



By: TA | AP Brief

Peru would declare a state of emergency due to the wave of Venezuelan migrants



President José Jerí of Peru said his government would declare a state of emergency along the country's southern border and deploy more armed forces to the area as a large number of Venezuelan migrants venture north from Chile, where anti-immigrant sentiment has surged during a fraught presidential campaign.

Hundreds of thousands of migrants fleeing crises in their home countries or seeking better opportunities abroad long have traversed the continent and the Peruvian border to build new lives in Chile, one of Latin America's most stable and prosperous nations.

But scores of people without legal status in Chile — mostly Venezuelans who abandoned their country's **economic ruin** and **authoritarian rule** in recent years — are now also headed in the other direction as Chile prepares to harden its stance against immigration.

The favorite to win **Chile's presidential runoff** on Dec. 14, ultraconservative lawyer José Antonio Kast, has built his campaign around popular fears over **immigration from Venezuela** and a rise in organized crime.

He filmed a campaign video at Chile's porous desert border with Peru last week, warning immigrants without formal status to get out of the country while they still can.

"You have 111 days to leave Chile voluntarily," Kast said in the ad, referring to the number of days until a new administration takes over from current left-wing President Gabriel Boric. "If not, we will stop you, we will detain you, we will expel you. You will leave with only the clothes on your back."

Growing chaos

Soon Peruvian media was awash with images of migrant families rushing north from Chile into Peru, their belongings stuffed in backpacks and garbage bags.

Within days, Jerí traveled to the same area to inspect border controls and sent armed forces

to boost security operations.

Residents in Chile's northern border towns reported growing chaos as crowds of people who left Chile but lacked permission to enter Peru were stranded in limbo. On Friday, Jerí convened his Cabinet to declare a state of emergency in the region.

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There is no clear figure for how many people have decided to leave Chile against the backdrop of Kast's threats of mass deportations and what immigration lawyers describe as increased xenophobia in the South American country, home to 18.5 million people.

On Friday, Kast released a new video repeating his warning to immigrants and urging Boric to intervene. Peruvian Foreign Minister Hugo de Zela dismissed his comments, saying that a presidential candidate "cannot speak on behalf of the Chilean government."

When asked how Kast's campaign impacted the outflow of migrants, Chilean Minister of Security Luis Cordero responded that "rhetoric sometimes has consequences."

"People cannot be used as a means to create controversy for the elections," he said. "Our main purpose is to prevent a humanitarian crisis."