



CNS photo/Kevin Lamarq

Trump's anti-immigration rhetoric meant to instill fear, advocates say

President Trump visits the U.S.-Mexico border in Calexico, Calif., in April.

From extending the wall on the U.S.-Mexico border to efforts to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program to making it more difficult for green card holders to retain their status, the Trump administration has arguably made reducing both legal and undocumented immigration into the United States a primary goal. In addition, the administration announced there would be enforcement actions in 10 different cities targeting 2,000 undocumented immigrants during the weekend of July 13 and 14. While there were no reports of any such large-scale effort, the announcement itself caused widespread anxiety.

"We didn't see any raids in Dallas," said Josephine López Paul, lead organizer with Dallas Area Interfaith, an affiliate of the Industrial Areas Foundation. "But immigrants have been living in fear for years now." The fear keeps community members locked inside, afraid to fill out a census form or seek health care for their children, she said.

The Trump administration also announced in July that the U.S. departments of Justice and Homeland Security would adopt an interim "third country rule" requiring immigrants seeking asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border to apply for refugee status first in another country. Yet days after the new rule was said to have been implemented, the acting head of U.S. Customs and Border Protection told NPR it was being piloted "in just one location." And on July 24, a federal judge in California blocked the new rule.

That outcome was expected by Teresa Cavendish, director of operations for Catholic Community Services of Southern Arizona. She believes the Trump administration, unsure if any one measure will hold up in court, uses a "multi-pronged approach," hoping that something will have an impact. C.C.S. runs the Casa Alitas shelter for asylum seekers in Tucson, Ariz. In recent weeks, Ms. Cavendish said, the number of asylum seekers Casa Alitas receives on any given day—previously as many as 300—has dropped by more than half.

"We're never quite sure what the outside push and pull is," she said. For example, immigration officials regulate the number of individuals who may apply for asylum on any given day through a process called metering. Immigration officials may also process individuals through detention centers at different rates.

"It's difficult to make predictions," Ms. Cavendish said. "You need to be prepared for folks. If you calculate wrong, that means someone will be sleeping on the street."

When Trump administration officials announce anti-immigration measures, "they instill fear among the immigrant community and score points with their base," said Donald Kerwin, executive director of the Center for Migration Studies in New York. "They know they can't deport everybody, so they set broad enforcement goals and hope [other undocumented immigrants] will leave. They're trying to do deportation through fear, to get people to self-deport."

The administration is considering cutting the number of refugees admitted to the United States to zero, Mr. Kerwin said. Last year, Mr. Trump also endorsed a bill that would cut legal immigration by 50 percent, according to the Migration Policy Institute.

In Dallas, Ms. López Paul said the church works to dispel fear through "know your rights" workshops, a parish identification card program and health fairs. Dallas Area Interfaith hosts events at churches and synagogues to build community amid a climate that breeds isolation.

"We're not going to see meaningful change until we hold our elected officials to account," she said. "National politics is not going to move forward without a centrist agenda of pro-immigrant reform."

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