

## Hungary & Texas: A Comparative Perspective

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#### Abstract

On the surface, the European nation of Hungary and the U.S. state of Texas couldn't be more different. However, both jurisdictions have confronted migration crises as waves of migrants arrived at their borders, straining local resources, causing public security concerns and disquieting local populations. Both Hungary and Texas have responded to migration crises with their own policies to take control of their borders and attempt to establish criteria for who gains entry to their jurisdictions, even if those entering – legally or otherwise – intend to only transit the country or U.S. state on their way to other parts of the European Union, in the case of Hungary, or the United States, in the case of Texas.

Hungary and Texas confront their own overarching authorities—the European Union and United States government — that have failed to fulfill their duties to secure their borders or have been actively promoting pro-illegal immigration policies. Both jurisdictions also face the frustration of being on the frontlines of migration crises, but not receiving the support of the European Union or U.S. federal government.

The actions of Hungary and Texas to secure their borders have brought consequences in the forms of fines and legal action, but neither has backed down. This research paper explores the struggles of Hungary and Texas to secure their borders, confront the European Union and U.S. federal government respectively and ultimately force change on a thorny issue which threatens only to become even more contentious in the coming years.

#### 1. MIGRANT CRISIS IN EUROPE

In 2015, thousands of migrants from the Middle East and beyond poured into Hungary via its southern border with Serbia.<sup>1</sup> Many of these migrants were from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, traveling through the Balkans to reach Hungary, the first the country in the European Union's border-free Schengen area. According to EU asylum rules, migrants must be processed in the first EU country they set foot in, requiring their processing at the Hungarian-Serbian border.<sup>2</sup>

Scenes of migrants crossing the Hungarian border drew worldwide attention – notably when a camerawoman was filmed tripping migrants breaking through a police cordon.<sup>3</sup> Scenes of police firing tear gas at migrants storming the border also went viral.<sup>4</sup> Many of the migrants entering Hungary eventually arrived in Germany, which announced it would welcome them.<sup>5</sup>

#### 2. BORDER CRISIS IN TEXAS

Across the Atlantic Ocean, along the U.S.-Mexico border, Texas has confronted similar waves of migrants crossing illegally from Mexico.

In September 2021, an estimated 12,000 Haitian migrants descended on the border town of Del Rio, Texas, where images of desperate migrants crowding under the international bridge generated worldwide headlines.<sup>6</sup> Over the following two and a half years, illegal migrants from Central America and increasingly further afield arrived in large numbers. They forded the Rio Grande, which separates the United States and Mexico and forms Texas's southern border with Mexico, into the Rio Grande Valley, the town of Eagle Pass and the city of El Paso.<sup>7</sup> In December 2023, some 4,000 migrants crossed illegally into Eagle Pass, a remote town of 35,000 people, within a single 24-hour period, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection<sup>8</sup>.

#### 3. HUNGARY DEFENDS ITS BORDER IN SPITE OF EU OPPOSITION

Almost immediately, the Hungarian government expressed alarm over the arrival of so many migrants at its southern border in 2015. Hungary unilaterally suspended EU asylum rules – known as the Dublin Regulation, which require migrants to be processed in the first country they enter and outlining where they should be returned to<sup>910</sup>. Hungarian officials also began construction a fence along its border with Serbia and Croatia<sup>11</sup>. In 2016, the country held a referendum rejecting EU migrant quotas, though the turnout was below the 50 percent threshold required for validity<sup>12</sup>.

Hungary's opposition to EU migration policies continues to the present day. It has passed what state secretary of the Interior Ministry Bence Rétvári called the strictest immigration law in the European Union, which, "closed all loopholes," earlier this year<sup>13</sup>. The country faces a fine of €20,000 per migrant it refuses to accept under the EU's migration pact<sup>14</sup>. In June, Hungary was also fined €200 million plus €2 million per day for failing to obey a 2020 decision from the European Court of Justice decision on processing migrants and asylum seekers<sup>15</sup>. In a radio interview following the court ruling, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán criticized the EU, stating, "The Brussels bubble is full of Soros people. Soros has a plan to bring a million migrants into Europe every year and create a mixed continent," referring to Hungarian-born financier and philanthropist George Soros<sup>16</sup>. "Our country has a dispute with Brussels and Hungary insists that Hungarians should decide who they want to live with."

#### 4. TEXAS ASSERTS ITS SOVEREIGNTY

Like Hungary, Texas has taken measures to stop the flow of migrants. In 2021, it introduced Operation Lone Star, which sent National Guard and law enforcement officers to the southern border<sup>17</sup>. Texas officials also began inspecting trucks crossing into the state from Mexico to pressure Mexican authorities into taking action<sup>18</sup>. Governor Greg Abbott initiated a policy of bussing migrants from Texas border towns to so-called "sanctuary cities" such as New York and Chicago, where local officials refuse to enforce U.S. immigration laws or carry out deportations. According to the Governor's office, more than 100,000 migrants have been transported to sanctuary cities<sup>19</sup>.

The Texas state government installed buoys in the Rio Grande between Piedras Negras, Mexico, and Eagle Pass to deter migrant crossings, drawing protests from Mexico and the U.S. federal government<sup>20</sup>. Texas also placed razor wire along the Rio Grande, impeding entry to popular crossing points for migrants<sup>21</sup>. Additionally, Texas passed SB-4, legislation which would allow state law enforcement officers to arrest and charge migrants illegally in Texas with "illegal entry" and return them to a port of entry<sup>22</sup>.

Much like Hungary, which attracted condemnation from fellow EU members for its attempts at slowing immigration through its territory, Texas has also encountered opposition from the U.S. federal government. The Border Patrol began cutting and removing razor wire along the Rio Grande, over Texas objections, effectively clearing a path for migrants to reach U.S. soil. The Supreme Court eventually sided with the federal government, allowing the removal of the razor wire<sup>23</sup>. The federal government also filed legal action to remove the border buoys, which Mexico claimed violated its territorial sovereignty, lacked proper federal permits and would negatively impact the diplomatic relationship with Mexico<sup>24</sup>. Additionally, the federal government pursued

legal action against SB-4, arguing that Texas's actions were "unconstitutional" and stating, "States cannot adopt immigration laws that interfere with the framework enacted by Congress."<sup>25</sup> As of July 2024, SB-4 is not effective, pending a court decision on its constitutionality<sup>26</sup>.

#### 5. HUNGARY AND TEXAS: LITTLE IN COMMON?

On the surface, Hungary and Texas have little in common. Hungary unfolds across the Carpathian Basin in Central Europe and sits at a significant crossroads of European history and empire. The Hungarian state dates back to 895, and the country, with a population of nearly 10 million, speaks a unique Ugric language. Hungary was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918, endured four decades of communist rule, marked by a 1956 Revolution violently suppressed by the Soviet Union, which ended in 1989. It joined the European Union in 2004.

In contrast, the area now known as Texas was first settled by Native American tribes, with the first European explorers arriving in the 1500s. Among them was Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, whose journey across what is now North America took him through Texas and eventually into Mexico<sup>27</sup>. The Spanish established missions in the region, which later became part of Mexico after it won independence from Spain in 1821. Texas quickly rebelled against Mexican rule, declaring independence in 1836 and establishing the Republic of Texas. It joined the United States in 1845, but Texas identity remains deeply rooted, and its sense of being more than just another U.S. state looms large<sup>28</sup>.

#### 6. A COUNTRY OF MIGRANTS?

Hungary is not a country of immigrants, though its geographic location has brought considerable transmigration. This was evident during the 2015 migrant crisis and later by the exodus of Ukrainians after the 2022 Russian invasion, with more than 1 million Ukrainians exiting the war-torn country via neighboring Hungary<sup>29</sup>.

Census data show that 84.3 percent of the population identify as Hungarian, with roughly 2 percent identifying as Romani, 1 percent as German, and 1.2 percent as other<sup>30</sup>. Roughly 13 percent of the population did not identify with any ethnic group, and the Romani community is likely underrepresented, according to The World Factbook published by the Central Intelligence Agency. Immigration to Hungary has been limited over the years, with much of the movement involving the return of ethnic Hungarians living in neighboring and nearby countries, such as Romania, especially after the fall of communism. Parts of the diaspora living in nearby countries – 3.3 million of whom were trapped outside Hungary after the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, through

which Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory after World War I – started returning to Hungary after the fall of communism<sup>31</sup>.

More than 130,000 refugees arrived in Hungary between 1988 and 1995; 75 percent of those arriving prior to the 2015 migrant crisis were ethnic Hungarians, according to an essay published by the Migration Policy Institute<sup>32</sup>. "This phenomenon has significantly influenced the development of Hungarian refugee law and policy," said the essay's author, Elżbieta M. Goździak. Indeed, Hungary has helped resettle populations of Hungarian descent, such as Venezuelans who were assisted in leaving the failed South American country for Hungary<sup>33</sup>. This followed Hungary approving a law in 2010 granting citizenship to Hungarians outside of Hungary and later extending those citizens the right to vote in its elections<sup>34</sup>.

Texas has a deep Hispanic heritage. Many counties in south Texas near the border with Mexico are Spanish-speaking, partly due to the original settlement of Nuevo Santander, a region of the Viceroyalty of New Spain. Nuevo Santander became part of Mexico and part of it was claimed by Texas after independence<sup>35</sup>. Texas's Hispanic population number 11.4 million in 2020 out of a total population of 29.36 million at the time<sup>36</sup>.

Texas has a long history of immigration from around the world, especially Mexico due to the country's proximity, poverty, and recurring political difficulties, including the 1910 Revolution. In 2018, Texas was home to 4.9 million immigrants, and 51 percent were from Mexico<sup>37</sup>. Additionally, Texas also attracts even more residents from other U.S. states for economic and cultural reasons<sup>38</sup>.

#### 7. LACKING LEGAL AUTHORITY ON IMMIGRATION?

Both Hungary and Texas face challenges in fully controlling immigration and border policies. As an EU member, Hungary is bound by various treaties governing EU policies, including immigration. According to a fact sheet from the European Parliament, "The EU is competent to lay down the conditions governing entry into and legal residence in a Member State," which "retain the right to determine volumes of admission for people coming from third countries to seek work"<sup>39</sup>. In the realm of illegal migration, "The EU may provide incentives and support for measures taken by Member States to promote the integration of legally resident third-country nationals; EU law makes no provision for the harmonization of national laws and regulations, however." The European Parliament fact sheet continued, "The European Union is required to prevent and reduce irregular immigration, in particular by means of an effective return policy, in a manner consistent with fundamental rights."

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Hungary has drawn scorn from the European Union for its migration policies. This issue is one of several on which Hungary has clashed with other European Union member states since Viktor Orbán's 2010 election<sup>40</sup>. The prime minister has told the European Union to stay out of the affairs of member states, asserting in 2018 that Hungary had replaced liberal democracy with "21st-century Christian democracy, which guarantees people's freedom, security. ... It supports the traditional family model of one man and one woman, keeps anti-Semitism at bay, and gives a chance for growth."<sup>41</sup>

The Financial Times quoted an EU diplomat describing Orbán's "game plan" with the European Union as, "A sustained campaign to shift power from Brussels to the member states."<sup>42</sup> Hungary has faced fines and attempts at weakening its voting power over accusations of "democratic backsliding" and other positions<sup>43</sup>. Despite these tensions and Euroskeptic attitudes, Hungary is unlikely to leave the European Union. A 2023 Pew Research Center survey still showed 59 percent support for the EU in Hungary, though this was a 10-point drop from the previous year<sup>44</sup>. Hungary also received approximately 550 million Forints in EU subsidies in 2022<sup>45</sup>. Orbán has said on the matter, "We need the EU and the EU needs us."<sup>46</sup>

On July 1 2024, Hungary assumed the rotating presidency of the Council of The European Union. Orbán captured the presidency's ambitions undet the slogan "Make Europe Great Again."<sup>47</sup> In a Financial Times essay, he then expressed a desire to revive Europe's uncompetitive economy and create a more business-friendly European Union<sup>48</sup>. In the essay, he also noted that "we want to curb illegal migration by working closely with the primary countries of origin and transit, emphasizing the importance of protecting external borders and the necessity of EU funding for this purpose."

#### 8. EU MIGRATION CONFLICT

Orbán has found few allies among European governments – with Poland and Slovakia being notable exceptions at times – for his warnings on migration over the years. The discord over migration intensified during the 2015 crisis when Hungary took unilateral actions, such as building a border barrier, which Brussels opposed and has refused to fund<sup>49</sup>. Hungary was joined by Romania, Czechia and Slovakia in voting against the E.U.'s Emergency Response Mechanism of quotas for resettling 160,000 migrants that year<sup>50</sup>. Hungary's share of the quota would have been 1,294 persons<sup>51</sup>. Despite receiving 203,898 applications since the start of 2015, the country granted protection to 800 claimants, as reported by The Economist in October 2016.

Orbán also publicly challenged Brussels. In 2017, he launched a survey asking the public for their views on immigration. The survey's questions' preamble stated that "Brussels wants to force Hungary to let in illegal immigrants," despite "a series of recent terror attacks in Europe."<sup>52</sup> Hungary followed up two years later with a letter to households

warning that Europe had "not learned anything from the horrible terror attacks of the past years," according to the Associated Press, while weakening member states' ability to protect their borders<sup>53</sup>.

The European Union has largely opposed or responded with legal action against Hungary's measures to protect its borders and control immigration. The European Council voted to approve the relocation of refugees from Greece and Italy in 2015, despite Hungary's objections. BBC journalist Chris Morris described the vote as "Highly unusual – unprecedented really – for a majority vote to be used in a situation like this, which involves basic issues of national sovereignty."<sup>54</sup> The European Court of Justice dismissed a petition from Hungary and Slovakia to annul the vote<sup>55</sup>. In 2018, the European Parliament voted to trigger an Article 7 procedure against Hungary for breaching the European Union's fundamental values, which include concerns over violations of "the fundamental rights of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees."<sup>56</sup> In 2024, the European Parliament again demanded Article 7 action against Hungary, but the European Commission opted not to proceed due to a lack of consensus<sup>57</sup>. Besides parliamentary censure, Hungary faces fines for failing to comply with the EU's migrant relocation pact and for disobeying European Court of Justice decisions on processing migrants and asylum seekers.<sup>5859</sup>

#### 9. EU MIGRATION PACT

Hungary most recently found itself clashing with the European Union over the introduction of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, which was narrowly approved in April 2024<sup>60</sup>. This pact strives to manage irregular migration and establish a unified asylum system across the European Union, which "delivers results while remaining grounded in our European values," according to the European Commission<sup>61</sup>. It establishes border centers where illegal migrants await their asylum claims and expedites deportations for those rejected. Additionally, claimants may be sent to countries deemed "safe" outside of Europe<sup>62</sup>.

The pact failed to pacify both migrant activists, who decried it as cruel, and countries such as Hungary, which felt it did not do enough to impede illegal migration. Orbán responded to the pact on X, formerly Twitter, calling it, "Another nail in the coffin of the European Union." He added, "Unity is dead, secure borders are no more. Hungary will never give in to the mass migration frenzy! We need a change in Brussels in order to Stop Migration!"<sup>63</sup>

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#### 10. U.S. FEDERAL SUPREMACY ON MIGRATION

Texas' recent actions on immigration, which have intensified since President Donald Trump left office in January 2021, are driven by concerns over security. Aaron Nielson, a lawyer representing Texas, argued in Federal Court, "Texas has a right to defend itself."<sup>64</sup> Texans point to criminal cartels and human trafficking organizations in Mexico, which increasingly control migration flows through the country and facilitate illegal entries into the United States. Texas officials also say drug cartels use migrants to facilitate the entry of illegal drugs between ports of entry<sup>65</sup>.

Texas's proactive stance is not unprecedented. State governments have previously attempted to combat illegal immigration in the face of federal inaction, raising important questions about state sovereignty and the supremacy of the U.S. Constitution on immigration matters.

For instance, Arizona enacted Senate Bill 1070 (S.B. 1070), officially known as the "Support our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act," in 2010. The law mandated that police officers act upon suspicions regarding a detainee's immigration status<sup>66</sup>. Critics decried the legislation as racist, and labeled it the "show me your papers" law, arguing that it criminalized people who did not carry immigration papers or worked without authorization<sup>67</sup>. In 2012, the Supreme Court struck down parts of the Arizona law, ruling that it "creates a conflict with federal law," while acknowledging that "Arizona may have frustrations with the problems caused by illegal immigration."<sup>68</sup>

#### 11. FRAUGHT IMMIGRATION ISSUE

Immigration has become a politically fraught in the United States over the past two decades. The Democratic Party has largely promoted more lenient policies on illegal immigration, viewing immigrants as a significant part of its base in an increasingly diverse nation. In contrast, the Republican Party has favored stricter border enforcement. Congress has failed to find common ground on a comprehensive immigration reform – with the last significant bill being approved in 1986<sup>69</sup>.

President Donald Trump capitalized on perception of a broken border with his successful 2016 presidential campaign, promising to build a border wall and enhance enforcement and deportations. Although he built at least 370 miles of wall along the nearly 2,000-mile border with Mexico, Mexico did not fund the project<sup>70</sup>. Due to his efforts to secure the border, conservative groups point to a much quieter border when Trump left office in January 2021<sup>71</sup>. This period coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, during which Title 42 health provisions were applied to expedite the removal of non-citizens to Mexico or their countries of origin<sup>72</sup>. Migrant flows also dropped during the pandemic due to border closures and lockdowns<sup>73</sup>.

President Joe Biden took office promising to put a friendly face on U.S. immigration policy, and his administration tried telling migrants outside the United States: Now is not the time to come to the U.S.<sup>74</sup> On his first day in office, Biden paused deportations for 100 days and suspended a Trump-era program known as Remain in Mexico, which required asylum seekers to wait in Mexico while their asylum claims were processed by U.S. courts<sup>75</sup>. Although "Remain in Mexico" was eventually scrapped, even its critics say that it prevented at least 68,000 people from entering the United States<sup>76</sup>.

Under President Biden, the number of migrant crossings began to rise, leading him to implement stricter border policies, much to the dismay of his base<sup>77</sup>. Some of the measures proved ineffective. For example, in 2023, U.S. Customs and Border Protection introduced the CBP One app, designed to allow migrants to request appointments to enter through a port of entry and seek asylum. Migrants adjusted to the application by waiting in Mexico City, where they were safer than in northern Mexico and could earn money to sustain themselves. A priest working with migrants described this phenomenon as the "CBP One effect," which ultimately attracted more hopefuls looking to enter the United States legally<sup>78</sup>. Eventually, Biden announced a June 2024 restriction on asylum applications, resulting in a 40 percent drop in migrant encounters between ports of entry over the next three weeks, according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security<sup>79</sup>. Unannounced by U.S. officials, Mexico had been stepping up enforcement throughout 2024, ostensibly at the request of the White House<sup>80</sup>.

#### 12. SERBIA, A HELPFUL NEIGHBOR

One of the borders Hungary shares is with Serbia, and the two nations cooperate closely to address irregular migration and enhance regional security. Reinforcing border management along the migration route is essential to reduce irregular arrivals, considering the evolving strategies of smugglers and the risks of firearms trafficking and organized crime.

In October 2022, the heads of Hungary, Austria, and Serbia met in Budapest to discuss expanding their cooperation in fighting illegal immigration<sup>81</sup>. This meeting followed armed clashes between criminal gangs fighting for control of the territories used to smuggle migrants into the European Union through the Serbia-Hungary border, and resulted in three fatalities after a shootout on October 27, 2024<sup>82</sup>.

In response to the occurrence, the Hungarian and Serbian Ministers of the Interior met to discuss the situation and reached an agreement that a Hungarian police officer would join the Serbian police and be on the ground during operations targeting the gangs involved, in order to exchange information regarding the migrant smugglers in a timely manner<sup>83</sup>. In May 2024, Hungary sent a contingent of 28 police officers to Serbia to assist in preventing illegal border crossings and human trafficking, as

confirmed by head of Hungary's border police department Balazs Laszlo, who said "It is our obligation to prevent illegal migrants from entering our country and the territory of the European Union, so we closely cooperate with the relevant authorities of neighboring countries". This deployment marked the third Hungarian police contingent serving in Serbia<sup>84</sup>.

Even prior to such agreements, however, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban had previously credited Serbia for helping preventing hundreds of thousands of irregular migrants from entering the European Union, noting that as many as 270,000 migrants had been stopped at the Serbian-Hungarian border. Along with Austria, the three countries signed a trilateral memorandum in an effort to formalize their cooperation on the issue of illegal migration in October 2022<sup>85</sup>.

#### 13. MEXICO, A FICKLE, FAIR-WEATHER NEIGHBOR

Texas shares a 1,254-mile border with Mexico. Cross-border movement was a way of life in many border communities until the late 2000s, when violence from Mexican drug cartels exploded in the neighboring Mexican states of Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Coahuila and Chihuahua. Between 2008 and 2011, at least 10,000 people were murdered in Ciudad Juárez, across from El Paso, Texas, as two drug cartels fought over a coveted smuggling corridor<sup>86</sup>.

Simultaneously, drug cartels began to dominate the trafficking of migrants throughout Mexico, particularly in the border states<sup>87</sup>. Migrants in the Remain in Mexico Program were especially vulnerable to kidnapping and other crimes as they waited in Mexican border cities effectively controlled by drug cartels<sup>88</sup>. Such is the control of drug cartels that they charge migrants to cross the Rio Grande, which separates Texas and Mexico, and impose severe beatings or worse on those who do not pay<sup>89</sup>. Cartels now use wristbands to identify the migrants who have paid for permission to transit through the areas they control<sup>90</sup>.

Mexico's government has largely ignored cartel crimes against migrants; President López Obrador downplayed the mass abductions of migrants near the Texas border in January 2024 as media "sensationalism," despite 31 individuals being pulled from buses and taken to safe houses<sup>91</sup>. López Obrador has never spoken critically of organized crime, and the powerful Sinaloa Cartel has electorally supported his Morena party in the state it controls<sup>92</sup>.

López Obrador often speaks in moral terms when addressing the issue of migration. As a candidate, he promised not to do the "dirty work" of any foreign government on migration and tore into Republicans as "bad governors and bad Christians."<sup>93</sup>

The Mexican government has shown little interest in assisting in curbing the flow of migrants, despite the United States suffering the highest volume of illegal immigration in the history of the country<sup>94</sup>. López Obrador, however, has claimed that Mexico is helping to slow immigration to the U.S.<sup>95</sup>

When Governor of the Mexican state of Chihuahua Maru Campos requested federal help to address the escalating humanitarian crisis at the border, Interior Secretary Adan Augusto emphasized that Mexico is a country of asylum with open doors for migrants, and stated that the federal government would continue to guarantee migrants' free passage through Mexico<sup>96</sup>.

In a 2023 conference in Morelia, Michoacán, Augusto algo reiterated that Mexico does not intend to act as the United States' migration police and emphasized that decisions would be made to improve the quality of migration for all their "foreign brothers" who have made the decision to transit through the territory<sup>97</sup>.

Even though the Mexican government has publicly encouraged the passage of migrants through Mexico on their way to the U.S, they have also shown a willingness to negotiate with the U.S. government on migration and use migrants as a bargaining chip<sup>98</sup>.

#### 14. MEXICO AS MIGRANT ENFORCER

The outgoing president, whose term ends on September 30, is following a longstanding pattern in Mexico: acting as a migrant enforcer, typically for a price, as Mexico can be coerced or cajoled into helping the United States on migration issues.

Historically, Mexico has sent migrants to the United States as Mexicans fled poverty and poor economic prospects. An estimated 10.7 million Mexicans live in the United States, though the figure has been declining as Mexican migration slowed after the 2008 economic crisis<sup>99</sup>. However, over the past 15 years, transmigration through Mexico has increased as migrants, primarily from the Northern Triangle of Central America – Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador – headed for the United States during the 2010s amid rampant gang violence, drought, and poverty<sup>100</sup>. The arrival of thousands of unaccompanied minors from Central America in 2014 underscored the crisis and desperation driving them to leave<sup>101</sup>. In response, Mexico announced the Southern Border Plan, aimed at impeding Central American migration through its southern states. While the extent of U.S. involvement in crafting the plan is unknown, the Obama administration attributed it to "diplomatic efforts."<sup>102</sup> The Trump administration applied more public pressure to Mexico than its predecessors. Trump bluntly instructed Mexico to break up caravans of migrants which formed in Central America or southern Chiapas state. In 2018, he referred to the caravans as an "illegal invasion," but added, "I appreciate what Mexico is trying to do" to stop them<sup>103</sup>. The following year, Trump threatened Mexico with escalating tariffs, prompting Mexico to again enforce migration control – after López Obrador had briefly experimented with providing migrants with humanitarian visas, which were overwhelmingly used to quickly pass through Mexico<sup>104105</sup>.

Trump and López Obrador seemed to have a cordial relationship; the Mexican leader often said Trump treated Mexico with "respect," while Trump spoke well of his Mexican counterpart<sup>106</sup>. The leaders appeared to strike an informal arrangement: Trump didn't press López Obrador on Mexican domestic matters and the Mexican president maintained strict migration enforcement.

#### 15. APPEASING AMLO

Biden also struck migration deals with López Obrador. In March 2021, Mexico's National Guard was sent to Chiapas, and travel restrictions were imposed on the southern border, following the Biden administration's decision to send COVID-19 vaccines to Mexico<sup>107</sup>. While Biden sought a more expansive agenda with Mexico, especially regarding climate issues<sup>108</sup>, the agenda often narrowed as Biden had to accommodate López Obrador's demands to make progress on immigration<sup>109</sup>.

These acts of appeasement might have seemed minor: prior to a 2023 summit, López Obrador insisted Air Force One land at a rarely used airport he had built north of Mexico City, but considered a priority mega-project of his administration. López Obrador subsequently claimed that Biden praised the facility as a great airport<sup>110</sup>. However, the real focus was on the United States refraining from criticizing López Obrador's controversial policies and practices. This included staying silent on his attacks on autonomous institutions like the electoral authority, his security policy dubbed "Hugs, Not Bullets," and his limited cooperation with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

The Mexican president even spoke of less cooperation on migration and drugs after a trio of media outlets revealed how the DEA probed possible drug cartel donations to his 2006 presidential campaign<sup>111</sup>. U.S. officials responded in ways that have become customary: appeasing López Obrador and assuring him there was no active investigation<sup>112</sup>. Ken Salazar, the U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, declared the matter "case closed" to pacify the president<sup>113</sup>.

López Obrador has demanded that the United States pay \$20 billion to address what he considers the root causes of migration in Central America and beyond. He's even insisted on lifting sanctions on Venezuela, where "21st Century Socialism" has driven an exodus of 7 million migrants, and for changed to U.S. policy on Cuba<sup>114</sup>. The demands show the leverage AMLO wields as the United States leans on Mexico to curb migration.

Throughout 2023, Mexico appears to have ramped up its enforcement efforts, particularly in anticipation of the November U.S. election. The Washington Office on Latin America, a human rights think tank, reported that Mexico has encountered or apprehended 240,000 migrants in February – 20 percent more than its previously monthly highs. Additionally, Mexico issued 98 percent fewer humanitarian visas, which has previously allowed migrants to remain in Mexico but were often used to travel through Mexican territory toward the United States<sup>115</sup>.

#### 16. U.S. SIDING WITH MEXICO OVER TEXAS

Complicating matters for Texas, Mexico has launched complaints over the state's actions to curb illegal immigration. Outgoing President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has repeatedly criticized Republican Texas Governor Greg Abbott, even accusing him of acting "in a racist manner" in a 2023 press conference<sup>116</sup> López Obrador has also criticized other Republicans for "politicking" on immigration issues, despite Mexico's National Immigration Institute stepping up immigration enforcement in 2024, leading to a decline in apprehensions by U.S. officials at the U.S-Mexico border<sup>117</sup>. He attacked Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, a Republican presidential hopeful, for promoting a strict anti-immigration bill and urged Latinos in the United States not to support Republicans<sup>118</sup>.

These comments reflect a shift in the Mexican president's posture toward Biden. Initially, López Obrador had been cool toward President Joe Biden after the latter won the November 2020 U.S. election<sup>119</sup>. However, he later found common ground with Biden, particularly in opposing Texas's' border measures. The Mexican Foreign Relations Secretariat filed a diplomatic note in response to the installation of border buoys, pledging to defend its citizens living in Texas and the United States<sup>120</sup>. Mexico also supported the Biden administration's legal action against Texas, filing an amicus brief contending that SB-4 harmed Mexicans residing in Texas and negatively impacted bilateral relations with the United States<sup>121</sup>. U.S. Ambassador Salazar echoes this stance, criticizing the buoys during a July 2023 visit to the border city of Ciudad Juárez, saying "The Mexican people are right to be offended because it is wrong, the placement of buoys [to stop migration] is an offense."<sup>122</sup> This approach by the Biden administration contrasts sharply with López Obrador's previously cordial relationship with Trump, despite Trump's threats to escalate tariffs on Mexican exports in 2019 unless Mexico took action to stop transmigration<sup>123</sup>. Texas's efforts to secure its borders has thus become a bargaining chip in Mexico-U.S. relations, with the Biden administration prioritizing improved relations with Mexico's populist president over strict border enforcement<sup>124</sup>.

#### 17. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Hungary and Texas, despite their vast geographical and cultural differences, share striking similarities in their responses to migration crises. Both have taken decisive actions to control their borders in the face of inadequate support from overarching authorities—the European Union for Hungary and the federal government for Texas. These actions have led to significant consequences, including fines and legal challenges, yet neither jurisdiction has relented in their efforts.

Hungary has benefitted from close cooperation with neighboring countries like Serbia to bolster border security, while Texas has found that it has no partner in Mexico. The persistent struggles of Hungary and Texas highlight the complex dynamics of migration management and the contentious interplay between local and supranational governance. As migration continues to be a pressing issue, the experiences of Hungary and Texas underscore the urgent need for more effective and cooperative approaches to border security and migrant integration.

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