

Stats show the Harris-Biden administration just stopped caring if criminals crossed the border

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The three and a half years of the Harris-Biden administration have proven beyond dispute that illegal immigration is not a victimless crime. This fact has been thrown into sharp focus with the news that an illegal alien charged with assaulting New York City police officers was caught and released at the border just last May, despite ICE beds being available.

We have heard of the horrific crimes committed by illegal aliens against innocent Americans like Laken Riley, Rachel Morin and Jocelyn Nungaray. We have mourned their loss and grieved for their families. We have also questioned **how such terrible acts could possibly be allowed to happen** in our communities at all. Ultimately, these atrocities were made possible by an administration that has set aside decades of bipartisan immigration enforcement precedent.

Specifically, President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris' policy of mass catch-and-release has led to millions of inadmissible aliens being released into the interior, including massive waves of criminals and other public safety threats. Since the beginning of fiscal year 2021, the Border Patrol has recorded **more than 52,000 arrests of illegal aliens with criminal histories**, compared to around 22,000 from FY2017-2020. Deputy Chief Patrol Agent Dustin Caudle for the Border Patrol's Yuma Sector told my committee last year that *"any crime that can be committed, we do encounter people who have committed them."* This sobering number does not include the roughly 2 million known gotaways on Biden and Harris' watch. These are individuals whom Border Patrol agents detect crossing, but are unable to apprehend.

Border Patrol Chief Jason Owens has said these gotaways keep him awake at night. His fears are well-founded, because among these gotaways are an unknown number of criminals, gang members, and individuals with ties to terrorism, who pay more to avoid apprehension. Further, because most countries do not maintain adequate criminal databases, there is often little to no information for Border Patrol agents to use in vetting border crossers. In other cases, **hostile nations like China, Cuba and Venezuela simply refuse to share what information they do possess**. As a result, former Border Patrol Chief Rodney Scott told my committee earlier this year that the vetting of illegal border crossers has become "a check-the-box exercise." Even the current acting director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) recently said, **"Sometimes there is just no information on individuals."**

And yet, Biden and Harris' Department of Homeland Security (DHS) **continues to release them anyway** — evidently just hoping for the best. But hope is not a strategy, and the direct consequences have been an untold number of criminal aliens released into the interior. A quick survey of recent ICE press releases yields story after story of illegal aliens who were released by Customs and Border Protection (CBP), only for federal law enforcement to learn — months or even years later — of their criminal connections and have to track them down. Consider the case of Peruvian national Gianfranco Torres-Navarro, who is wanted in connection with the **murder of 23 people in his home country**. He was arrested earlier this month in New York after illegally entering Texas and being released in May 2024. Law enforcement was notified of his criminal history in early July, but he remained at large for more than a month.

There is not just a vetting problem at the border, however. The Harris-Biden administration has dialed back immigration enforcement in the interior, including for criminal illegal aliens.

In his September 2021 guidance to ICE personnel, now-impeached DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas informed agents that **an illegal alien's conviction for a criminal offense was not sufficient to warrant investigation and removal by ICE**, in clear contradiction of long-standing US immigration law. This wanton approach to law enforcement is reflected in ICE's statistics. **As of January 2024, there were more than 617,000 criminal illegal aliens at large in the United States, up from just over 407,000 in January 2023.**

Meanwhile, ICE arrests of criminal aliens have plummeted, from over 120,000 in FY2019 (the last full fiscal year before the pandemic) to just over 46,000 in FY2022 and around 74,000 in Y2023. From FY2019 to FY2023, criminal removals decreased by **approximately 60%**, from more than 173,000 to 69,902. In FY2019, ICE removed 5,497 known or suspected gang members, but just 2,667 in FY2022 and 3,406 in FY2023.

Detainers, which ICE issues to state and local law enforcement, requesting they hold apprehended suspected criminal aliens until ICE can take them into custody, have also dropped by more than 40,000 from FY2019 to FY2023. And all these decreased numbers have come despite the unprecedented increase in illegal immigration since early 2021. As one former senior DHS official noted at the onset of the crisis in 2021, ***the administration effectively shielded the vast majority of illegal aliens from enforcement actions***, ostensibly to focus on threats to public safety. Yet the administration is clearly failing to do even that. Under the Biden-Harris administration's open-border and anti-enforcement agenda, **Americans are simply less safe in their own communities**. This will remain the case until we secure the border and enforce our immigration laws.