

# The Cost of the Migrant Crisis on Urban Communities

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## Introduction

Understandably, Americans are sympathetic to those seeking a better life here in America. Likewise, there are others with good faith concerns over the issues that come with mass migration. This paper seeks to illuminate this issue in clear terms. Regardless of one's general view of immigration, the current situation on our southern border is untenable.

This report will take a deep dive into the nuanced issue of the migrant crisis on our southern border. Given the legal loopholes being exploited, it's technically incorrect to call those illegally *crossing* our borders en masse illegal immigrants. This technicality does not change the fact that most asylum claims fail in court,<sup>1</sup> and most allegedly asylum-seeking migrants are simply economic migrants wishing to enter the United States. The reason they are treated as asylum-seeking migrants and not illegal immigrants is that many in this new wave of migrants have been coached to claim asylum by progressive legal groups.<sup>2</sup>

## The Problem

Given the disorderly nature of our border, necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing are often in short supply. This creates an immediate humanitarian need. With more than two million people per year showing up with next to nothing, the burden of caring for them is immense for local, state, and federal officials. Unlike the federal government, state and local governments do not control the money supply and cannot print money. Budget constraints are real at the local and state levels, and trade-offs are an inescapable reality of public finance.

Every dollar spent accommodating unregulated mass migration is a dollar less for the citizens who are here legally and paying taxes. This is fundamentally unfair. Chicago spent an estimated \$300 million<sup>3</sup> on migrants that illegally crossed our southern border in 2023, and Washington, D.C. spent more than \$20 million<sup>4</sup> through the 2022-23 fiscal year. New York City is projected to spend \$12 billion by Summer 2025.<sup>5</sup> These estimates are just snapshots that don't include all the costs incurred by municipal governments. Our broken border policies and immigration policy have created a humanitarian crisis. Throughout the Biden Administration's term, more than 85,000 unaccompanied minors have gone missing.<sup>6</sup> Some of these children are being sexually exploited<sup>7</sup> throughout the United States because of the incompetence of the current administration. Allowing this to continue will turn America into a human rights backwater with the veneer of a first-world nation.

According to the U.S. Border Patrol (USBP), the total number of Southwest Land Border Encounters surged from a COVID-19 pandemic low of 458,000 in 2020 to a record of more than 2.8 million in the first 10 months of 2023.<sup>8</sup> This record-breaking figure will certainly rise as the migration season peaks over the fall and winter months. These are unfathomable numbers never seen in the history of our republic.

Additionally, the number of people on the terrorist watchlist apprehended at our southern border increased by more than 60 percent from 2022 to 2023.<sup>9</sup> This is undoubtedly a national security issue that represents a growing threat.<sup>10</sup> To be clear, we have no way of knowing how many terrorists have evaded capture, so the number of hostile foreign nationals in the country that exploited our southern border is unknown.<sup>11</sup>

## Why is This Happening?

There are undoubtedly push factors impacting migration trends. Violence<sup>12</sup> and political instability<sup>13</sup> in Central and South America undoubtedly led many to seek change.<sup>14</sup> These push factors are frequently cited in defense of the migrant surge and continued accommodation of it. However, this can only explain the baseline numbers of illegal border crossings that have more or less existed for decades. Latin America has long been plagued by violence and political instability, so that's not a new condition. Yet these massive migration numbers are exceptionally beyond the norm.

Like the push factors that motivate people to leave, there are pull factors that have persisted for decades. America is safer and far more economically advanced.<sup>15</sup> Our position as the leader of the global economy has always made immigration to the U.S. an appealing proposition for many in the global community. When polled, citizens all over the world list America as their dream destination for starting a new life.<sup>16</sup> However, this too is not a new condition that adequately explains what we're seeing on our border today.

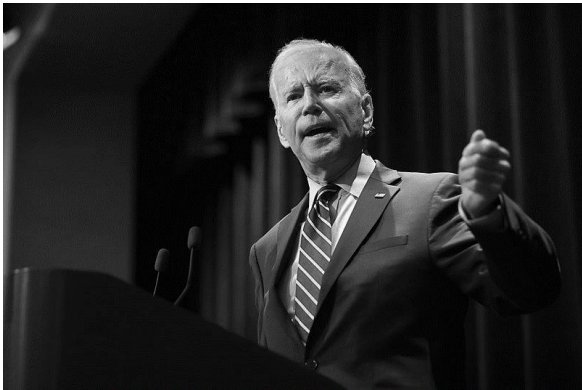
**Technology:** The widespread implementation of the internet and social media has changed the speed at which information and news spread across the globe. Similarly, there's a lagging effect due to wealth differentials in this implementation, meaning rich countries adopted this technology first and poorer countries played catch up. This means today, unlike decades ago, migrants have rapid communication capacity<sup>17</sup> and can signal to each other where resources are and how to acquire them.<sup>18</sup>

**Messaging:** Changes in immigration policy and messaging on immigration from some elected leadership in America encourage migration.<sup>19</sup> Democrats have made it clear that they believe the changing demographics of the country from being majority white to a multi-racial plurality, improves their electoral prospects.<sup>20</sup> Although these migrants technically cannot and should not vote, they understand that as more come and start families their kids will vote.<sup>21</sup>

This is in essence replacement theory, and despite popular media reports<sup>22</sup> to the contrary, is a left-wing electoral strategy. It's part of their ideological adherence to buzzy concepts like Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, which is effectively a dog whistle meaning anyone except white people (males in particular).<sup>23</sup> Democrats have openly cited changing demographics (less white) in their hopes of enacting a permanent majority.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, they frequently cast opponents of mass migration as racist

for correctly noting the inhumane conditions at our southern border and the inadequacy of immigration law.<sup>25</sup>

**Policy:** The spread of sanctuary cities that offer a haven for illegal migrants was a short-sighted act of defiance that has come back to hurt many cities that now find themselves on the hook for ever-increasing costs and crowding out actual citizens from government services.<sup>26</sup>



Source: Wikimedia Commons

President Biden has reversed Trump-era policies such as Remain in Mexico,<sup>27</sup> which required migrants to wait in Mexico while their asylum claims are processed. Similarly, Biden stopped<sup>28</sup> (then later resumed<sup>29</sup>) border wall construction on a very limited basis. Democratic presidential candidates pledged free healthcare for illegally crossing migrants in 2019.<sup>30</sup> As president, Biden removed eligibility restrictions on some public welfare programs for migrants<sup>31</sup> who illegally crossed into the United States.<sup>32</sup> All of these decisions made national and international headlines. The message was clear, migrants are welcome. Although seemingly benevolent, the doublespeak on

illegal border crossings sent an abundantly clear message to our neighbors to the south: If you come to America, you will be let in and accommodated.

American immigration policy provides backdoor incentives for illegal border crossings. Our asylum process allows those seeking shelter in America to cite race, nationality, religion, social group, and political opinion as valid reasons for asylum. Although one can be impartial towards immutable characteristics, social group membership is vague and problematic. In a perfect world, all would be free to do as they please. However, there is no heaven on earth, so it's fair to ask what obligation America has to non-Americans merely due to their affiliations.

Defensive asylum is particularly problematic. Under defensive asylum, migrants can request asylum to avoid deportation if they are apprehended within the United States after crossing illegally.<sup>33</sup> Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) handles those arrests in the interior of the United States, while Customs and Border Protection (CBP) operates at ports of entry and patrols the area within 100 miles of the border.<sup>34</sup> An immigration judge within the Executive Office for Immigration Review at the Department of Justice (DOJ) is assigned to hear each asylum seeker's case. If denied, they have 30 days to petition the Board of Immigration Appeals, the highest immigration court in the United States. If that fails, migrants can escalate their appeal to a federal court, and, in rare cases, the Supreme Court, before they are deported.

In the past, knowledge of U.S. immigration law was limited among migrants, and defensive asylum was less of a problem. Organizing tactics in the decision to migrate to the United States were mostly determined by individuals or families. Although that generally remains true, the proliferation of groups

that specialize in organizing massive immigrant caravans is a relatively new phenomenon. These groups counsel would-be migrants on what to say and do if they encounter border patrol and how to make defensive claims.<sup>35</sup> They send lawyers to Central and South America to organize massive migrant caravans and coach them on legal issues.<sup>36</sup>

The loophole of defensive asylum promotes inhumane border crossings as well. By having a legal means to circumvent official ports of entry, the Biden Administration is effectively encouraging illegal border crossings.

## Solutions

**Solution One:** End defensive asylum. The very first order of business should be to make it crystal clear that any non-citizen who enters America outside of an official port of entry will be promptly deported. This is a moral imperative. The mass acceptance of defensive asylum claims empowers human traffickers, sex traffickers, and those seeking to circumvent more cumbersome immigration procedures. Similarly, the existence of defensive asylum incentivizes Mexican drug cartels to develop monetized alternative routes into the United States. Getting rid of defensive asylum would not reduce nefarious activities on our southern border to zero. However, it makes it clear that all must use the front door.

**Solution Two:** Fix the vagueness of general asylum law. Current law enables protections for group membership. Although all Americans have a constitutional right to free association, alleged violations of free association for non-Americans outside of the United States should not be a means of gaining legal entry into the United States. Likewise, 8 U.S. Code § 1158, defers a great deal of asylum policy decision-making to the Attorney General, a political appointee. This subjects many asylum policies to the whims of the current administration, while a more defined process would be advantageous for stability. Congress should clearly articulate what classes of people are eligible for asylum.

**Solution Three:** Build the Wall. Although advocates for more expansive immigration policies believe that the wall is a ‘Trumpian’ symbol of xenophobia, the reality is that border walls and barriers predate Former President Trump and have proven to be effective.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, building a wall sends a clear message that we are taking our border security seriously. Furthermore, the wall should be accompanied by state-of-the-art monitoring software to alert CBP agents of illegal tampering. In short, we need to know who is coming into our country and a physical barrier can play an important role in accomplishing that objective.



Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security

## Conclusion

These proposed solutions will not reduce illegal border crossings to zero. The reality is that our southern border is nearly 2000 miles long and the economic disparity between the United States and South and Central America is immense. Human ingenuity and longstanding push and pull factors are not going to completely dissipate with congressional action. However, the massive spike in border encounters on our southwest border is significantly driven by political messaging, policy changes, and the actions of left-wing legal advocacy groups. To remedy this situation, the solutions we have outlined are proven means of discouraging dangerous and inhumane trips to our southern border. By addressing bad policies, Congress and the president can free up resources to focus on America's pressing domestic and national security needs and provide some measure of relief to American taxpayers.

## About the Author

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Raheem has served as a Koch Fellow in 2014, the inaugural Policy Director for the North Dakota Young Republicans in 2018, a Republican Leadership Initiative Fellow in 2018, and a 2019 America's Future Foundation Writing Fellow. He is a current member of the Louisiana Advisory Board for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and a member of the New Orleans Federalist Society. Williams is a 2023 Fellow of American Conservatism and Governing at the Manhattan Institute. He is a Senior Fellow at Do No Harm, a medical ethics advocacy group.

Raheem Williams received his B.A. in Economics from Florida International University and his M.A. in Financial Economics from the University of Detroit Mercy. He is a current Masters in Public Administration candidate at the University of Pennsylvania.

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