



How Biden's Private Sponsorship Parole Policy Reduced Illegal Migration by Making the Legal Kind Easier

Biden extended the successful Uniting for Ukraine model to cover migrants from four Latin American nations with oppressive governments and horrible conditions, thereby greatly reducing illegal migration from those nations. This effect undercuts a lawsuit challenging the program, filed by twenty red states.

Ilya Somin

March 30, 2023

In early January, the Biden Administration extended the model used by the successful Uniting for Ukraine private migrant sponsorship program to include up to 30,000 migrants per month from four Latin American countries: Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Haiti. Under the program, migrants from these countries can quickly gain legal entry into the United States and the right to live and work here for up to two years, if they pass a background check and have a private sponsor in the US who commits to supporting them.

As in the case of Uniting for Ukraine, the main justification for this program is to grant refuge to people fleeing horrific violence, poverty, and oppression. Three of the four nations covered by the program are ruled by repressive socialist dictatorships, and the fourth (Haiti) suffers from horrific escalating violence and extreme poverty.

In a recent substack post, Cato Institute immigration analyst Alex Nowrasteh (one of the nation's leading immigration policy experts) describes how the program has a notable additional benefit. It greatly reduces illegal border crossings:

Encounters of migrants crossing the southwest (SW) border with Mexico are down 39 percent from December 2022 to February 2023. President Biden's immigration and border plan that expanded legal migration to the United States through humanitarian parole should take credit for this decline. Under Biden's plan, up to 30,000 migrants from Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Haiti (VCNH migrants) are allowed to enter the United States legally each month through humanitarian parole. As a result, more of them are waiting to come legally rather than attempting to cross illegally.

In February 2023, the number of VCNH migrants encountered, found inadmissible by Customs and Border Protection (CBP), or apprehended by Border Patrol decreased by 84 percent compared to December 2022. The number of VCNH migrants showing up at the border fell from 91,344 in December to 22,084 in January and then further down to 14,381 in February....

This trend supports Cato's theory that legal migration discourages illegal immigration and border crossings. Non-VCNH migrants who do not have the option of humanitarian parole fell by only 12.5 percent from 160,651 in December 2022 to 134,192 in January and rose again to 140,617 in February. Almost 80 percent of the total decline in encounters along the border from December to February comes from a reduction in VCNH migrants....

Biden's border plan reduced chaos along the Southwest land border in a short period. That's good for its own sake, helps clear the air for a serious immigration debate, and is politically astute for Biden, which means that the incentives for good policy are politically aligned and sustainable. Second, the Biden plan increases legal immigration when U.S. labor demand is still high. Third, it defunds criminal networks and cartels by channeling many migrants into the legal system and away from the black market.

For reasons Alex explains, the reduction in illegal crossing by VCNH country migrants cannot be explained by other factors. It is powerful evidence for the proposition that the easiest way to reduce illegal migration is to make the legal kind easier. This also, of course, has the effect of reducing disorder at the border, and curbing opportunities for organized crime.

In addition to the policy advantages noted in Alex's post, the reduction in illegal border crossings undercuts the rationale for the lawsuit challenging the program filed by twenty red states. As I explain here, the statute authorizing the president to use the "parole" power to let in migrants indicates that he may do so "on a case-by-case basis for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit." Reducing illegal migration and disorder at the border qualifies as such a "significant public benefit." Or at least it does if you believe the leaders of the plaintiff states, who have long been loudly complaining about illegal border crossings, and claiming they constitute a major crisis.

For reasons laid out in my earlier post, it is also pretty obvious that there are compelling "humanitarian reasons" for paroling migrants from these four nations. On this point, too, you don't need to take my word. You can instead take that of the governors of some of the plaintiff states in the lawsuit:

Three of the four nations included in the program are ruled by oppressive socialist dictators, whose policies have created horrific conditions. Few have put it better than Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, whose state is one of the participants in lawsuit. As he said last year, Venezuela's socialist president Nicolas Maduro is a "murderous tyrant" who "is responsible for countless atrocities and has driven Venezuela into the ground." DeSantis went on to say that "people [in Venezuela] are "really hurting," due to the government's policies. It is indeed true that Venezuelan socialism has resulted in widespread oppression, poverty, and hyperinflation, leading to the biggest refugee crisis in the history of the Western hemisphere, with some 6 million people fleeing. Texas Governor Greg Abbott, whose state is spearheading the lawsuit, has also noted the severe economic crisis in Venezuela, which he (rightly) blames on socialism.

In 2021, DeSantis signed a law requiring Florida public schools to provide 45 minutes of instruction each year on the evils of Communist regimes, including that of Cuba, which DeSantis correctly described as responsible for "poverty, starvation, migration, systemic lethal violence, and suppression of speech." Cuba, likewise, inflicts severe poverty and oppression on its people, including recent brutal suppression of protests in July 2021....

Nicaragua under the increasingly authoritarian socialist rule of Daniel Ortega is a similar story. Ortega's repression has deepened already severe poverty, and created what even the left-leaning BBC describes as an "atmosphere of terror...."

Abbott, DeSantis, and other GOP governors have repeatedly denounced both the evils of socialism generally, and those of the Cuban, Venezuelan, and Nicaraguan governments specifically.

But perhaps they have somehow forgotten these things. If so, DeSantis should invite his fellow GOP governors to sit in on one of the 45-minute classes on the evils of communism, established under the law he signed last year.

Ilya Somin is Professor of Law at George Mason University, and author of Free to Move: Foot Voting, Migration, and Political Freedom and Democracy and Political Ignorance: Why Smaller Government is Smarter.