Our Open Border

An Immigration Crisis Beyond Imagining

In 1960, the Eisenhower administration began counting the number of foreign nationals "apprehended" or "encountered" by what was then called the U.S. Border Control when crossing into the U.S. over its southern border with Mexico. These figures have been published and closely monitored through the years, and there has never been anything like the numbers we are seeing now. A human tsunami of previously unfathomable size—Border Patrol has had to handle more than 7.6 million border crossers in 36 months—has smashed every record, with each year's numbers exceeding the previous year's record in stair-stepping fashion.



Of the over 7.6 million illegals encountered by Border Patrol since January 2021, the number allowed to stay inside the U.S. is somewhere north of five million. But with the percentage of those allowed to stay now approaching 100 percent, if current trends hold, the total allowed to remain in the U.S. under the Biden administration will reach ten million by next January.

The U.S. has experienced surges of illegal immigration in the past, but these have been brought quickly under control by implementing policies to deter, block, detain, and deport illegal immigrants. Not this time. To put the current numbers in perspective, consider that Jeh Johnson, President Obama's Director of Homeland Security, told MSNBC that in his time in office—when the number of illegal crossings was relatively low—he considered it bad if apprehensions exceeded 1,000 a day, because anything more than that "overwhelms the system." Over the past three years, apprehensions have averaged about 6,940 per day.

This crisis is not the result of incompetence, but of purposeful policies.

Even with a surge in illegal crossings in 2019—this was due to a legal loophole that encouraged illegals to cross with minors—the Trump administration had brought apprehensions down to between 800 and 1,500 a day in his final year in office, the lowest numbers in 45 years. Four months into the Biden administration, apprehensions spiked to about 6,000 per day. There were 2.4 million apprehensions in 2022, a daily average of 6,575. In 2023 there were three million apprehensions, a daily average of 8,219. Entering 2024, apprehensions were up to 12,000 to 15,000 per day.

The reality is even worse, because these numbers do not include the people who entered the U.S. illegally without being apprehended—sometimes referred to as "gotaways"—a number the Border Patrol estimates but does not make public. That estimate over the past three years is two million, bringing the three-year total of illegal immigrants to ten million—a number equivalent to the population of Greater London or Greater Chicago.

But these are just numbers. Who are these people? They are internationally diverse: 45 percent come from 170 countries outside the traditional origin countries of Mexico and Central America. Many are unaccompanied minors: 448,000 to date. More than 330 as of November 2023 are on the FBI's terrorist watch list. Many are murderers, rapists, kidnappers, and violent criminals. More than a million have been lawfully ordered deported by judges in the U.S. but remain in our country regardless. The dismissal by the executive branch of our government of hundreds of thousands of cases of immigration law violations is unprecedented.

It is worth noting some other firsts: Mexico's crime syndicates and their paramilitary forces have never earned so much money from cross-border smuggling, and it is reported that their proceeds from human smuggling are surpassing those from drug smuggling for the first time. Never before have the Border Patrol's 19,000 agents been ordered to abandon vast stretches of the border to conduct administrative intake duty. Never have so many immigrants died to take advantage of policies that all but guarantee quick release into the U.S. Never has our government explicitly refused to enforce immigration laws requiring detention and deportation of illegal immigrants on the grounds that those requirements are cruel and inhumane—instead adopting ad hoc policies aimed at providing "safe, orderly, and humane pathways" into the U.S. for illegal border crossers. And never has there been anything like the current conveyor-belt policy to distribute millions of illegals throughout the American interior.

This crisis is not the result of incompetence, but of purposeful policies. What is more, America's establishment media has largely abdicated its duty to report on the crisis, refusing to acknowledge an event that is having a greater impact than almost any other in the world today. One can only assume that the reason for this is partisan bias: after all, the crisis can easily be traced to an identifiable moment in time—Inauguration Day 2021.

Prior to that day, the Trump administration had brought the southern border largely under control using four key policies.

- Diplomatic Big Sticks: The U.S. gained Mexico's cooperation by threatening ruinous trade tariffs of up to 28 percent on Mexican goods. We gained the cooperation of Central American nations by threatening to freeze U.S. foreign aid. The cooperation of these countries consisted of two things: accepting deported illegals from the U.S. and using their military and police to block incoming immigrants at their own borders.
- Remain in Mexico: Border Patrol was required to return apprehended immigrants immediately to Mexico, where they had to wait out the long duration of asylum processing, rather than releasing them to disappear inside the U.S.
- Safe Third Country: Immigrants who had passed through designated "safe third countries" (including Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico) on their way to the U.S. without applying for asylum in one of those countries were automatically deported with no chance to claim asylum in the U.S.
- Title 42: This pandemic-control health order required rapid deportations to Mexico, without the option to claim asylum, of all immigrants caught illegally crossing the U.S. border. During the 2020 campaign, candidate Biden promised to undo Trump policies within the