416	1897	230,832	1948	170,570	1999	644,787
1847	234,968	1898	229,299	1949	188,317	2000	841,002
1848	226,527	1899	311,715	1950	249,187	2001	1,058,902
1849	297,024	1900	448,572	1951	205,717	2002	1,059,356
1850	369,980	1901	487,918	1952	265,520	2003	703,542
1851	379,466	1902	648,743	1953	170,434	2004	957,883
1852	371,603	1903	857,046	1954	208,177	2005	1,122,257
1853	368,645	1904	812,870	1955	237,790	2006	1,266,129
1854	427,833	1905	1,026,499	1956	321,625	2007	1,052,415
1855	200,877	1906	1,100,735	1957	326,867	2008	1,107,126
1856	200,436	1907	1,285,349	1958	253,265	2009	1,130,818
1857	251,306	1908	782,870	1959	260,686	2010	1,042,625
1858	123,126	1909	751,786	1960	265,398	2011	1,062,040
1859	121,282	1910	1,041,570	1961	271,344	2012	1,031,631
1860	153,640	1911	878,587	1962	283,763	2013	990,553
1861	91,918	1912	838,172	1963	306,260	2014	1,016,518
1862	91,985	1913	1,197,892	1964	292,248	2015	1,051,031
1863	176,282	1914	1,218,480	1965	296,697	2016	1,183,505
1864	193,418	1915	326,700	1966	323,040	2017	1,127,167
1865	248,120	1916	298,826	1967	361,972	2018	1,096,611
1866	318,568	1917	295,403	1968	454,448	2019	1,031,765
1867	315,722	1918	110,618	1969	358,579	2020	707,362
1868	138,840	1919	141,132	1970	373,326		
1869	352,768	1920	430,001	1971	370,478		
1870	387,203	1921	805,228	1972	384,685		

¹ Includes the 15 months from July 1, 1975 to September 30, 1976 because the end date of fiscal years was changed from June 30 to September 30.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security

References

Gramlich, John. 2021. What's happening at the U.S.-Mexico border in 7 charts. Pew. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/11/09/whats-happening-at-the-u-s-mexico-border-in-7-charts/>

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