



Playing catch-up on immigration: Biden chases Trump to the Mexico border

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President Joe Biden is in the awkward position of once again copying former President Donald Trump. Both men will head to the U.S.-Mexico border Thursday.

Trump had first announced his visit to the border town of Eagle Pass, Texas. Then, lo and behold, Biden later decided to visit another Texas border city, Brownsville, *on the exact same day*.

This will be the second time in Biden's presidency that he's bothered to set foot along the U.S.-Mexico border, regardless of how illegal immigration has spiked to record levels under his presidency. Biden tried making Vice President Kamala Harris his border czar, but she failed miserably in that role and is now doing other things.

Trump and Biden's dueling visits are a total coincidence, I'm sure.

Securing the border and curbing the flood of illegal crossings has become a key issue in the 2024 presidential campaign, and Biden is playing a serious game of catch-up. Or at least he needs to – and fast.

The numbers, which don't lie, are in Trump's favor, and he will double down on how Biden is putting the country in danger by allowing a de facto open border.

Biden fails on immigration: The border is a mess. Does Biden have the guts to stand up to progressives and get a deal?

Since Biden took office, illegal crossings have averaged 2 million a year – all record highs. By contrast, three out of four years of Trump's presidency, illegal crossings never topped 600,000. In 2019, the one year they did, they were below 1 million.

It defies logic to say there's not a connection, especially because some of Biden's first actions as president were to roll back many of Trump's border restrictions. Since then, Biden has pleaded helplessness to address the glaring problems that not only affect border towns but also large (Democratic) cities around the country, from Denver to New York City.

Murder of Georgia nursing student should put more pressure on Biden

Other recent headlines won't ease the concerns of citizens already troubled by what's happening at the border.

President Joe Biden walks with U.S. Border Patrol agents along the border in El Paso, Texas, in January 2023. *Andrew Harnik, AP*

The suspect charged in the brutal murder of 22-year-old nursing student Laken Riley on the University of Georgia campus is in the United States illegally. Riley went for a run and never returned.

Records show Venezuelan citizen Jose Ibarra had unlawfully crossed the border in 2022. And even though he was arrested in New York City last year on different charges, he remained in the country.

Many in the news media have done their best to ignore the fact that Ibarra is undocumented, but you can be sure that Trump and other Republicans will remind people of this fact.

The United States has to know who's crossing its borders, and the mayhem there now is making that impossible.

Immigration surges to top issue facing country

While Biden wants to make this election about “democracy” and abortion rights, the American people have other ideas.

A new Gallup poll shows that the number of people who say immigration is the most important problem facing America keeps rising, and for the first time in five years it's now the top issue, at 28% compared with 12% who say the economy is most important.

January 2, 2024: Migrants cross the Rio Bravo river, known as Rio Grande in the United States, into the US through Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua State, Mexico. US border police have in recent weeks reported approximately 10,000 crossings by migrants every day, many of them fleeing poverty and violence in Central America. *HERIKA MARTINEZ, AFP Via Getty Images*

Similarly, Gallup found that a record 55% of U.S. adults – an increase of 8 points from last year – agreeing that "large numbers of immigrants entering the United States illegally" is a critical threat to the nation's interests in the next decade.

All of this is bad news for the president, who's already struggling mightily to convince voters he's up to a second term. Biden's messaging on the issue also has been confusing – and misleading. He has claimed he can't take further action on the border without legislation from Congress. Yet, he has contradicted himself by saying he's now pondering executive action.

David Bier, associate director of immigration studies at the Cato Institute, says there are actions Biden could take. One of the most effective measures would be to reinstate Trump's Remain in Mexico policy, which curbed the number of migrants seeking asylum. That's unlikely, though, as Biden campaigned on overturning the policy (and he did) and would face fierce political backlash from progressives if he brought it back.

There aren't any easy fixes, but Biden will have to do a lot more than drop by the border to ease Americans' minds.