

Rethinking a US-Mexico Border Fence & US Interests

Seven reasons why a US-Mexico border fence will not adequately address U.S. interests:

1. **Detracts from Real National Security Concerns.** Border fencing and appropriations for “deportation only” policies detract from more significant national security threats and side step the much needed reform of immigration law and policy. Confirmed terrorists have attempted to cross into the U.S. from Canada. Yet border control funding overwhelmingly goes to the U.S.-Mexico border. The border fence also channels funds away from other, more pressing priorities such as port and cargo security. Additionally, growing concerns regarding drug trafficking related violence and national security threats highlight the pressing need for immigration policy reform so law enforcement in the border region can focus energies and efforts on real threats, not economic migrants. In a recent survey of 100 national security experts, only 6 percent identified a border fence as a high security priority.^{1,2}
2. **Fails to Deter Undocumented Immigration.** Border fencing does not deter migration. The undocumented population in the U.S. has continued to grow despite increases in expenditures on border fencing, surveillance technologies and Border Patrol personnel. Trade agreements, U.S. agricultural subsidies and other economic factors continue to displace family farmers and others in migrant-sending countries, pushing them toward U.S. employment opportunities. Market forces and jobs are more powerful than the obstacles posed by a border fence.^{3,4}
3. **Prevents Migrants from Returning Home.** Prior to the 1990’s, migration to the U.S. from Mexico was largely circular – people would come and leave again. Hardened U.S. border enforcement has discouraged migrants from going home because they do not want to risk being denied reentry, contributing to an increase from 3 million to over 12 million permanent immigrants today. This disruption of circular migration patterns has also contributed to an increase in unaccompanied minors crossing the border and pressed parents to hire smugglers to bring their children across.^{5,6,7}
4. **Contributes to Destabilizing Mexico, Our Second Largest Trading Partner and Neighbor.** Underemployment, job loss and growing inequality exacerbated by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and internal Mexican political corruption combine to create socioeconomic stress in Mexico. Out-migration allows desperate and ambitious Mexicans to find hope for a better life, contribute their needed labor to the U.S. economy, and send remittances home, helping family members stay in Mexico. If migration from Mexico to the U.S. ended, experts believe it would cause instability and security risks for both the United States and Mexico.^{8,9}
5. **Increases Migrant Deaths and Trauma.** The ‘prevention through deterrence’ model with heavily fortified or fenced urban zones forces migrants to take more dangerous routes through deserts and desolate terrain. The number of yearly border-crossing deaths has doubled since 1995. Nearly 2000 people died on these routes between the years 1998-2004 according to the U.S. Border Patrol.^{10,11,12}
6. **Wastes Taxpayer Resources.** Border fencing is figured to cost over \$49 billion. Strategies re-classifying and detaining economic migrants as felons would add more beds to a detention system that costs of \$95 per day and over \$1.2 billion annually. These strategies fail to deter migration because they do not address root causes. A small percentage of that cost invested in economic development south of the border could prevent far more migrants from leaving their homes.^{13,14,15}
7. **Distracts from Addressing Root Causes and Real Immigration Reforms:** Polls show Americans want broad immigration policy reform not just enforcement. Six in ten Americans support provisions to better integrate immigrants into U.S. society and options for guest workers to earn legalization. A fence will not solve the underlying problems that motivate people to attempt to cross the U.S. border, nor will it address concerns of family unification, quotas, visas and worker status.^{16,17,18,19}

CITATIONS

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