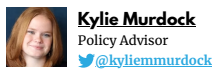


How Humanitarian Parole Reduces Chaos at the Border



Republicans have shut down a border deal that gave them exactly what they asked for. They've made it clear they would rather make border security a talking point in the 2024 election and pursue frivolous impeachments than actually fix the problem. With Congress refusing to act, comprehensive border and immigration reform is off the table. But President Biden does have a tool he can use to reduce chaos at the border: humanitarian parole. Presidents from both political parties have used parole for decades to admit refugees into the United States without challenge from Congress. This memo unpacks humanitarian parole, explains what the Biden Administration has done with it, and lays out how it can help reduce chaos at our southern border.

What is Humanitarian Parole?

Humanitarian parole is an executive authority that allows the Secretary of Homeland Security to admit migrants on a case-by-case basis for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit. Migrants granted parole are allowed to live and work in the United States for a period of one or two years without threat of deportation. Parole does not give migrants permanent legal status or provide a pathway to citizenship, though in the 1900s, most parolees were eventually granted permanent legal status by Congress. Paroled migrants are expected to leave the United States after the designated time period expires, unless they qualify for and receive another form of legal status that allows them to stay.

Parole isn't a new concept—it's been used by Republican and Democratic presidents for decades to admit refugees, often ones fleeing communist or oppressive governments. Over the past seven decades, presidents have issued 126 parole orders. Republican President Eisenhower paroled over 31,000 Hungarians during the Hungarian Revolution. Democratic President Kennedy paroled 107,000 Cubans after the communist revolution. Since then, more than 500,000 Cubans have been granted parole. Republican President Ford paroled more than 330,000 Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians after the Vietnam War and thousands of Iranians after the Iranian Revolution. The United States has a long history of using parole to help refugees escape from emergency situations, and it has been an important tool in the President's toolbox to address shifting migrant circumstances.

How Has President Biden Deployed It?

President Biden's first major use of parole was after the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan. The United States evacuated and granted parole to 77,000 Afghans, many of whom were allies to the United States who feared persecution by the Taliban for their pro-western beliefs. Afghans were vetted and screened for weeks before being resettled in the United States.

Less than a year later, Russia invaded Ukraine, displacing more than 10 million Ukrainians. Through a program called Uniting for Ukraine, 125,000 Ukrainians were granted parole into the United States for two years. Unlike Afghans, Ukrainians were required to have a US sponsor who agreed to financially support them.

Another 23,000 Ukrainians who had fled to Mexico at the beginning of the war were granted parole at the US-Mexico border.

More recently, the President has deployed this tool to manage the flow of migrants from Latin America, which has seen record unrest over the past few years. Venezuela is experiencing the world's second largest refugee crisis, with more than 7 million Venezuelans forced to leave the country. More than half of Haitians need humanitarian aid or protection as gangs continue to control the government. And Nicaraguans are fleeing an authoritarian government that imprisons and kills dissidents. As a result, encounters at the southern border are at record highs, with migrants from Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua accounting for nearly 25% of encounters in fiscal year 2022.

In January of 2023, the Biden Administration created a parole program to admit a total of 30,000 refugees a month from Venezuela, Haiti, Cuba, and Nicaragua, all countries going through major humanitarian crises. Like most parole programs, parole lasts for two years and does not offer a pathway to legal status. Participants are required to pass background checks, have a US sponsor who offers financial support, and fly into a US airport (rather than showing up at the southern border). The program was created to reduce illegal crossings at the southern border by offering refugees legal channels to enter the United States, and it was coupled with a change in policy at the border. Migrants from these four countries who try to cross the border without legal status will be made ineligible for parole and subject to expulsion to Mexico. The Biden Administration negotiated a deal with the Mexican government to accept 30,000 refugees per month from these four countries. Since its inception, 340,000 Venezuelans, Haitians, Cubans, and Nicaraguans have been allowed to legally enter the country in an orderly fashion, settle in communities, and work in the United States.

What Has Been the Impact?

The southern border saw a significant decrease in encounters after the creation of the 2023 parole program. Border encounters dropped 38% in the month of January, from 252,315 to 157,358, and dropped for many of the countries included in the program.

- Encounters with Cuban migrants dropped by 73% in January.
- Encounters with Nicaraguan migrants dropped by 89%.
- Encounters with Venezuelan migrants stayed the same, though had dropped by 33% the previous October after the announcement of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Venezuelans already in the United States.
- Encounters with Haitian migrants stayed the same in January but increased significantly in the following months.

While there are monthly fluctuations, encounters with Cuban and Nicaraguan migrants continue to be much lower than before the creation of the parole program. Encounters with Venezuelan and Haitian migrants did increase in the spring months and continue to be high, likely due to the worsening humanitarian crises in their home countries. (It's important to note that these migrants encountered at the border are not eligible for parole, though they may be eligible for asylum.) Springtime increases in border encounters aren't new—almost every year since 2014, border encounters have seen a significant increase in the months of March, April, and May. Overall encounters did increase during these months in 2023, but at a much lower rate than previous years, likely due to the wider availability of legal pathways.

Conclusion

With Republicans refusing to act, the Administration is left with few tools to address the situation at the border. President Biden has used humanitarian parole, like many presidents before him, to reduce chaos at the border, and he should continue to do so. More than 340,000 refugees have been able to enter the United States legally and safely through this process, decreasing congestion and confusion on our border with Mexico. It's clear that increasing legal pathways into the United States decreases illegal immigration and chaos at the border, and if Republicans won't act, the President must.

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