



# Extreme Vetting at US Ports of Entry under Trump 2.0: What You Need to Know

By: [Anne Rowley](#), Counsel

One might not suspect that a thing as simple as travel would change remarkably when presidential administrations do, but, the reality is that the scrutiny placed on individuals entering and leaving the country has increased significantly since President Trump took office for the second time in January 2025. One of the most contentious aspects of modern immigration policy is the practice of "extreme vetting" for noncitizens, especially at airports. The term "extreme vetting" has been a key part of immigration debates in recent years, and in 2025, the implementation of heightened security measures at airports and other ports of entry has become more intense than ever. But what exactly does this mean for noncitizens, and how does it shape how we think about domestic and international travel insofar as it affects immigration?

## The Evolution of Vetting: Expanding Security Protocols

In the past, security at airports largely focused on preventing dangerous items or individuals from boarding flights—essentially, checking passports, visas, and luggage. Today, however, the concept of vetting has expanded to include not just physical security checks, but a much broader, more comprehensive process of scrutiny. Extreme vetting, which is the practice of rigorously vetting noncitizens, can include anything from detailed background checks to analyzing digital footprints and reviewing data recently deleted from personal devices such as cell phones and laptops.

In 2025, this has evolved into a highly sophisticated system that draws from an ever-expanding pool of information. Governments now rely heavily on biometrics, social media activity, and even financial data to make decisions about who is allowed to cross their borders. This appears to be the "new normal" of airport security for noncitizens traveling to the US; as the current administration adjusts government resources to prioritize its conception of national security, navigating international travel becomes more challenging.

## The Digital Footprint: Social Media and Online Activity

A key component of extreme vetting at ports of entry is the investigation of a noncitizen's digital footprint. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, TikTok, X (formerly known as



Twitter), and Instagram, as well as other online activities, are increasingly being examined by authorities. In 2025, it's not uncommon for Customs officials to review social media posts, pictures, and connections to determine a person's associations or intentions.

For instance, a traveler's past social media posts or their affiliations with certain groups or causes can come under intense scrutiny, and recently, have garnered national attention in high profile cases of both nonimmigrants and lawful permanent residents being ordered removed or transferred to ICE detention centers on entry to the States. While the government may argue that extreme vetting is an effective way to spot potential national security risks, especially when someone's online activity indicates extremist views or illegal behavior, it appears increasingly that public expectations of privacy may be shifting in response to the current administration's national security protocols under the current administration's view of doing what it takes to adhere to strict protocols that are designed to keep alleged threats out of the country.

Some observers raise concerns that individuals may be unfairly targeted based on their digital presence if their online activity is misinterpreted or distorted by algorithms. The risk of false positives—where innocent individuals are wrongly flagged as threats—is a significant concern, and one that is likely to continue based on recent media releases indicating these practices are widespread.

## The Impact on Travel and Tourism

As one might imagine, extreme vetting is causing significant disruptions to the travel experience, especially for noncitizens. While some travelers may face only slight delays due to the heightened screening process, others could experience long interrogations, additional searches, or even detention and expedited removal, depending on the level of suspicion raised by their profiles.

For many, this means increased anxiety and uncertainty when booking international (or even domestic) flights, as travelers are unsure whether their personal history, social media posts, or travel patterns could trigger further investigation. This can be especially concerning for individuals who have no criminal background but find themselves subjected to lengthy vetting due to algorithms or other factors misidentifying them as high-risk individuals.

Moreover, the process could discourage tourism and business travel, particularly as more stringent vetting procedures continue to be reported in the US. It is reasonable to believe our country will see a decline in international visitors as people seek destinations with less complicated entry requirements.



## Legal and Ethical Considerations

The implementation of extreme vetting raises several legal and ethical questions. One concern is the transparency of the vetting process. Are travelers made aware of what information is being collected and how it will be used? Are there enough safeguards in place to ensure that innocent individuals are not unfairly penalized or discriminated against due to factors like race, religion, or nationality?

Another critical issue is the accountability of the systems used for extreme vetting. What happens if an AI system makes a mistake, wrongly flagging an innocent traveler as a threat? In many cases, the burden of proof falls on the traveler to prove their innocence, which can be a daunting and time-consuming task.

In response to these challenges, some human rights organizations have called for stronger regulations and oversight of the vetting process. The balance between security and privacy continues to be a point of debate, with advocates for individual rights urging for greater protection against invasive screening procedures.

## The Future of Extreme Vetting

As technology continues to advance and threats become more complex, it is conceivable that extreme vetting at airports will become more refined in the coming years. While some of these measures are undeniably effective in enhancing security, they also come with considerable risks to privacy and personal freedoms.

Looking ahead, it appears travelers would be prudent to appreciate how their data is being used. In addition to measures like ensuring consistency across DS-160s and petitions or applications filed with USCIS, travelers may adapt by traveling without their primary personal devices, choosing instead to use temporary cell phones, and having their laptops and personal cell phones shipped to their final destinations so as to avoid the potential anxiety and disruption that such intense searches provoke. As travelers adjust, so too should the government, in creating processes that achieve national security priorities while also being more transparent, accountable, and respectful of individuals' rights.

In 2025, extreme vetting is not just a buzzword—it's a global reality, shaping how we travel and how nations protect their borders. As technology continues to evolve, so too will the policies that guide our movement across the world. For now, travelers must adapt to a world where security concerns often intersect with personal freedoms, and where the vetting process is only likely to become more complex with time.