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Joe Biden Doesn't Have an 'Open Border' Policy, so Why Do Republicans Say Otherwise?

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President Joe Biden's first year in office has seen authorities encounter almost 1.8 million migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border, prompting conservative leaders to lambast his administration for its "dangerous open border policy."

In late December 2021, during a segment on *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, FOX News titled its report on migration at the border as "Biden's open-border policy is reckless and dangerous." And in November, the House GOP published an article titled *Biden's Open Border Policies Have Deadly Consequences*.

While usage of the phrase "open border" has become more popular, with both Texas Governor Greg Abbott and Texas Senator Ted Cruz invoking the term when offering critiques of the administration, those who study the situation say their usage of the term is incorrect. Rebecca Hamlin, who studies immigration politics as a professor with the University of Massachusetts Amherst and wrote a book on the labeling of migrants, told *Newsweek* that the political usage of the term "open border" does not reflect reality, saying the Biden administration's policies are relatively restrictive compared to past presidential administrations.

"I've been studying immigration politics for now 20 years, and I haven't seen such a mismatch between the accusations of one party and the policies of the other which are actually not close to open and probably stricter than what we've seen in a long time," Hamlin said.

The Biden administration has received consistent backlash from immigrant rights groups for leaving the Title 42 public health order in place that restricts the channels through which migrants can seek asylum. Furthermore, 2021 saw the U.S. admit the lowest number of refugees it has seen since 1980, with just over 11,400 being allowed into the country.

Conservative think tank Cato Institute has taken note of this, publishing a September article titled *Biden's Border Policy Is Not 'Open Borders,'* where it noted that "Biden's policies and goals are largely the same as those of President Donald Trump."

Nonetheless, lawmakers have leveraged the claim to push for new policies. On January 20, Republican Senator Rick Scott of Florida called for a Department of Homeland Security investigation of the administration's decisions that, according to Scott, "have led to the worst border crisis in United States history.

In addition, Scott and other members of Congress have introduced the *Upholding the Law at Our Border Act*, legislation aimed at requiring the Department of Homeland Security to "investigate the vetting and processing" of migrants at the southwestern border.

Despite her feeling that the term "open border" is inaccurate, Hamlin believes it continues to be used during debates because of the polarizing nature of the situation at the border and immigration.

A 2019 study by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs found 78 percent of Republicans are likely to see immigration as a threat to U.S. interests as opposed to 19 percent of Democrats. Hamlin said stoking fears around an uncontrollable border can be used to rally support and potentially gain the votes of the 42 percent of independents that the Council on Global Affairs reported saw immigration as a threat.

"I think it's a winning tactic for the Republican Party. I think it's a really powerful phrase that's quite troubling or scary for a lot of people because it's sort of implies that it's unrestricted or uncontrolled," Hamlin said.

When it comes to combatting the message, the Biden administration faces an uphill battle, according to Hamlin. Given that the U.S. allows some migrants from certain nations with valid asylum claims to enter, the border cannot be considered "closed" which Hamlin said makes it hard for Democrats to find a "rhetorical opposite" to point toward.

Furthermore, the Biden administration has held fewer press conferences at this point in his presidency than any of his five immediate predecessors at the same point in their terms, the Associated Press reports. With voting rights and the social spending and climate justice bills being placed among the administration's top priorities, the border surge has stood as less of both a legislation and media focus for the Biden camp, leaving it vulnerable to GOP criticism.

"Biden could say, 'I'm not in favor of open borders, but he hasn't done a great job of articulating what alternative he is in favor of,'" Hamlin said. "There hasn't been a really good effort, in my opinion, to come up with a counter veiling term that sort of pushes back on this. So, I think he's really lost a lot of ground on this issue, and I would imagine that a lot of people probably are under the misperception that our borders are a lot more open than they actually are."