LOCALISM INSIGHT · IMMIGRATION AND THE BORDER

Fewer Crossings, Record Deportations, New Leaders

What the 2026 election means for immigration in the United States and on the southern border.



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The election changed who writes immigration policy, but not the money already flowing. Crossings at the southwest border are at their lowest in more than 50 years, and deportations hit a record in fiscal 2026. Most of the money Congress approved for enforcement in 2025 runs through September 2029. The fastest changes in 2027 will come from Austin and city halls, where a new governor, a Democratic Texas House and local leaders are already redrawing their role in enforcement.

95%
Drop in southwest border encounters from the fiscal 2023 peak

483,200
ICE deportations in fiscal 2026, a record

$170.7B
Federal enforcement funding from 2025, available through September 2029

$11B
Texas spending on Operation Lone Star since March 2021

The Results That Matter for Immigration

U.S. CONGRESS
Democratic Majorities
Seated January 3. Control of DHS budgets, hearings and subpoenas, but no veto-proof margin.

U.S. SENATE · TEXAS
James Talarico (D)
A new Texas voice on border funding and oversight of enforcement.

TEXAS GOVERNOR
Gina Hinojosa (D)
Defeated Greg Abbott. Controls the border disaster declaration, state troopers and state agencies' work with ICE.

TEXAS HOUSE
Democratic Control
Can block renewal of border spending and new enforcement laws.

TEXAS SENATE
Republican Control
Can block repeal of existing laws such as SB 4.

CITY OF HOUSTON
Mayor John Whitmire
On November 6, limited police contact with ICE, saying “elections matter.”

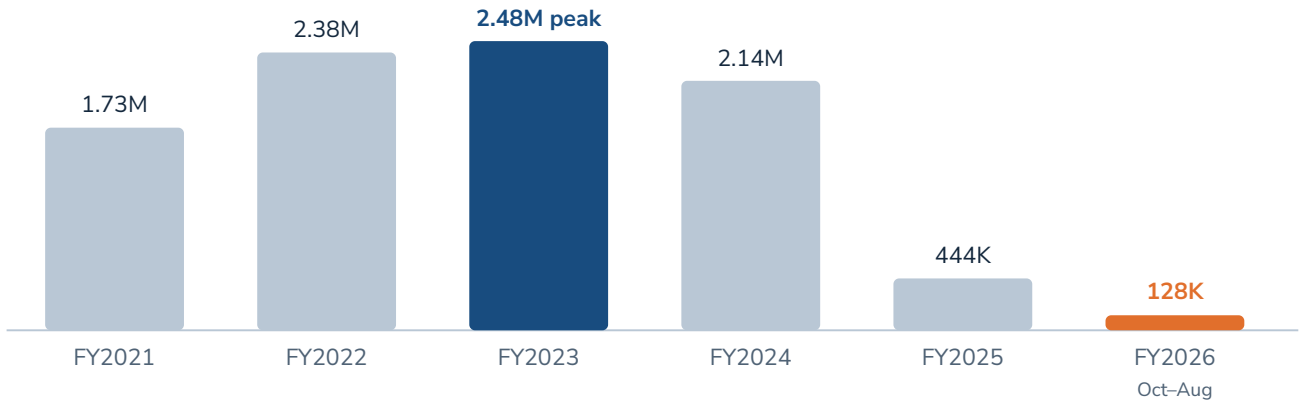
Voters split power in Washington and Austin, so major immigration changes in 2027 will need both parties. The American Immigration Council’s new States Index shows the debate moving to state houses and city halls.

By the Numbers

The surge years are over. Enforcement has moved from the border to the interior, where arrests, detention and deportations are at record highs.

Southwest border encounters are down about 95% from the 2023 peak

Encounters at the U.S.–Mexico border by fiscal year (October to September)



FY2026 includes ports of entry through August 31. Sources: CBP; House Homeland Security Committee; The Center Square.

MEASURE	LATEST	CONTEXT
ICE deportations, FY2026	**483,200**	Record; up from 442,640 in FY2025 (DHS)
Formal removals as a share of deportations	**63%**	July–Aug 2026; the rest are voluntary returns and departures (TRAC)
ICE arrests, FY2026	**475,000 to 491,000+**	DHS and CBS News report different totals
Nationwide CBP encounters, FY2026	**379,243**	Counts every border, port of entry and airport, so it is nearly triple the southwest border total charted above. Lowest in agency history; 691,906 in FY2025
Border Patrol releases at the border	**Zero**	17 straight months through September 2026
Unaccompanied children, southwest border	**7,608**	FY2026 through August
New border wall	**250 miles**	Completed since January 20, 2025
International students (F status)	**About 1.6 million**	Now facing new limits on study and work (DHS)

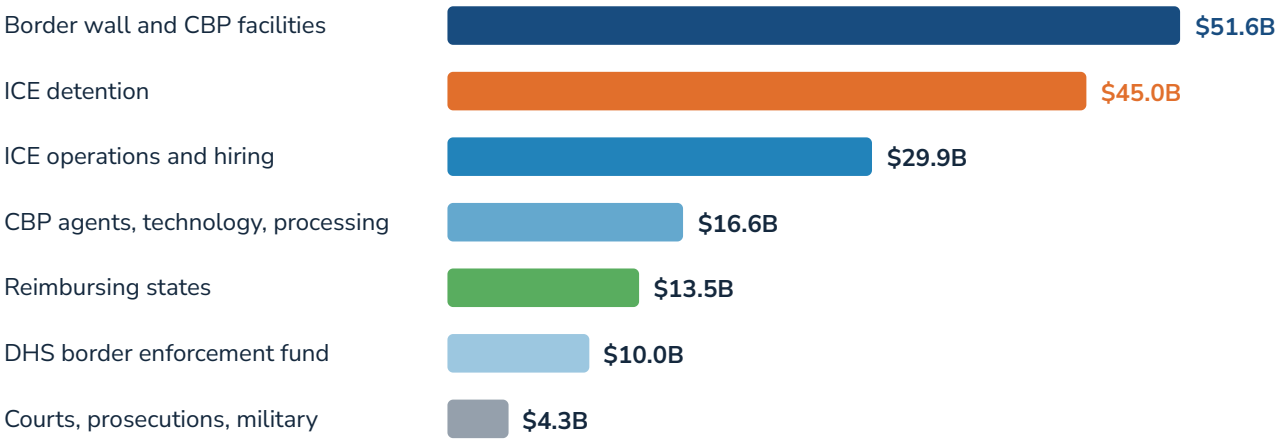
What it means: The border is quieter than at any time in more than 50 years, while enforcement inside the country is at record levels. For employers and communities, the pressure point has moved from the border to the workplace and the neighborhood.

Where the Money Goes

Congress approved $170.7 billion for immigration and border enforcement in 2025. It must be spent by September 30, 2029, and agencies have wide discretion over it.

The border wall and ICE detention take more than half

2025 enforcement funding by category, billions of dollars



The last bar is $3.3 billion for the Justice Department (immigration judges, prosecutions and local jail costs) plus $1.0 billion for Defense Department border support. The categories add to about $170.9 billion; the source states $170.7 billion, a rounding difference. Texas received $7.5 billion in reimbursement in September 2026. ICE hiring includes 10,000 new officers. Source: American Immigration Council.

What Changes in Washington in 2027

A Democratic Congress gains the power to question enforcement, but little power to stop money already approved.

The 2025 Money Stays

The $170.7 billion runs through September 2029. Taking it back would need a new law the President signs.

Annual Budgets Are the Lever

DHS's yearly funding bill, starting with fiscal 2028, is where the new majority can set conditions on detention and reporting.

Oversight Returns

Expect hearings and subpoenas on detention conditions, arrests of people without records, and how deportations are counted.

Fees Stay in Law

Most can't be waived: $100 a year for a pending asylum case, $550 for a first work permit, $500 for TPS registration.

Students and Workers

About 1.6 million international students face new limits. Universities and employers will push Congress to raise visa caps and add new visa pathways.

Broad Reform Unlikely

Narrow majorities and a veto mean any reform needs both parties. Work visas and farm labor are the likeliest common ground.

Texas and the Border

Texas has spent $11 billion on Operation Lone Star since March 2021. Its future is now the first border decision for the new governor and Legislature.

$11B
Operation Lone Star since 2021

$3.4B
Border security in the current state budget

82.2 mi
State border barrier, built for $3.1 billion

69
Times the border disaster declaration has been renewed

ITEM	WHERE IT STANDS
Federal reimbursement	$7.5 billion approved for Texas in September 2026
SB 4 (2023), state illegal-entry law	Enforceable while the case continues, after an April 2026 Fifth Circuit ruling
SB 4 (2017), local cooperation with ICE	Still law; used to pressure Houston over about $110 million in state grants
Houston police contacts with ICE	107 in the first eight months of 2025, up from 9 in all of 2024
State border barrier	Declared complete by the Texas Facilities Commission this year

WHAT GOV.-ELECT HINOJOSA CAN DO ALONE

- Let the border disaster declaration lapse
- Order a review of Operation Lone Star. She has said, “We need a review.”
- Change how state agencies work with ICE

She has said she supports a secure border.

WHAT NEEDS THE LEGISLATURE

- Renewing or cutting Lone Star funding in the 2028–29 budget
- Changing or repealing either version of SB 4: the 2017 law on local cooperation with ICE, or the 2023 state illegal-entry law

With a Democratic House and a Republican Senate, each chamber can block the other. The budget must pass by the end of May.

Detention in Texas

Immigration detention is at record levels, and Texas holds more people than any other state.

73,000
People in ICE detention nationwide in January 2026, a record

~20,000
Held in Texas facilities, the most of any state (March 2026)

5,000
Capacity of Camp East Montana at Fort Bliss, the largest in Texas

20,000+
New ICE beds planned in Texas, including a 9,500-bed site near Dallas

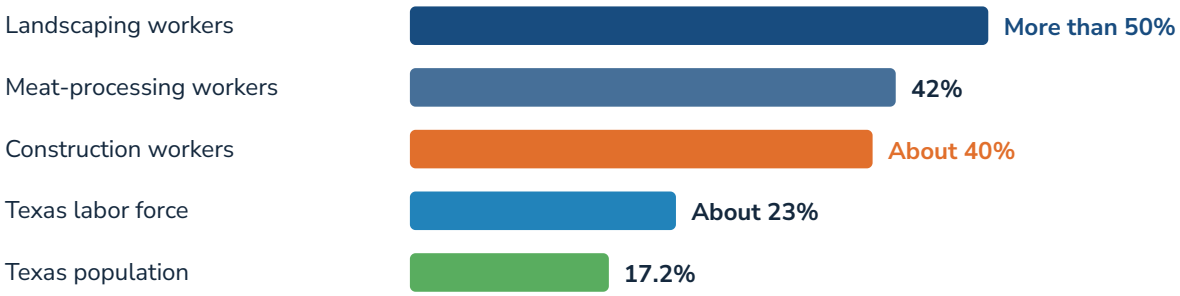
The $45 billion for detention aims to fund 100,000 people in detention on an average day. About 53% of people held in January had no U.S. criminal charges or convictions. Detainees have reported overcrowding and poor conditions. Sources: CBS News; Texas Tribune; Dallas Morning News via Marshall News Messenger; TRAC. Page sources: Texas Tribune via KBTX and KSAT; Texas Tribune, September 18, 2026.

The Economy

Fewer new arrivals already show up in Texas job numbers. The Dallas Fed found slower immigration explains roughly half of the slowdown in Texas job growth in 2025, and contractors report raising wages and adding overtime.

Immigrants are a large share of Texas's workforce in key industries

Immigrant share, percent



Workforce shares from FWD.us (2022) and the American Immigration Council; 1.1 million undocumented workers are about 8% of the Texas workforce. Sources: FWD.us; ENR; Dallas Fed.

What to Watch

Jan 3
New Congress sworn in

Jan 12
90th Texas Legislature convenes

Jan 19
Hinojosa takes office; first call on the disaster declaration

Spring 2027
Fiscal 2028 DHS budget hearings

By May 31
Texas budget decides Lone Star funding

What Employers and Partners Should Do

1
Know Your Exposure
Which roles depend on immigrant workers, and which visas or work permits renew in 2027.

2
Brief New Leaders
The governor-elect's transition team and Sen.-elect Talarico are setting priorities now.

3
Plan for the Budget
Say what border communities need from Lone Star money: ports, local law enforcement, workforce.

4
Watch Your City
Houston moved first. San Antonio and border cities may follow, and the state may push back.

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