

# MEDIAMATTERS FOR AMERICA

## Media Matters' 2021 guide to debunking right-wing misinformation about migrants and the border

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As the administration of President Joe Biden begins to repair the damage caused by his predecessor's xenophobic and lawless approach to the country's immigration system, Fox News, joined occasionally by other cable and national news outlets, has remained a cesspool of lies, fear mongering, and anti-immigrant propaganda. Whether it is spreading lies about immigrant criminality or decrying immigration at the southern border as an invasion and threat to American society, misinformers are twisting the migration pattern of recent months to fit a false right-wing narrative.

Although right-wing media and those who repeat its misinformation may have you believe that immigration from Latin America is a catalyst for chaos and violence in this country, the majority of migrants come to seek stability for themselves or their families, not to upend their new communities. As Washington Post columnist León Krauze put it, "They are looking for a shot at survival."

Here are the myths and realities of what is currently going on at the border.

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- **The increase in migrants at the border is not an unprecedented Biden border "crisis"**
- **MYTH:** Both right-wing media and mainstream media figures have recently demanded that the Biden administration refer to the border as a "crisis" without providing proper context. On his March 22 radio show, Fox News host Sean Hannity agreed with Rep. Mark Meadows (R-NC) that the arrival of migrants on the border is "Biden's Hurricane Katrina," adding that it's "a crisis, a human tragedy, but it's a self-inflicted one by the Biden administration. "

**REALITY: "Have Biden administration policies caused a crisis at the southern border? Evidence suggests not."** In an analysis for the Washington Post, experts from the U.S. Immigration Policy Center at the University of California at San Diego wrote that the current

increase in migrants at the border fits “a pattern of seasonal changes in undocumented immigration combined with a backlog of demand because of 2020s coronavirus border closure.” From the March 25 report:

- Underappreciated in the developing narrative is just how predictable the rise in border crossings is. We analyzed monthly U.S. Customs and Border Protection data from 2012 through February and found no clear evidence that the overall increase in border crossings in 2021 can be attributed to Biden administration policies. Rather, the current increase fits a pattern of seasonal changes in undocumented immigration combined with a backlog of demand because of 2020s coronavirus border closure.
- The media obsessively demanding the border situation be deemed an unprecedented crisis of Biden’s making has consequences; as Media Matters’ Matt Gertz recently wrote: “Reporters who devote substantial attention to a story and describe it as a ‘crisis’ are using their agenda-setting power, priming their audience to treat it as one. ... In this case, the ‘crisis’ tone plays into weeks of right-wing demagoguing of the border issue.”
- **There is no evidence that migrants at the border are significant spreaders of COVID-19**
- **MYTH:** On the March 14 edition of Fox News’ *Sunday Morning Futures*, Fox host Maria Bartiromo cited a Washington Times story, claiming, “Migrants are flooding across the border with as much as 10 times the COVID-19 rate as Americans.” Texas Gov. Greg Abbott also repeatedly pushed this false narrative, appearing on right-wing media outlets to scapegoat migrants for rising COVID-19 numbers in border areas, despite his own reckless decision to lift mask mandates and other proven public health measures.

**REALITY:** “**No evidence migrants at border significantly spreading virus.**” Despite right-wing media’s recent apoplectic focus on the threat of migrants bringing the coronavirus to this country, there’s little evidence that migrants are significant spreaders of COVID-19. As the Associated Press reported on March 10:

- As he ended Texas’ coronavirus restrictions Wednesday over the objections of public health officials, Republican Gov. Greg Abbott has tried shifting concern about the virus’ spread to migrants with COVID-19 crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, though without evidence they are a significant factor.

The focus by Abbott and other Republicans on migrant families has drawn criticism about invoking a long history in the U.S. of wrongly suggesting migrants spread diseases.

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Doctors on the border fear Abbott repealed coronavirus safeguards too soon and threatens a fragile decline in COVID-19 cases. The surge of immigration to the border is also worrying, they say, but far from the biggest factor in containing the virus’ spread.

“It’s not trivial,” said Dr. James Castillo, the public health authority for Cameron County in Texas’ Rio Grande Valley, the busiest corridor for migrant apprehensions along the U.S.-Mexico border.

“Is it the biggest source of infection to our whole community?” he said, referring to migrants arriving with the virus. “No, it’s maybe one source, and there’s a lot of different sources. And it’s a shame that we’re going to create new sources by dropping the restrictions.”

- The racist and unfounded trope that immigrants are perpetual sources of disease has existed for centuries. Unfortunately, the modern threat of COVID-19 has given anti-immigrationists a new way to repack these harmful lies.
- **Undocumented immigrants crossing the border are not given special treatment under COVID-19 protocols**
- **MYTH:** On the March 24 edition of Fox News’ *The Story with Martha MacCallum*, MacCallum pushed the lie to Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) that COVID-19 protocols for undocumented immigrants crossing the border are less stringent than those for citizens and visitors doing the same, claiming, “If you travel outside of this country as a citizen, you got to have a COVID test to get in. But you don't need one at the southern border, which I think is a hypocrisy that a lot of people can relate to.”

**REALITY: The order requiring a negative COVID-19 test to enter the country only applies to air travel.** Although as of January 28, the U.S. government did in fact make a negative COVID-19 test mandatory for entrance into the country, it is only a requirement for air travel, not for “land border crossings.” Furthermore, as fact-checked by Politifact on February 4, U.S. border authorities have been conducting screening protocols “since the beginning of the pandemic.” As explained by Politifact:

- U.S. officials don’t have to rely on an “honor system.” U.S. Customs and Border Protection has tools and processes to screen immigrants who are apprehended at the border for health and security issues, even if the people aren’t fully upfront or don’t have medical records or documentation on hand proving they have a clean background.

CBP told PolitiFact that it does initial inspections for symptoms or risk factors associated with COVID-19, and “pursuant to longstanding infectious disease protocols,” refers immigrants who might have an infectious disease to local clinics or hospitals “for appropriate medical evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment.”

Procedures for COVID-19 have been in place since the beginning of the pandemic, said Matthew Dyman, a spokesperson for the CBP.

- **Immigrants contribute to the economy and are not a “drain” on taxpayers**
- **MYTH:** On the March 23 edition of Fox News’ *The Faulkner Focus*, an entire segment was dedicated to pushing the right-wing talking point that too much immigration is a strain on U.S. resources and unfair to U.S. citizens. Anchor Harris Faulkner asked Fox host Will Cain to respond to a clip she’d just aired from Tucker Carlson’s prime-time show, in which the Fox News host complained that “at a time when there were more than half a million Americans homeless living on the streets -- a crushing number that our leaders ignore but that rises every single year -- at that moment, Joe Biden is giving hotel rooms to illegal aliens. It's hard to believe that's real. But it is real.” Cain added, “Welcoming in migrants from Central America, that's all fine and good but not if it is

coming at the expense of a limited amount of resources that we're depriving ... Americans [of].”

**REALITY: “Immigrants are not a sap on ‘finite’ resources. In the longer term, immigrants contribute more to the government’s coffers than they receive in social spending.”** Despite the long-standing right-wing talking point that immigrants drain the country’s social services and resources, evidence has repeatedly shown that immigrants contribute greatly to the economy. As explained by The Atlantic on September 29, 2018:

- Immigrants are not a sap on “finite” resources. In the longer term, immigrants contribute more to the government’s coffers than they receive in social spending. Moreover, these programs are not just welfare or a handout, but also an investment, helping ensure that families are healthy, educated, and able to work and support themselves over the course of generations.

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Further, the government’s resources are not “finite.” Immigrants do not come and steal things away from native-born Americans. Immigrant families pay taxes. They work. They start businesses. They spend money in their communities. They join native-born families in being economically productive, both paying money to the government and receiving benefits from the government.

Do they receive more than they take—that is, are they a net drain? Again, the answer is no. Lower-income immigrant families might receive more in benefits than they pay in taxes. But that mathematical equilibrium is temporary, and an artifact of the way the tax-and-transfer system is structured to help lower-income families and to support families with kids. As one Federal Reserve summary of the research puts it: “If immigrants are assigned the marginal cost of public goods, then the long-run fiscal impact is positive and the short-run effect is negative but very small (less negative than that of natives).” Given some time in the country, these families pay in, in other words. One estimate puts the net present value of each immigrant to the government at \$259,000. The Trump administration would prefer a smaller country, a smaller economy, and a more perilous long-term fiscal picture, evidently.

Plus, disinvesting in families—particularly families with young children—might save the government a few safety-net dollars, but at the cost of hurting those families’ health and long-run earning potential.

- **Biden and the Democrats do not support and have not created “open borders”**
- **MYTH:** On the March 22 edition of Fox News’ *The Five*, co-host Jesse Watters said Biden has an “open borders policy for teenagers.” Fox host Jeanine Pirro claimed: “I am telling you for a fact, the border is open. And I stood there with the sheriff who showed me where they stopped the wall, where they are literally, from Mexico, cutting the bottom of the wall and allowing people to come in.” On the March 22 edition of MSNBC’s *Morning Joe*, frequent guest Donny Deutsch also claimed, “You can’t live with open borders like this.”

**REALITY: “This is all, in truth, total nonsense. The United States of America as it exists today is, in fact, a country, and it has borders.”** As many media outlets and experts have

explained, the idea that “open borders” exist in this country, or that the president and Democrats support the concept, is a false right-wing talking point. In fact, as Vox pointed out in response to the Trump administration’s frequent fear mongering by using the term to justify its draconian anti-immigrant policies, the idea “obviously does not have any mainstream adherents in practical American politics.” From Vox on June 22, 2018:

- This is all, in truth, total nonsense. The United States of America as it exists today is, in fact, a country, and it has borders. Our borders are not currently open, nor were they open under George W. Bush. It is not the case that open borders is the only alternative to Trump’s immigration crackdown, nor is it remotely true that harsher immigration laws are required to avoid a situation of borderlessness.

The fact that this kind of rhetoric has become normalized, including in elite circles, is itself a kind of insanity. The implication is that the survival of the country requires the level of immigration law violations to fall to zero, a standard that the United States has never met throughout its history and could only conceivably meet through the institution of a costly and cruel authoritarian regime that would greatly damage the interests of American citizens.

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The true purpose of “open borders” rhetoric is to try to exempt the topic of border security and immigration enforcement from the normal political process in which we consider the trade-offs and choices involved. If even a single opportunity for a person to break immigration law and get away with it is reframed as an existential threat to the existence of the nation, then suddenly all kinds of things — from a multibillion-dollar border wall to mass incarceration of children — suddenly seem reasonable. But none of it is true.

- **An increase in migrants at the border does not represent a terrorist threat**
- **MYTH:** After House Minority Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) suggested on a March 15 trip to the border that Border Patrol had apprehended migrants on the terror watch list, Fox co-host Jesse Watters hyped an Axios report on the March 16 edition of Fox News’ *The Five* that “four migrants with names on the terror watch list were picked up at the border since October,” adding, “You can only assume that” Border Patrol “probably missed some too.” Fox co-host Greg Gutfeld repeatedly conflated those on the watch list with actual terrorists, invoking the 9/11 terror attacks and claiming: “The terrorist argument is extremely valid because the primary strategy is to remain unseen. Saying that you have found four is saying you found a minimum of four, right?” The chyron went on to read “Biden’s border crisis: GOP warns terrorists rushing across the border.”

**REALITY: Republicans have provided no evidence for their claims that terrorists are “rushing” across the border, and the right has a long history of pushing these dubious claims.** Following McCarthy’s comments, right-wing media jumped to spread the claim that terrorists are traveling across the southern border. Democrats from border states immediately pushed back on McCarthy’s claims and claimed they had seen no evidence of Border Patrol finding suspected terrorists. Furthermore, the terror watch list database is known to be deeply flawed, and a person’s inclusion in the vast system does not on its own show that they are a terrorist.

The assertion that terrorists are crossing the southern border is not new on the right, and former President Donald Trump's administration and his right-wing allies frequently push the scare tactic even though it has been repeatedly debunked. As explained by the Cato Institute on March 18:

- Here are the facts about terrorists crossing the border from Mexico: Zero people have been killed or injured in attacks on U.S. soil committed by terrorists who illegally crossed the Southwest border. From 1975 through the end of 2020, only nine people convicted of planning a terrorist attack entered the United States illegally – some of them on ships, airplanes, and walking across the border. For instance, the most serious case was Walid Kabbani who walked across the Canadian border with a bomb in 1987 and was immediately arrested. Only three of the nine who entered illegally came across the border with Mexico as young children in 1984, 23 years before they were arrested for a comically planned terrorist attack on Fort Dix in 2007.
- **There still is not a causal connection between undocumented immigrants and crime**
- **MYTH:** Thanks to Trump's incessant demonization of immigrants, in particular his lies that they are predisposed to criminality, right-wing media continue to fearmonger about a connection. Fox News has taken the bogus claim even further to falsely accuse the Biden administration of not seeking to deport undocumented immigrants with criminal convictions.

**REALITY:** “A lot of research has shown that there's no causal connection between immigration and crime in the United States.” Study after study has repeatedly shown that not only is there no causal connection between immigrants and crime, there also is no significant one when it comes to undocumented immigrants. On May 13, 2019, the New York Times reported on a new study by the Marshall Project that once again debunked this favorite right-wing scare tactic:

- A lot of research has shown that there's no causal connection between immigration and crime in the United States. But after one such study was reported on jointly by The Marshall Project and The Upshot last year, readers had one major complaint: Many argued it was unauthorized immigrants who increase crime, not immigrants over all.

An analysis derived from new data is now able to help address this question, suggesting that growth in illegal immigration does not lead to higher local crime rates.

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The results of the analysis resemble those of other studies on the relationship between undocumented immigration and crime. Last year, a report by the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, found that unauthorized immigrants in Texas committed fewer crimes than their native-born counterparts. A state-level analysis in *Criminology*, an academic journal, found that undocumented immigration did not increase violent crime and was in fact associated with slight decreases in it. Another Cato study found that unauthorized immigrants are less likely to be incarcerated.

At the more local level, an analysis by *Governing* magazine reported that metropolitan areas with more undocumented residents had similar rates of violent crime, and significantly lower rates of

property crime, than areas with smaller numbers of such residents in 2014. After controlling for multiple socioeconomic factors, the author of the analysis, Mike Maciag, found that for every 1 percentage point increase in an area's population that was undocumented there were 94 fewer property crimes per 100,000 residents.

- **The Biden administration did not do away with Title 42, the public health law that is turning away migrants at the border**
- **MYTH:** On the March 22 edition of Fox News' *Outnumbered*, co-host Harris Faulkner referenced an interview she had with former President Donald Trump in which he falsely claimed, "They're applying nothing. They're not doing Title 42 or any title." Title 42 was invoked last March by Trump, giving Customs and Border Protection the authority to automatically expel undocumented migrants to ostensibly prevent the spread of the virus. Faulkner repeated the lie about the law as she referenced COVID-19 testing and stated, "So we are not able to test everybody. Title 42 enabled them to slow down that so they can get that done. We don't have that right now." This false claim has also appeared in mainstream news outlets; on March 22, CNN host Poppy Harlow also claimed that Biden's administration "knew that reversing Title 42" would have consequences.

**REALITY:** "This is exaggerated." In a March 20 fact-check of Sen. John Cornyn's (R-TX) similar claim that the Biden administration had "failed to enforce the Title 42 public health order," The New York Times said his reference to Title 42 was "inaccurate." As explained by the Times:

- Mr. Cornyn's reference to Title 42 was also inaccurate. Though the Biden administration has decided not to expel unaccompanied children, despite a court ruling allowing the practice, it has continued Title 42 expulsions of most border crossers. In fact, out of the more than 100,000 encounters at the southwestern border in February, 72,000 led to expulsions.
- **Migrants are not agents of drug cartels; smugglers pay to pass through controlled territory**
- **MYTH:** On the March 4 edition of Fox News' *The Five*, co-host Jesse Watters pushed a conspiracy that migrants who cross the border will have to act as sleeper agents in America for the drug cartels, otherwise the cartels will "kill their family back home," adding, "Cartels own this country at this point, and Joe Biden is letting them do it." On March 22, Fox host Jeanine Pirro claimed, "The bringing of these children into this country where they will be forever connected to a cartel is slavery."

**REALITY:** Migrants "slip through Mexico with smugglers, known as coyotes, who bribe cartels and corrupt cops and immigration agents along the way." As explained by the Texas Tribune on March 7, 2019, migrants are not working for Mexico's drug cartels, as the cartels are but one part of a "sophisticated network of smugglers, cartels, stash houses, drivers and lookouts":

- Unlike the attention-grabbing caravans that have been making their way to Tijuana, the movements of migrants who hire smugglers — and most migrants do — are not tracked by media outlets or in President Donald Trump's Twitter feed. Like Carlos and Heyli,

they slip through Mexico with smugglers, known as coyotes, who bribe cartels and corrupt cops and immigration agents along the way. (Carlos is a pseudonym; the rest of his family members are referred to in this story by their real first names.)

It's a system that runs on people like Carlos and his family, who are willing to carve up their meager assets to pay off a sophisticated network of smugglers, cartels, stash houses, drivers and lookouts. "It's like a cake," a coyote who goes by the nickname Sultan said in an interview. "Everyone gets their little piece."

Although taking Heyli offered a steep discount, Carlos and Claudia still didn't have the money to pay off their smuggler, who wanted roughly half his \$7,000 fee up front to get the pair to Reynosa, a Mexican city just across the Rio Grande from McAllen. The other half would help pay off the Gulf Cartel, a crime syndicate that charges a "tax" of \$1,000 to \$1,500 per person to let migrants cross its territory.

The cartel began trafficking booze across the border during Prohibition before switching to narcotics decades ago. More recently, it has increasingly turned to human cargo for a variety of macroeconomic and geopolitical reasons. Marijuana-legalization efforts have driven down prices in the U.S., while periodic crackdowns on border crossings over the past 15 years have driven up the amount the cartel can charge migrants for allowing them safe passage.

- **Trump did not have a humane immigration system -- it was designed to be a punitive deterrent, unlike Biden's approach**
- **MYTH:** On the March 22 edition of Fox News' *America Reports*, Fox contributor and former Trump press secretary [Kayleigh McEnany](#) claimed Trump created "a system to make this work where they could process asylum claims faster," adding that he "created a humane system" as she contrasted Trump's record on immigration favorably against that of Biden. Fox anchor [Martha MacCallum](#) similarly argued that "in many ways, you can make an argument that [Trump's child separation policy] was more humane" than what Biden is doing.

**REALITY:** "The situation under former president Donald Trump was substantially worse from a humanitarian and a pragmatic governing perspective." The Washington Post's Greg Sargent has [repeatedly explained](#) how the Trump administration defined "success" as preventing as many migrants as possible from entering the country, even as asylum seekers under U.S. and international law. But as Sargent [pointed out](#) on March 16, this version of so-called success encouraged a "humanitarian catastrophe," and was "only a 'solution' if you believe cruelty and fear should be used to deter people from applying for asylum":

- Citation

Trump's "solutions" were designed to prevent people from applying for asylum at all. His "Remain in Mexico" policy — which forced thousands back into Mexico to await hearings — was the centerpiece of this.

But that was a humanitarian catastrophe. Many were exposed to violence and even kidnapping, or stranded in horrific refugee camp conditions for months.

"Trump's policy created a much worse humanitarian and legal crisis than what we're seeing now," Dan Restrepo, a national security official under former president Barack Obama, told me.



“It failed to meet our legal obligations and relegated tens of thousands to dangerous and inhumane conditions in Mexico.”

That was only a “solution” if you believe cruelty and fear should be used to deter people from applying for asylum. That’s the real Republican position: that those are legitimate tools to ensure that as few people apply and qualify for asylum as possible.

- **Trump’s family separation was never necessary; it was a “zero tolerance” shift**
- **MYTH:** On the February 2 edition of Fox News’ *Fox & Friends*, Fox host Pete Hegseth insisted Trump had been following the law when he enacted his family separation policy and that “there’s a huge misrepresentation of why children were separated from families at the border in the first place. It’s like anyone who commits a crime is separated from their kids.” Hegseth further complained, “They made it out as if it was intentionally a draconian policy and now they’ve created an entire caricature around it.”

**REALITY: “Immigrant families are being separated at the border not because of Democrats and not because some law forces this result.”** In January, the Trump administration’s own inspector general for the Department of Justice concluded that “zero tolerance” caused family separation, an unprecedented reversal of the historical policy to “avoid the separation of the family.” On June 19, 2018, The Washington Post’s Fact Checker debunked the Trump administration’s lie that it was legally obligated to separate children from their parents, determining that “they’re being separated because the Trump administration, under its zero-tolerance policy, is choosing to prosecute border-crossing adults for any offenses.”

- The doublespeak coming from Trump and top administration officials on this issue is breathtaking, not only because of the sheer audacity of these claims but also because they keep being repeated without evidence. Immigrant families are being separated at the border not because of Democrats and not because some law forces this result, as Trump insists. They’re being separated because the Trump administration, under its zero-tolerance policy, is choosing to prosecute border-crossing adults for any offenses.

This includes illegal-entry misdemeanors, which are being prosecuted at a rate not seen in previous administrations. Because the act of crossing itself is now being treated as an offense worthy of prosecution, any family that enters the United States illegally is likely to end up separated. Nielsen may choose not to call this a “family separation policy,” but that’s precisely the effect it has.

Sessions, who otherwise owns up to what’s happening, has suggested that the Flores settlement and a court ruling are forcing his hand. They’re not. At heart, this is an issue of prosecutorial discretion: his discretion.

The Trump administration owns this family-separation policy, and its spin deserves Four Pinocchios.

- **The Biden administration was not blind to the problems materializing on the border**
- **MYTH:** On the March 17 edition of Fox News’ *Fox & Friends*, guest co-host Lawrence Jones discussed the situation at the border and said the Biden administration wasn’t

“prepared for this.” Jones went on to assert that the Trump administration had adequately tried to prepare the Biden administration for migrants seeking entry to this country. Co-host Brian Kilmeade agreed that the Biden administration “totally lost control of the border” and had “no idea” how “challenging” immigration is. This narrative has also been pushed by mainstream journalists; on Fox, Axios reporter Jonathan Swan called the increase in migration “foreseeable” and said it was “pretty perplexing” that Biden’s administration did not “have the facilities lined up and all the ways to deal with this influx.” The Washington Post similarly reported that the increase in migrants at the border is “the result of an administration that was forewarned of the coming surge, yet still ill-prepared and lacking the capacity to deal with it.”

**REALITY: “The Biden transition team and career government officials began sounding an alarm on the need to increase shelter space ... but the Trump administration didn't take action until just days before the inauguration.”** NBC recently reported that the Biden administration began asking about extra shelter space for an increase in migrant children in early December, but the Trump administration didn’t take action until a few days before the inauguration in late January. As NBC reported:

- The Biden transition team made its concerns about the lack of shelter space known to Trump officials both at the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Homeland Security, laying out the need to open an influx shelter in Carrizo Springs, Texas, and to issue what's known as a "request for assistance" that would start the process of surveying new sites for expanded shelters, according to the transition officials.

It was not until Jan. 15 that then-HHS Secretary Alex Azar issued the request for assistance, which started the multiweek process of surveying and choosing new sites. The Biden administration opened the Carrizo Springs facility Feb. 22 and announced this week that it would be expanding the capacity of that site.

As of February, HHS was only able to use about half of its congressionally funded capacity because of Covid-19 protocols and a shuttering of facilities under the administration of former President Donald Trump.

- **There is no widespread problem of undocumented immigrants collecting COVID-19 relief payments**
- **MYTH:** On the March 23 edition of his radio show, Fox News’ Sean Hannity pushed the false claim that millions of undocumented immigrants would automatically receive stimulus checks from the most recent COVID-19 relief law. As he railed against “out of control, madness, insanity at our nation’s border,” Hannity claimed, “Now we’re going to reward millions of illegal immigrants with a taxpayer funded jackpot. At least 2 million of them are going to get COVID emergency stimulus checks of up to 1,400 dollars. These are illegal immigrants. So of course we’re seeing a bunch of Biden for President flags flying over the migrant border camps.” The conservative Washington Examiner also wrote that “2.1 million illegal immigrants could be eligible for \$4.38 billion wired directly into their checking accounts, just like the hundreds of millions of legal residents and citizens who started receiving checks last week.”

**REALITY: “COVID-19 relief package excludes most immigrants in the country without legal permission, as did the two previous packages that passed under the Trump administration.”** On March 11, the Associated Press fact-checked a viral claim that undocumented immigrants would receive the \$1,400 stimulus checks distributed under the most recent pandemic relief law. As explained by the AP, this misinformation relied on generalizations, assumptions, and exaggerations rooted in the fact that a small number of immigrants who have overstayed their visas and properly obtained social security numbers when they previously had work authorization may receive the relief, depending on how the IRS processes the funds:

- The vast majority of immigrants without lawful status in the U.S. do not have Social Security numbers and cannot receive a \$1,400 stimulus check. A small number of people who entered the U.S. on a temporary work visa and were issued Social Security numbers may be able to receive a payment, even if they overstayed their visas.

Whether someone will receive a stimulus check really comes down to whether they have a Social Security number.

“For the most part, no unauthorized immigrants will receive the \$1,400 stimulus payments,” said Julia Gelatt, a senior policy analyst at the Migration Policy Institute in an email to The Associated Press. “In order to receive a payment, someone must have a valid Social Security number issued by the Social Security Administration.”

According to a recent estimate by the Center for Migration Studies, a think tank focused on international migration, there were 10.35 million immigrants living in the country without legal status in 2019. Most of them do not have Social Security numbers.

However, there are some people who entered the U.S. on valid temporary work visas who received a Social Security number while on that visa. Those who overstayed their visas may qualify for a stimulus check, but experts say the number of people in this category is small.

“We don’t know how many unauthorized immigrants overstayed a temporary work visa that grants access to a Social Security number, but again, it’s likely to be a pretty small number,” Gelatt said. “And we will still have to see if the IRS really issues payments to people with a Social Security number that is no longer authorized for work.”

- **The vast majority of asylum-seekers attend immigration court hearings**
- **MYTH:** On the March 23 edition of MSNBC’s *Morning Joe*, co-host Joe Scarborough claimed that “of course, even when illegal immigrants get a notice to appear” in court, “maybe 25%, maybe a third of those given those notices to appear actually come back and show up in court.” Republicans and conservative media have long claimed that a majority of asylum-seekers don’t show up for their court hearings.

**REALITY: Recent data shows that asylum seekers continue to appear for immigration court proceedings at high rates.** As Human Rights First explained when the Trump administration pushed this false claim about low appearances, the facts say otherwise:

- Government figures made available through the Syracuse University’s Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) asylum decision tracking tool show near 100

percent appearance rates for asylum seekers released from immigration detention. Out of 10,427 decisions in fiscal year 2018 for released asylum seekers, only 160 received removal orders because they missed a court hearing—resulting in a 98.5 percent court hearing compliance rate.

The presumption that asylum seekers who do not attend court hearings lack legitimate claims for protection is erroneous. That conclusion obscures the range of factors that lead some asylum seekers to miss their immigration court proceedings or even fail to file an asylum application. Indeed, a federal district court has held that the failure of the Department of Homeland Security to notify asylum seekers who have passed a credible fear screening of the obligation to file an asylum application within the one-year deadline violates the immigration laws and due process rights under the Constitution.