



# POLICY BRIEF

## REAL LIFE IMPACTS OF THE BORDER CRISIS

The millions of unlawful border crossings in America are more than just numbers; they have real economic, national security, and social consequences attached to them, which negatively impact the well-being of all Americans. President Biden's border and immigration policies, which are aided and abetted by Congressional Democrats, make us a weaker nation.

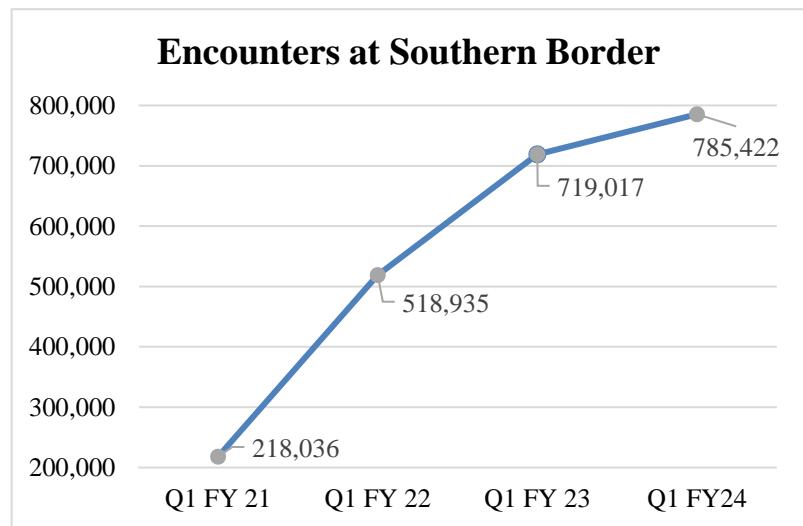
### The Border Crisis

Under the Biden administration, the border has been an unmitigated disaster. In just the first three years of Biden's presidency, there were approximately 8.75 million encounters between illegal migrants and the U.S. Border Patrol, the vast majority of which have been at the southern border.<sup>1</sup> In addition, there were over 1.7 million *known* "gotaways" from January 2021 through September 2023.<sup>2</sup>

Fiscal year (FY) 23 saw an increase of encounters of 40 percent over FY21 and a 100 percent increase since FY19. In December 2023, there were a record-breaking 371,036 nationwide encounters of illegal migrants, including 302,000 illegal migrant encounters at the southern border—a 300 percent increase from December 2020.<sup>3</sup>

The differences in data between Presidents Trump and Biden are stark, with the U.S. now seeing 34 consecutive months of higher illegal migrant encounters than the highest month seen under Trump.<sup>4</sup> A closer comparison of the first quarters of the last several years emphasizes this. In Q1 of FY21, the final quarter of the Trump presidency, only 218,036 encounters with illegal migrants took place at the southern border. In Q1 of FY22, one year later and just nine months after President Biden took office, this number shot up 138 percent over the previous year, with over half a million illegal migrant encounters occurring. In Q1 of FY24, a shocking 785,422 encounters occurred, an over 260 percent increase from the Trump years.<sup>5</sup>

These differences are due to border policy and the Biden administration's refusal to enforce our immigration laws. On his first day in office, President Biden signed an executive order ending the emergency declaration at the southern border and halted border wall construction.<sup>6</sup> In his first year, he sent an amnesty bill to Congress, ended the "Remain in Mexico" policy, and reversed the Trump "Safe 3rd Country" policy, which required illegal migrants to apply for asylum in a country closer to their home country rather than the United States.<sup>7</sup> (*For more on this, see RPC brief "Policies that Led to the Biden Border Crisis."*)<sup>8</sup>) The administration has consistently impeded states like Texas from establishing adequate border security to protect their residents.<sup>9</sup>



## Economic Burden

Because of undetected illegal crossings, the actual number of illegal migrants in the U.S. is difficult to pinpoint. In 2016, a Yale study estimated that there were between 16 and 29 million illegal migrants in the United States.<sup>10</sup> The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) estimated there were 15.5 million illegal residents at the beginning of 2022.<sup>11</sup> Since then, there have been over 5 million land encounters just on our southern border, which has undoubtedly substantially increased the total illegal population in the country.<sup>12</sup>

Using FAIR's estimated population, the economic impact of illegal immigration costs taxpayers \$150.7 billion per year, which amounts to \$957 per taxpayer.<sup>13</sup>

This net cost, which comes from approximately \$182.1 billion in additional national expenditures minus \$31.4 billion in total tax contributions by illegal migrants, is greater than the annual GDP of 15 different states.<sup>14</sup> This fiscal burden manifests in education, healthcare, welfare programs, and other related expenses.

### Education

There are tangible costs and strains placed on our educational system because of illegal immigration. FAIR approximates that there are 5.1 million K-12 students who are either here illegally or are the children of parents here illegally.<sup>15</sup> Approximately 75 percent of illegal migrants have Limited English Proficiency (LEP), and studies show that students with LEP are 15 percent more expensive to educate.<sup>16,17</sup>

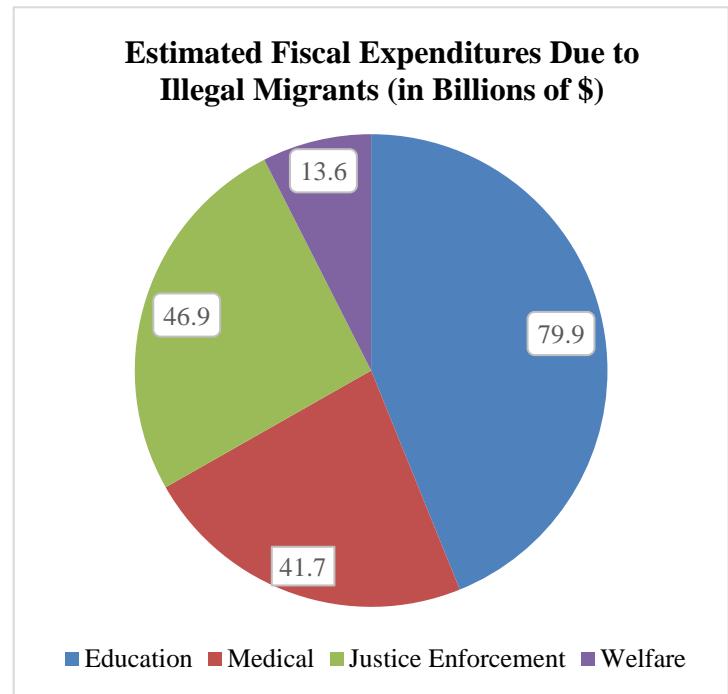
These additional students, who, due to language barriers, are already tougher to educate, are overwhelmingly burdening local educational systems. For example, Chicago public schools are spending an extra \$15 million in the 2023-24 school year for new staff members to support bilingual instruction.<sup>18</sup>

In total, these students cost the federal taxpayer \$6.6 billion annually in additional expenditures and cost state and local governments \$73.3 billion annually.<sup>19</sup>

### Healthcare

Under the law, illegal migrants should not receive federally subsidized healthcare and are ineligible for subsidies under the Affordable Care Act.<sup>20</sup> However, many states allow them to collect medical welfare, which is a financial hit to the Americans in those states and can be used as justification for states to request larger grant totals from the federal government.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, there are still Medicaid costs for illegal migrants. For one, the U.S.-born children of illegals are entitled to Medicaid. They can also be beneficiaries of improper Medicaid payments, which is a problem in general in the United States. If illegal migrants received these improper payments at the same rate as the general population, there would be nearly 1.3 million illegal migrants collecting them each year.<sup>22</sup>



Another cost is hospital and emergency room care for illegal migrants. Federal law requires hospitals participating in Medicare to provide emergency services for all, regardless of their insurance coverage or ability to pay.<sup>23</sup> The majority of the illegal migrant population is uninsured, meaning they are disproportionately likely to be responsible for uncompensated hospital expenditures, which means the government could be on the line for reimbursing providers for their care.<sup>24</sup>

The taxpayer also pays for the free healthcare being provided at border facilities for illegal migrants. A \$1.5 billion contract was recently awarded to Loyal Source Government Services to provide medical services for the thousands of migrants apprehended daily at the southern border.<sup>25</sup> Whistleblowers have already submitted complaints about significant waste, fraud, and abuse of these funds.<sup>26</sup>

In addition, the influx of migrants has brought a vast number of cases of infectious diseases to the country, further burdening the resources of the American healthcare system and, of course, risking the health of Americans. In 2022, the New York City tuberculosis (TB) rate was 6.1 cases per 100,000, more than double the national rate. It was estimated that 88 percent of people with these cases were born outside the United States.<sup>27</sup> The Centers for Disease Control confirmed that in 2022, at least 73 percent of all TB cases in America were in foreign-born people.<sup>28</sup>

Overall, FAIR estimates that the federal taxpayer is hit with \$23.1 billion in federal medical expenditures for illegals, with state and local governments spending an additional \$18.6 billion.<sup>29</sup>

### Welfare

Illegal immigration dramatically impacts and burdens welfare programs intended for Americans in poverty. The U.S.-born children of illegal migrants can receive direct benefits from welfare programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly referred to as food stamps or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). In addition, the Woman, Infants, and Children (WIC) program provides grants to states for the children of low-income mothers from pregnancy up to age five.<sup>30</sup> Every state has made illegal migrants eligible to benefit from WIC.<sup>31</sup>

Another factor is the eligibility for benefits of “paroled” migrants in the country. According to U.S. law:

*“[The Secretary of Homeland Security] may ... in his discretion, parole into the United States temporarily under such conditions as he may prescribe only on a case-by-case basis for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit any alien applying for admission to the United States, but such parole of such alien shall not be regarded as an admission of the alien and when the purposes of such parole shall, in the opinion of the [Secretary], have been served the alien shall forthwith return or be returned to the custody from which he was paroled and thereafter his case shall continue to be dealt with in the same manner as that of any other applicant for admission to the United States.”<sup>32</sup>*

Despite the law establishing that paroling inadmissible migrants is for emergencies and should be done on an individual basis, the Biden administration paroled one million migrants in just over their first two years in office.<sup>33</sup> Paroled migrants become “qualified aliens” under our welfare laws after one year and can receive all welfare benefits after five years. However, they are eligible earlier for certain taxpayer-funded benefits.

Immigration courts have become so backed up that many migrants don’t even receive a Notice to Appear (the immigration court charging document) when apprehended, making it likely they will attain “qualified alien” status and even receive benefits well before seeing a judge.<sup>34</sup> The Center for Immigration Studies estimates that starting in 2026, for every million parolees, the American taxpayer will be hit with an additional \$3 billion bill annually.<sup>35</sup>

Overall, the American taxpayer is charged an additional \$13.6 billion in federal and state welfare benefits due to illegal immigration.<sup>36</sup>

## Crime and National Security

The worst humanitarian and security border crisis in American history has taken a toll on American safety. The mass importation of illegal migrants from all over the world, who are inherently breaking the law by coming here illegally, increases crime, drains the resources of law enforcement, and gives nefarious organizations such as drug cartels and terrorist groups access to our nation.

### Domestic Crime

When it comes to criminal activity by illegal migrants, a single added crime is too much and would be prevented by a coherent border policy. However, there is evidence that illegal migrants disproportionately commit violent crimes in comparison to legal residents of the country.

While many jurisdictions do not keep track of crime data by immigration status, Texas does. A study of 2019 Texas data found that once illegal migrants were identified during their prison stays and added to the total count of illegals, they were 14 percent more likely to be convicted of a homicide and 78 percent more likely to be convicted of a sexual assault than the overall Texas population.<sup>37,38</sup>

President Trump's Department of Justice released a report using 2018 data that showed 64 percent of all federal arrests were of non-U.S. citizens, compared to just 37 percent in 1998.<sup>39</sup> The flood of illegal immigration has indisputably gotten worse since this report was released.

In addition, our open border allows criminals who have already been convicted of previous crimes to gain access to our country. In 2023 alone, Border Patrol encountered thousands of illegal migrants with prior convictions in the United States or abroad for assault, robbery, and sexual offenses.<sup>40</sup> Also, the close to 2 million known and unknown "gotaways" presumably include many convicted criminals and others who could pose a national security or public safety threat.

### Cartel Activity

Our porous border has invited organized criminal cartels into our country. These cartels use brutal violence for control and are increasingly responsible for U.S. gang activity involving illegal migrants, drug trafficking, and human trafficking. Their influence on the US-Mexico border activity has become so significant that former Border Patrol Chief Rodney Scott went so far as to say that "[the cartels] control the border today."<sup>41</sup>

The cartels have exploited the open border policies of the Biden administration by sending large amounts of migrants to where Border Patrol agents are forced to send reinforcements or get tied up in multiple areas, leaving other large remote areas without protection. In his congressional testimony, Chief Patrol Agent of the CBP Tucson Sector, John Modlin, stated that:

"[S]muggling organizations split large groups of migrants into many smaller groups. These small groups are then directed to illegally cross the border all at once and at different locations, effectively saturating the area with migrants and exhausting our response capability. This tactic, coupled with the remoteness of the area, has a compounding effect and results in large areas of the border being left vulnerable while our agents are responding, rescuing, apprehending, and transporting hundreds of migrants."<sup>42</sup>

The cartels take advantage of these wide-open border areas for human trafficking and fentanyl smuggling.

A disturbing trafficking practice by the cartel is that of "debt bondage," where migrants pay the cartel to get to and across the border and then are forced into servitude to pay off any remaining balance the cartel claims they are owed. This forced labor can be the smuggling of drugs or other contraband and, tragically, prostitution, which has become a very lucrative part of the cartels' operations.<sup>43,44</sup>

These cartels, which have faced calls to be designated as terrorist organizations by the U.S. government, have thrived under the border policies of the Biden administration.<sup>45</sup> From migrant smuggling alone, the cartels saw an increase in revenue from \$500 million in 2018 to \$13 billion in 2022.<sup>46</sup>

### Global Terrorism

A vulnerable southern border exposes America to the entire world, including terrorists from places such as Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia.

In just FY23, 169 individuals whose names appeared on the U.S. terrorist watchlist were apprehended trying to cross the US-Mexico border in between ports of entry, which is more than the years FY17-22 combined, with FY17-20 only having 11 total.<sup>47</sup> From the beginning of Biden's tenure through December 2023, at least 361 individuals on the terrorist watchlist were apprehended at the southern border. It is unknown how many came through our southern border without apprehension.

The Biden administration has enabled this threat to American security. A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request revealed that, as of October 2023, the CBP had allowed 250,000 inadmissible migrants to unlawfully enter the country using a mobile app called "CBP One."<sup>48</sup> Migrants use this government app to schedule their unlawful entry through a port of entry. These illegal migrants are not in removal proceedings and are immediately eligible for work permits.<sup>49</sup> This massive paroling with little oversight on the migrants entering the country is no different than "unlawful" crossings between the ports of entry.

Of these illegal entrants, over 7,300 are classified as "special interest migrants" as they come from 24 countries designated as a risk due to their propensity for harboring Islamic extremists and terrorists—countries such as Iran, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.<sup>50,51</sup>

The sheer number of illegal migrants coming through our southern border, including vast numbers of military-age males, along with the data coming from CBP, provides a cause for concern for the safety of all Americans.<sup>52</sup>

### **Social Costs**

The extreme pace of illegal immigration is especially harmful to our fabric as a country. With a wide-open border and millions of people flooding into our country, often unchecked, we expose ourselves as a nation to rampant homelessness, increased drug accessibility, and threats to our national unity.

### Homelessness

The wave of migrants allowed into our country under President Biden has exacerbated an already troubling homelessness problem that has been plaguing America's cities.<sup>53</sup> In New York City, where there are nearly 70,000 homeless migrants, homeless shelters are full, and the city has rented hundreds of hotels to attempt to provide shelter for a massive number of illegal migrants flocking into the city.<sup>54,55</sup> The city infamously shut down a Queens school to temporarily house these migrants, forcing American students back into the remote "learning" that failed them during the COVID lockdowns.<sup>56</sup> In Massachusetts, a state dealing with a similar problem, the governor has requested that residents house the migrants themselves.<sup>57</sup>

As the United States already faces record homelessness, a rapidly growing number of migrants further increases the pool of those who seek affordable housing and those who fight for charitable or government resources.<sup>58</sup> (For more on the homelessness crisis, see RPC's guide *Biden's Failed Housing First Policy*<sup>59</sup>)

### Drugs

The American drug crisis has been enabled and exacerbated by open-border policies that allow a free flow of illegal drugs to pour across our border and into our communities. Fentanyl, a drug 100 times stronger than

morphine, is a highly addictive opioid and anesthetic that has been especially deadly during America's drug epidemic.<sup>60</sup>

According to the U.S. government, fentanyl often reaches the US by being trafficked into the country across the Mexican border by cartels and affiliated U.S. drug traffickers.<sup>61</sup> In FY23, Customs and Border Patrol seized over 27,000 pounds of fentanyl, which is enough to kill more than 6 billion people.<sup>62</sup> Federal officials estimate they are only able to seize 5-10 percent of the smuggled drug.<sup>63</sup> However, it is impossible to know how much of this deadly drug was successfully trafficked into our country.

In 2022, 73,654 Americans died from a fentanyl overdose, an average of over 200 per day. Since 2018, over a quarter of a million Americans have died from this drug.<sup>64</sup> (For more on this issue, see the RPC guide *China: Using the Border Crisis as a Fentanyl Pipeline*.<sup>65</sup>)

### Assimilation

One inherent problem with the mass levels of illegal immigration seen in this border crisis is that it is now more difficult to ensure assimilation into the United States. Patriotic assimilation, especially being fluent in English, is imperative and is what allows America to be a real and unified nation while also allowing legal immigration.<sup>66</sup> The legal naturalization process requires that, among other things, a migrant be able to understand and speak English, take an English and civics test, and take an Oath of Allegiance to the U.S.<sup>67</sup>

Education is heavily influenced by a person's ability to speak the native language, which is part of assimilation. In the classroom, LEP students develop poorly across all subject areas, and the expensive special programs for them use up resources for struggling students who are U.S. citizens.<sup>68</sup>

The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) tests achievement for students and serves as an unbiased evaluation of their knowledge. Students' knowledge and understanding are broken down into the categories of: Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. In 2019, only 16 percent of LEP fourth graders were at least proficient in mathematics, compared to 45 percent of those fluent in English. Only 9 percent were at least proficient in reading compared to 39 percent of fluent speakers.<sup>69</sup>

In addition, our national unity is greatly impacted when there is no requirement for those who come to our country to assimilate into our communities to gain a new sense of national identity. Open borders policies further disincentivize migrant assimilation, and the Biden border crisis incites a divide in our national unity.

### **Conclusion**

The border crisis represents a blatant dereliction of duty by President Biden and Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas. American taxpayers are bleeding resources to support illegal migrants as Biden and Congressional Democrats continue to ignore federal law. The fact remains that this is a policy problem, not a money problem. There are already laws on the books that would significantly curb this crisis, but the Biden administration has refused to follow them.<sup>70</sup> America is suffering from a border crisis by design, and the current policies that economically strain state, local, and federal resources are hurting us socially, increasing crime, and posing a severe threat to our national security.

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<sup>3</sup> The Biden Border Crisis Rages On. House GOP. <https://www.gop.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=698>

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> Southwest Land Border Encounters. U.S. Customs and Border Protection. <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-land-border-encounters>

<sup>6</sup> Proclamation on the Termination of Emergency With Respect To The Southern Border Of The United States And Redirection Of Funds Diverted To Border Wall Construction. The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/proclamation-termination-of-emergency-with-respect-to-southern-border-of-united-states-and-redirection-of-funds-diverted-to-border-wall-construction/>

<sup>7</sup> Policies That Led to the Biden Border Crisis. House Republican Policy Committee. <https://republicanpolicy.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/republicanpolicy.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/the-biden-border-crisis-v3-may-2023.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> *Id*

<sup>9</sup> Attorney General Ken Paxton Refuses Biden Administration's Demand to Surrender Shelby Park and End Border Security Measures. Attorney General of Texas. <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/news/releases/attorney-general-ken-paxton-refuses-biden-administrations-demand-surrender-shelby-park-and-end>

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<sup>12</sup> Southwest Land Border Encounters. U.S. Customs and Border Protection. <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-land-border-encounters>

<sup>13</sup> *Id*.

<sup>14</sup> The Historic Dollar Costs of DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas' Open-Borders Policies. House Committee on Homeland Security. <https://homeland.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Phase4Report.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> *Id*.

<sup>16</sup> Profile of the Unauthorized Population: United States. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/US>

<sup>17</sup> The Fiscal Burden of Illegal Immigration on United States Taxpayers | 2023 Cost Study. Federation for American Immigration Reform. <https://www.fairus.org/issue/publications-resources/fiscal-burden-illegal-immigration-united-states-taxpayers-2023>

<sup>18</sup> Nell Salzman. Migrants staying at Chicago police station turned away from school: 'They didn't have people who spoke Spanish.' Chicago Tribune. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/breaking/ct-migrant-students-turned-away-chicago-public-schools-20230822-zjf2zvqjr5c33j65rp2dcceauli-story.html>

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<sup>25</sup> Loyal Source Government Services Delivery Order. USA Spending.

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<sup>31</sup> The Historic Dollar Costs of DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas' Open-Borders Policies. House Committee on Homeland Security. <https://homeland.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Phase4Report.pdf>

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<sup>34</sup> *Id*.

<sup>35</sup> *Id*.

<sup>36</sup> The Fiscal Burden of Illegal Immigration on United States Taxpayers | 2023 Cost Study. Federation for American Immigration Reform. <https://www.fairus.org/issue/publications-resources/fiscal-burden-illegal-immigration-united-states-taxpayers-2023>

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