

NO WARMING, NO WAR



Climate, Militarism, and Migration



How do climate change, immigration, and militarism relate?

U.S. Militarism brings violence to communities across the United States and around the world, while degrading our environment and contributing directly to climate change. Increasingly, the United States deploys military power in response to climate-related migration. [Immigrant justice is climate justice](#), and challenging militarism is critical to achieving both.

What do climate change and immigration have to do with each other?

People around the world are already experiencing the impacts of a warming climate. In the coming decades, climate impacts like drought, resource scarcity, extreme weather events, rising sea level, and major flooding will make more corners of the world uninhabitable. These ecological realities, called “push factors” or “threat multipliers,” compound all the other reasons people move from one place to another. Commonly cited [estimates project](#) that around 200 million people will be displaced by the middle of the century due to climate change.

Regardless of the exact number of people that will be on the move in the coming decades, it is clear that climate change will force people to migrate at staggering rates. Climate change is [already impacting conflict and flows in migration](#). Between 2008 and 2015 an average of [21.5 million people were displaced annually](#) from the “impact and threat of climate-related hazards.” According to the [Cost of War Project](#), 21 million people have been displaced by the War on Terror. These two figures are almost certainly not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, as the climate crisis worsens, more ecological disasters and wars will continue to fuel mass migration.

Got it. How does militarism fit into all of this?

It is clear that on a warming planet, cross-border migration will rise. Rich countries that are well-resourced and better-positioned to adapt to climate change can provide safe refuge to those forced to travel across borders. Instead, countries like the United States are [allocating more of their budgets](#) to build walls, hire armed guards, and [militarize borders](#) to keep migrants out. Over the course of several decades, US border and immigration enforcement has undergone unprecedented military escalations. Transforming the border into an imagined war zone, a bloated border budget funds increasing numbers of armed border patrol agents and surveillance technologies from drones and sensors to facial recognition and human detection technologies.

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This is a crisis. How do I explain to my congressional representatives that we have a responsibility to support climate migrants?

Climate change will impact every country in the world in a range of different ways. Yet, climate change doesn't affect everyone equally. Indigenous people, people of color, and people with lower incomes [confront its impacts first and worst](#). [Climate change is already directly contributing](#) to declines in economic and social conditions across the Global South. A [2019 study](#) found that for poor countries there is a greater-than 90% likelihood that per capita GDP is lower today than if global warming had not occurred. By turning climate change into a security issue, those who have [contributed the least](#) to the climate crisis not only suffer the most from its consequences, but are also targeted with security responses to those very climate impacts.

Having emitted nearly a third of the excess carbon dioxide in the atmosphere today, the United States is the top historic contributor to carbon emissions. Having played [such an outsized role](#) in causing the crisis, the United States bears a disproportionate share of the responsibility to address it, including a [debt to displaced people](#) around the world. Instead of accounting for this reality, the United States has characterized climate migrants as “security threats” and invested unprecedented amounts in border fortification to keep them out.

How do immigrants who are already in the United States play into all of this?

The force of the “war on migrants” extends beyond the borderlands, as something akin to a “virtual border” follows immigrants—particularly those who are undocumented—wherever they go. The physical barriers along the actual boundary line are [just one layer of US immigration enforcement](#), followed by virtual technology walls, roadside checkpoints, and roving patrols far away from the southwest border. ICE and CBP have a track record of systematic violence that terrorizes immigrant communities across the United States. The rhetoric that funnels billions of dollars into enhanced border fortification also functions to terrorize undocumented immigrants living in the United States.

As a result of this expansive immigration enforcement apparatus, [undocumented communities become the target](#) of the racist and for-profit detention and deportation machine. Thousands of immigrants are unnecessarily locked up every year, tearing families apart and imposing heavy social costs. The monetary cost to taxpayers is also significant. The cost of incarcerating so many people, for example, is [estimated to be over \\$1 billion dollars](#) a year.

Meanwhile, immigrants typically maintain close ties to their home countries, where their communities continue to disproportionately bear the brunt of the climate crisis and U.S. militarism. Immigrants often send money to family in their home country, and may form the basis for new migration as their families, friends, and others seek to join them in the United States. Oppressive immigration policies like family separation and detention [do not deter migrants](#) faced with dire situations at home from attempting to come to the United States.

So how do we advocate for immigrants, the environment, and demilitarization at once?

In the face of a climate-changed future, we need solidarity over security. We need to care for each other. We need a massive expansion of funding for victims of US wars and economic and environmental policies that have left tens of millions in need of humanitarian support. We also need to [defund hate](#) by doing away with the militarized agencies that terrorize immigrant communities in the United States. In the face of a climate-changed future, we must reverse our decades-long trend in border militarization and all anti-immigrant operations carried out by ICE and CBP and in doing so uphold our collective freedom to move and stay. [Immigrant justice is climate justice](#), and challenging militarism is critical to achieving both.