

US Senate

Reinstating Trump-Era Tariffs and Immigration Restrictions: Protectionism, Trade Barriers, and Immigration Policy

1. History of the committee

The United States Senate is one of the two chambers of the U.S. Congress, established by the Constitution in 1789 as part of the legislative branch of government. Unlike the House of Representatives which reflects population size, the Senate was designed to represent the states equally with each state electing two senators regardless of its population. This structure was the result of the “Great Compromise” during the Constitutional Convention, where delegates sought to balance the influence of large and small states in the new federal system. From its earliest days, the Senate has played a central role in shaping both domestic and foreign policy in the United States.

Historically, the Senate has developed a reputation as a more deliberative body compared to the House. Its smaller size and longer six-year terms were intended to encourage stability, independence, and a broader perspective on issues of national importance. Over the years, the Senate has differed itself by its powers of “advice and consent,” particularly in approving treaties, confirming presidential appointments, and conducting impeachment trials. These responsibilities have placed the Senate at the center of debates about the scope of executive power and the proper balance between different branches of government.

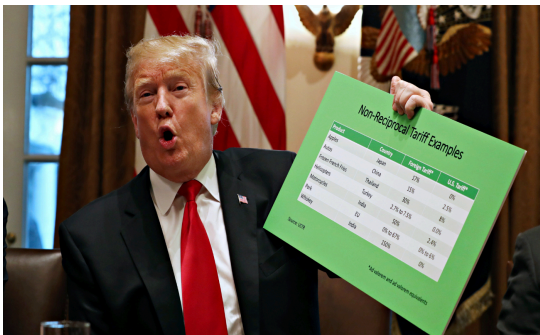
Currently, the Senate continues to serve as one of the most influential legislative bodies in the world. Its decisive role is needed for the U.S. trade, immigration, and foreign policy, which are directly relevant to the topic of this committee. Debates over tariffs, immigration restrictions, and economic protectionism have often shown the Senate’s dual function: safeguarding state interests while also confronting global challenges. As the Senate considers issues like the reinstatement of Trump-era tariffs and immigration policies, it draws upon a long history of balancing economic priorities with

America's broader commitments to democratic values and humanitarian principles.

1. Introduction

The question of reinstating Trump-era tariffs and immigration restrictions is one of the most pressing debates facing the United States Senate today. On the trade side, the administration has reintroduced sweeping tariffs on key goods such as steel, aluminum, auto parts, and semiconductors, often justified under national security provisions. According to the Wall Street Journal, these measures now account for nearly six percent of federal revenue, an unusually high dependence on tariffs in the modern U.S. economy. Economists warn that the burden of these tariffs falls heavily on American households and domestic firms, with Goldman Sachs estimating that consumers and businesses bear about forty percent of the cost. A recent Yale-Budget Lab study calculated that the average household could pay an additional 2,800 dollars annually due to higher prices, while over six hundred thousand jobs may be at risk because of rising production costs.

Alongside these trade measures, the administration has reinstated strict immigration policies, including limits on birthright citizenship, the return of the “Remain in Mexico” program, the suspension of refugee admissions, and broad enforcement powers under the Laken



Riley Act. The Associated Press reports that these actions have already sparked significant legal and political pushback, as many lawmakers argue they undermine both constitutional principles and America's humanitarian commitments. The human and economic costs are also becoming evident. In California, for example, intensified ICE raids have reduced the agricultural workforce by an estimated twenty to forty

percent, causing billions of dollars in crop losses and noticeable spikes in produce prices. Moody's Analytics chief economist Mark Zandi further cautions that mass deportations could fuel inflation to four percent, as industries dependent on immigrant labor face severe shortages.

This combination of tariffs and immigration restrictions reflects the larger challenge of balancing protectionist economic strategies with humanitarian responsibility. Supporters argue that these policies defend American workers, restore industrial strength, and secure national borders. Critics counter that they increase household costs, destabilize labor markets, and damage the nation's global image as a defender of human rights. The U.S. Senate is therefore tasked with weighing the economic rationale of protectionism against the social and humanitarian consequences of restrictive policies.

2. Historical context

The debate over tariffs and immigration in the United States has deep historical roots. Since the nineteenth century, tariffs have been a recurring tool of economic policy. During the early industrial period, the U.S. relied heavily on tariffs to protect domestic manufacturers, most notably under the Tariff of 1828, often called the “Tariff of Abominations.” Protectionist measures remained central through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, culminating in the Smoot-Hawley Tariff of 1930, which raised duties on thousands of imports and is widely blamed for worsening the Great Depression by sparking global retaliation. After World War II, however, the U.S. shifted toward liberalized trade through agreements like the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and later the World Trade Organization, reflecting a broader embrace of globalization and multilateralism.

Immigration has been equally argumentative throughout American history. In the late nineteenth century, laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Immigration Act of 1924 established strict racial and national quotas, reflecting a desire to protect domestic labor but also deep xenophobia. These restrictions remained until the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which eliminated quotas and dramatically changed the demographic makeup of the United States. Since then, the tension between border security and humanitarian responsibility has shaped debates over policies such as the Reagan-era amnesty for undocumented immigrants, the



post-9/11 tightening of border enforcement, and the Obama administration's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.

Donald Trump's presidency marked a return to economic protectionism and strict immigration enforcement. Between 2017 and 2021, his administration imposed tariffs on goods from China, the European Union, Canada, and Mexico, with the stated aim of protecting American industries and reducing trade deficits. By 2020, the U.S. had tariffs on over 360 billion dollars' worth of Chinese imports, triggering a trade war that affected global supply chains and U.S. consumers. At the same time, Trump implemented some of the most restrictive immigration policies in modern history, including the travel ban on several Muslim-majority countries, the "Remain in Mexico" policy requiring asylum seekers to wait outside U.S. borders, and efforts to end birthright citizenship. These measures were framed as protecting national security and American jobs but provoked widespread criticism for their humanitarian consequences.

In the years since, both tariffs and immigration restrictions have remained at the center of American political discourse. President Biden attempted to roll back some Trump-era policies, particularly in immigration, while maintaining certain tariffs on China. With Trump's return to office, these measures have now been reinstated with even greater force, reviving historical debates about whether protectionism strengthens the U.S. economy or undermines it, and whether strict immigration controls defend national sovereignty or erode humanitarian values. This historical trajectory shows that the current debate is not isolated but part of a much longer struggle to reconcile economic nationalism with America's role as a global leader committed to both prosperity and human rights.

3. Current Issue

The current debate over tariffs and immigration in the United States has become one of the most urgent policy challenges of 2025. With the return of the Trump administration, sweeping tariffs have been reimposed on critical goods such as steel, aluminum, automobiles, and semiconductors. The Wall Street Journal reports that these duties now represent nearly six percent of federal revenue, making tariffs a central tool of fiscal policy in ways not seen for decades. However, economists note that the costs are not borne by foreign exporters alone.

According to Goldman Sachs, American consumers and domestic businesses absorb around forty percent of the tariff burden, and a Yale-Budget Lab study estimates that households face nearly 2,800 dollars in additional expenses annually as prices rise on everyday goods. Analysts also warn of significant risks to the labor market, with over six hundred thousand jobs potentially threatened by higher input costs and retaliatory trade actions.

Immigration restrictions have also returned in full force, reigniting contentious legal and humanitarian disputes. The administration has revived the “Remain in Mexico” policy, suspended the Refugee Admissions Program, and curtailed birthright citizenship. The Associated Press notes that these measures have already triggered lawsuits from civil rights groups and resistance from several states, which argue that the policies undermine constitutional guarantees. Meanwhile, the newly enacted Laken Riley Act grants expanded powers for detention and broadens state liability for crimes tied to undocumented immigrants, raising concerns about overreach and misuse. The New York Post cites economists who fear that mass deportations could create severe labor shortages in agriculture, construction, and food processing, driving inflation as high as four percent.

The consequences of these policies are already visible on the ground. In California’s agricultural regions, intensified immigration raids have cut the workforce by nearly forty percent, resulting in billions of dollars in lost crop revenue and pushing food prices higher for consumers nationwide. Farmers and business leaders warn that supply chains, already strained by global disruptions, are under further stress from labor shortages. On the international stage, trading partners are preparing retaliatory tariffs, threatening to escalate tensions in ways that could undermine U.S. export industries. At the same time, humanitarian organizations caution that restrictive immigration measures are putting vulnerable populations at risk, from asylum seekers at the southern border to refugees awaiting resettlement.

The United States Senate thus faces a pressing dilemma: whether reinstating these tariffs and restrictions serves the national interest by protecting jobs and strengthening industries, or whether they impose unsustainable economic and humanitarian costs. As the body constitutionally empowered to oversee trade and immigration policy, the Senate must now weigh the short-term benefits of economic nationalism against the long-term implications for America’s

economy, society, and global reputation.

4. Past International actions

The international community has a long history of responding to U.S. policies on tariffs and immigration, particularly during the Trump administration between 2017 and 2021. On trade, the imposition of tariffs on steel and aluminum in 2018 under Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act provoked swift retaliation. The European Union, Canada, Mexico, and China responded with counter-tariffs targeting iconic U.S. products such as bourbon, motorcycles, and agricultural exports. The World Trade Organization became a forum for disputes, with members filing complaints against U.S. protectionist measures, though the weakening of the WTO's appellate body limited enforcement. By 2019, the escalating tariff war between the United States and China had become one of the largest in modern history, with China imposing duties on \$110 billion worth of U.S. goods and the U.S. on over \$360 billion in Chinese exports. These actions demonstrated the interconnectedness of global supply chains and the risks of unilateral protectionism.

On immigration, international reactions were equally strong. The Trump administration's travel ban on several Muslim-majority countries in 2017 drew condemnation from allies in Europe and human rights organizations worldwide, which argued the policy violated international norms of non-discrimination and refugee protection. The reinstatement of the "Remain in Mexico" policy, formally known as the Migrant Protection Protocols, involved bilateral cooperation with Mexico but was criticized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which stated that forcing asylum seekers to wait in unsafe conditions violated international refugee law. Similarly, the decision to withdraw from the Global Compact for Migration in 2018 signaled U.S. resistance to multilateral frameworks on human mobility, leaving many states questioning America's commitment to international cooperation on migration management.

Other international responses focused on humanitarian concerns. Organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch repeatedly denounced family separations at the U.S. border and the reduction of refugee admissions to historic lows. The United Nations Human

Rights Council criticized the United States for undermining international commitments to refugee protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Meanwhile, neighboring states like Canada and Mexico faced increased migration pressures due to the redirection of asylum flows caused by U.S. restrictions, which further strained regional relations.

These past international actions illustrate that U.S. policies on tariffs and immigration rarely operate in isolation. Protectionist trade policies triggered retaliation that harmed U.S. exporters, while restrictive immigration measures drew diplomatic pushback and humanitarian criticism from allies and multilateral institutions. For today's U.S. Senate, the lesson is clear: reinstating Trump-era policies will not only affect domestic politics but will also shape America's standing in the global order, testing relationships with trade partners, allies, and international organizations committed to human rights and free trade.

5. *Subtopics*

- The economic consequences of reinstating tariffs on steel, aluminum, semiconductors, and auto parts.
- The impact of tariff policies on the U.S.–China relations and the risk of renewed trade wars
- Household and consumer costs resulting from tariff-driven price increases.
- Constitutional debates over restricting birthright citizenship.
- The humanitarian and legal implications of reinstating the “Remain in Mexico” policy.
- The economic impact of mass deportations on agriculture, food processing, and construction.
- The role of the Laken Riley Act in expanding state responsibility for immigration enforcement.

- The effect of suspending the Refugee Admissions Program on U.S. humanitarian commitments.
- Balancing national security arguments with human rights obligations in immigration policy.
- The Senate's responsibility in overseeing executive power on trade and immigration.

6. Positions

Mitch McConnell (Republican – Kentucky)

As one of the most senior Republican senators, Mitch McConnell has consistently defended conservative approaches to trade and immigration. He is likely to back Trump-era tariffs as a way to protect American industries, particularly manufacturing, and to ensure U.S. economic independence from China. On immigration, McConnell generally supports stricter enforcement and border control, aligning with Republican priorities, though he has also expressed concern about disruptions to business interests in his home state. His role in the debate represents the establishment Republican defense of protectionism and security-first immigration policies.

Chuck Schumer (Democrat – New York)

As the Senate Majority Leader, Chuck Schumer has strongly opposed many Trump-era policies, framing tariffs as harmful to consumers and small businesses and immigration restrictions as unconstitutional and inhumane. Representing a state with high levels of international trade and a large immigrant population, Schumer is expected to argue against reinstating broad tariffs and immigration bans. He will likely emphasize the importance of upholding humanitarian values, constitutional protections such as birthright citizenship, and maintaining cooperative relationships with allies in trade policy.

Ted Cruz (Republican – Texas)

Ted Cruz is a vocal supporter of Trump-era immigration restrictions, particularly the “Remain in

Mexico” policy, given Texas’s direct connection to the southern border. He is expected to argue for mass deportations and tougher border security, claiming these measures protect American sovereignty and public safety. On tariffs, Cruz tends to support protectionist measures but must also balance them with the interests of Texas industries, especially agriculture and energy, which are vulnerable to retaliatory tariffs. His role embodies the hardline Republican stance on immigration.

Elizabeth Warren (Democrat – Massachusetts)

Elizabeth Warren has long been critical of Trump-era tariffs and immigration policies, emphasizing their impact on working families and vulnerable populations. She is likely to argue that tariffs function as a hidden tax on consumers and that immigration restrictions violate human rights while weakening essential sectors that depend on immigrant labor. Warren may also stress the importance of building fair trade agreements rather than engaging in trade wars, framing her position as a defense of both economic justice and humanitarian responsibility.

Marco Rubio (Republican – Florida)

Marco Rubio occupies a nuanced position, balancing Republican support for border enforcement with the economic realities of his home state. Florida’s economy relies heavily on agriculture and trade, sectors vulnerable to both labor shortages and retaliatory tariffs. While Rubio supports tighter border controls and immigration enforcement, he has also warned against the long-term economic costs of aggressive deportation policies and escalating trade wars. Rubio’s position reflects the pragmatic wing of the Republican Party that shares Trump’s concerns but is cautious about unintended consequences.

Alex Padilla (Democrat – California)

Representing a border state with one of the largest immigrant populations, Alex Padilla is a strong opponent of reinstating Trump-era immigration restrictions. He has been outspoken in defending asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrant workers, highlighting their importance to California’s agricultural economy. On tariffs, Padilla is also critical, noting that trade wars disproportionately harm his state’s exporters, such as technology and agricultural producers. His voice represents the perspective of states most directly affected by both immigration enforcement and retaliatory tariffs.

7. *Guiding questions*

- How do reinstated tariffs on steel, aluminum, auto parts, and semiconductors affect American consumers, workers, and industries?
- To what extent do tariffs protect U.S. national security and economic independence, and when do they risk sparking harmful trade wars?
- How should the Senate address the burden of higher prices on American households caused by tariffs?
- Does restricting birthright citizenship violate the U.S. Constitution, and if so, what alternatives can be considered?
- What are the humanitarian consequences of reinstating the “Remain in Mexico” policy, and how should the Senate respond to them?
- How can the U.S. balance labor market needs with mass deportation policies that risk creating shortages in agriculture and other industries?
- Should the Laken Riley Act and expanded state-level immigration enforcement powers be supported, or do they overstep federal authority?
- What responsibilities does the United States have under international refugee and human rights law when suspending refugee admissions?
- How can the Senate balance national security concerns with the economic and humanitarian consequences of Trump-era immigration restrictions?
- What role should the Senate play in checking or supporting executive power on trade and immigration policy?

8. *Suggested sources*

- Congressional Research Service (CRS) Reports
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)
- Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR)
- *The Wall Street Journal*
- *The New York Times*
- *The Washington Post*
- *Associated Press (AP)*
- *Politico*
- Brookings Institution



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