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ARRESTS AT SOUTHERN BORDER RISE FOR THIRD-STRAIGHT MONTH

U.S. agents nabbed more than 18,000 people trying to cross from Mexico

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Arrests of people caught trying to illegally cross the Mexican border into the U.S. rose in July from a month earlier, the third straight monthly increase, according to federal figures released Tuesday.

U.S. Border Patrol agents arrested 18,198 people caught sneaking across the border in July, compared with 16,087 in June.

President Donald Trump has made priorities of border security, including building a wall along the Mexican border, and a crackdown on illegal immigration. He has repeatedly said that under his watch arrests at the border have plummeted, and immigration agents have stepped up efforts to arrest and deport immigrants living in the country illegally.

During Mr. Trump's first few months in office, arrests at the border did drop – 11,125 people were detained in April, which the administration said was a record low for a single month. Border agents made 12,197 arrests in March and 18,755 in February.

Border apprehensions have been steadily increasing since May.

Despite the uptick, arrests at the border remain at historic lows, a trend that started during Barack Obama's presidency. Since October 2016, arrests at the border are down about 36 percent compared with a year earlier.

Arrests at the border, the best available gauge of how many people are trying to sneak into the U.S., typically increase in the spring and early summer only to level off in the late summer before declining during the colder fall and winter months.

David Lapan, a Department of Homeland Security spokesman, said Tuesday it is too soon to tell if the increases in arrests are a signal that more people will try to cross the border illegally in the future or if this is a seasonal trend.

The number of immigrant children caught traveling alone and immigrants traveling as families have been on the rise, with nearly 3,400 immigrants in families and 2,500 children arrested in July. Most of the children and families are originally from Honduras, El Salvador or Guatemala, according to DHS, which tracks the numbers.

That has been the case for several years, as immigrants from countries other than Mexico have outpaced the number of Mexican nationals caught crossing the border illegally.

Mr. Lapan said U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has removed about 102,000 immigrants from the U.S. since the start of the budget year in October. During that period, about 171,300 immigrants have been arrested by ICE agents.

During the 2016 budget year, ICE removed about 240,000 immigrants and arrested 114,434.

Mr. Lapan said the decline in deportations is partly attributable to the overall drop in arrests at the border.