

# [***White House and Democratic lawmakers plot ways to strengthen their hand on border security***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C28-FKN1-JBSS-S04G-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; The White House and top congressional Democrats are discussing a series of moves aimed at strengthening their hand on border security ahead of the first [*presidential debate next month*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/15/politics/debates-joe-biden-donald-trump/index.html).

That includes potentially rolling out a sweeping executive order limiting migrants' ability to seek asylum, revisiting the [*stalled bipartisan border bill*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/live-news/senate-vote-border-bill-aid-02-07-24/index.html) in the Senate, and possibly sending President Joe Biden to the border, according to three sources familiar with the discussions.

One of those sources said that some Democrats on Capitol Hill have encouraged White House officials to consider having the president make another visit to the border in the coming weeks.

With border arrests down this year, thanks in part to Mexico stepping up its own enforcement efforts in January, the White House is looking to take advantage of a brief reprieve from one of the most politically fraught issues Biden faces in his reelection campaign.

But senior administration officials are also bracing for the potential that border crossings will surge this summer, like in previous years, and are trotting out a series of policy changes to try to dissuade migrants from journeying to the US, and convince skeptical voters they are working to tighten up immigration at the border.

If officials move forward with a border visit, it would mark Biden's second trip to the US southern border this year and third since taking office. The discussions have not been previously reported; no trip has been announced. A White House spokesperson told CNN that no border trip for Biden is under consideration at the moment.

White House officials are in discussion with Senate Democrats about reviving the border policy package that failed to advance earlier this year, according to the two sources-another sign of ongoing efforts meant to show Democrats are aggressive on border security, an issue that's been a political liability for the party and the president.

The pressure on Congress also reflects the limited tools the administration has at its disposal to affect the situation on the ground over the next few months.

Discussions are ongoing on when the border executive action will be rolled out, according to sources, who say that one of the considerations is doing so after Mexico's election in early June and potentially before the first presidential debate.

The White House is hoping to stave off another crisis and keep the focus on congressional Republicans who backed away from the border bill that included some of the toughest border security measures in recent memory, multiple sources told CNN.

Aides say Senate Democrats expect to bring back up for a vote the border security bill that was blocked by Republicans after former President Donald Trump came out against the deal. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Connecticut Democrat Chris Murphy, who cut a deal with Republicans on the long-sought border security measure, have been heavily signaling their intention, though nothing has been formally announced.

On the campaign trail, Biden has continued to hammer Republicans over the measure.

"After months, we finally came up with the strongest border bill, the most comprehensive immigration reform in decades," Biden said at a campaign fundraiser in California this month. "The majority of the House and Senate members strongly support this. But ***politics*** derailed it."

New guidance and regulations

Over recent weeks, the Biden administration has rolled out new guidance and regulations that would tighten the immigration system to quickly reject migrants who are ineligible for asylum, and speed up court cases for some migrants - measures Biden officials hope will, in part, dissuade people from journeying north.

They've also cracked down on countries facilitating irregular migration, like Nicaragua, by imposing visa restrictionson over 250 members of the Nicaraguan government, nongovernmental actors, and their immediate family members.

"In order to meet the current moment, the administration has taken unprecedented steps to leverage existing resources, exercise our legal authorities and coordinate with our federal and international partners to reduce irregular migration and manage our borders in a safe and orderly way," a senior administration official told reporters this week.

Also under consideration is a sweeping [*executive action*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/21/politics/biden-considering-executive-action-to-close-southern-border-sources-say/index.html) that would restrict migrants' ability to seek asylum at the US-Mexico border if they crossed illegally - a maneuver reminiscent of controversial action from the Trump era. It involves using an authority known as 212f between ports of entry to try to clamp down on unlawful border crossings.

The White House has repeatedly stressed the unique challenges it faces in trying to control record migration across the Western hemisphere that's resulted in thousands of migrants at the US-Mexico border and overwhelmed federal resources. But voters appear unconvinced, as Biden continues to lag Trump on border security in polls.

In recent months, Mexico has surged operations to obstruct smuggling and movement to the border, targeting smugglers for prosecution, moving migrants away from the border and engaging in joint enforcement operations along the US southern border with federal authorities, according to Homeland Security officials.

In April, Border Patrol recorded more than 128,000 migrant encounters between ports of entry, down from 137,480 in March, according to US Customs and Border Protection data. Last April, Border Patrol apprehended more than 183,000 migrants.

But Homeland Security officials are now preparing for an anticipated rise in border crossings, consistent with previous years when numbers tick up in the summer, including shifting resources to meet a potential surge and getting personnel in place.

The White House is also bolstering its immigration team following anticipated staff departures earlier this year and plans to bring on one of the administration's chief architects of border policy, Blas Nunez-Neto, who currently serves as an assistant secretary at the Department of Homeland Security, to work even more closely with Biden's aides.

Upcoming election in Mexico

One wildcard is the upcoming election in Mexico slated for June 2, raising uncertainty in the minds of Biden officials about what, if anything, will change with a key partner when it comes to border cooperation at a critical moment.

"Whether we're talking about elections in Mexico or here in the US, it always provokes a level of uncertainty with everyone, generally, but especially in the migrant population," a Homeland Security official told CNN.

US and Mexican officials are in touch on an almost daily basis and high-level delegations have traveled back and forth as the two countries try to stem the flow of migration. Current and former US officials describe Biden and Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador relationship as friendly and professional.

Late last month, Biden spoke to Lopez Obrador about migration management, marking the second call between the two leaders this year.

"In the short term, the two leaders ordered their national security teams to work together to immediately implement concrete measures to significantly reduce irregular border crossings while protecting human rights," according to a White House readout.

Officials expect that a new administration in Mexico would likely continue cooperating with the US on migration given years of partnership, but it's unclear how migrants - and especially, smugglers - might plot their next moves in a moment of government transition.

Mexican officials are also observing another surge of migrants coming from further south at a time where their own resources are already stretched.

"What the Mexican government has done is slow people down by bussing them south and rationing out permits for some nationalities to move across the country," said Andrew Selee, president of the nonpartisan think tank, Migration Policy Institute.

"But it's not a long-term strategy to stop people and return them to their country of origin. That's what's missing in all of this," he added.

By Priscilla Alvarez and MJ Lee, CNN

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