

# Migrants Chanting ‘Biden! Biden!’ Attempt to Rush Border

Almost lost in the distractions of the holiday weekend, on the night of December 29 up to 400 mostly Cuban migrants forced their way past Mexican immigration and overpayment turnstiles on the Paso del Norte Bridge from Ciudad Juarez with a desire to force their way into downtown El Paso, Texas, according to news reporting. (Some video of the attempted incursion is [here](#) and [here](#).)

U.S. Customs and Border Protection Mobile Field Force officers met them in riot gear and used concrete blocks tipped by concertina wire to block the onslaught mid-bridge as many of the migrants chanted “Biden! Biden!” Many demanded they be let in to live in the United States while they pursue asylum claims, instead of waiting in Mexico as required under various policies of President Donald Trump.

But with Trump still presiding, the blocked migrants with Biden on their minds were forced to listen to a recorded message broadcast over loudspeakers in Spanish and English warning that any further trouble would be met by force, arrests, and prosecution. That went on until the crowd dispersed at about dawn on December 30.

A source told the Center for Immigration Studies that CBP and Mexican authorities on the international bridge to the Del Rio, Texas, port of entry broke up another, smaller migrant formation demanding U.S. entry. Otherwise, the extent to which the attempted incursions occurred elsewhere along the southern border remains unclear at this time. But a question naturally arises from these events.

Do attempted mass incursions like these foreshadow a new flashpoint and tactic whereby untold tens of thousands of migrants inside Mexico can quickly test the new Biden administration on its many campaign promises of a kinder and gentler approach toward them? It bears watching.

# Broader Implications of the Mass-Incursion Tactic for Incoming President Biden

This was not the first time CBP under Donald Trump has forcefully responded to surging migrants hoping to overrun the port of entry at El Paso and will almost certainly not be the last there or elsewhere.

Especially not now, judging by the chants and media interviews on the Paso del Norte Bridge this time about Biden's many immigration promises heard widely throughout the Americas and beyond, including an amnesty bill, an end to deportations, and reversal of Trump immigration policies during his first 100 days in office. While sharp analysts like my CIS colleague Mark Krikorian judge that Biden is likely to slow-boil the frog on some of his immigration promises for pragmatic political reasons, what was said on the international bridge during the recent confrontation confirms that migrants don't necessarily pay close attention to in-the-weeds political timing so much as big, broad, and directional messages.

The migrants on that bridge showed up with high expectations that the coming Biden administration somehow had already managed to swing open the gates as promised, never mind that Trump still has a few weeks to go.

The Mexican newspaper El Sol de Parral quoted Enrique Valenzuela, head of the Chihuahua State Council for Population and Migration, who was at the bridge last week, as saying a false social media rumor that the Americans would start letting migrants pass through that night easily sparked the event. He said that happened because "there is expectation, there is hope and there is enthusiasm in them [sic] who believe that with the change of administration comes new measures and that they will immediately enter and there will be new conditions that will allow them to request asylum."

Raul Pino Gonzalez of Havana was quoted at the bridge saying: "They should let us pass. We are calling out to Mexico and the U.S. and to Biden, the new U.S. president, to remind him of the presidential campaign promises he made. To make him aware we are here."

While events like this have happened before, time and place make these fresh

mass-entry attempts very different. At issue with the mass-incursion tactic is whether the new administration will show similarly stiff, riot-gear resolve toward follow-on attempts, or let them pass to avoid the look of forceful confrontation.

In this Hobson's choice, the Biden administration would face the politically bitter prospect that violent confrontations would be among its first interactions with migrants. Should the administration choose the obvious alternative of letting such groups pass on the bridges or elsewhere, it would naturally follow that any successful breach would only inspire more, which could quickly spiral into a nationally hurtful border crisis, given the vast populations of frustrated, angry migrants in Mexico and far beyond at the moment.

## **A Large Reservoir of Frustrated Migrants in Mexico Pulsing with Biden Hope**

While the exact number of migrants pooled up in Mexico is not clear, the reservoir of people who would enter through any first breach is clearly vast and deep.

Several Trump policies that Biden promises to reverse have forced economic migrants who'd use the asylum system to attain American prosperity to wait in Mexico since the summer of 2019. One of those policies, the Migrant Protection Protocols (also known as the "Remain in Mexico" program), has returned some 70,000 mostly economic migrants to Mexico to wait for their mostly meritless asylum claims to process, preventing them from disappearing inside the United States after judges inevitably decline those claims.

The Trump administration has required other migrants to remain in Mexico under a separate policy known as "metering", whereby they are individually invited over to lodge an asylum claim so as to avoid swamping processes at the ports of entry. More than 5,500 Cubans entered that line in 2019 in Juarez alone. Some of those on the bridge last week appeared to still be in the metering program but under the additional burden of a third policy.

The third policy is pandemic-related, where new asylum claims have been slowed to a crawl, and Border Patrol agents who apprehend migrants immediately return most to Mexico so that detention centers cannot become Covid-19 incubators.

(These are known as Title 42 expulsions.)

As many as an additional 100,000 more — beyond the 70,000 migrants in the MPP “Remain in Mexico” process — have chosen to apply for Mexican asylum as their means to wait for Democratic Party relief.

Under new Mexican requirements resulting from the U.S. blockages, migrants were compelled to apply for Mexican asylum to avoid deportation, while waiting for a kinder and gentler Democratic administration. The Mexican Commission for Aid to Refugees (Comar) reported that 36,454 migrants had applied for Mexican asylum during the first 11 months of 2020, mostly from Honduras, Haiti, Cuba, El Salvador, and Venezuela. That’s in addition to more than 62,000 who applied after Trump’s policies went into effect during only the latter half of 2019, COMAR officials told CIS in January 2020.

“None want to stay in Mexico,” Alma Delia Cruz, head of COMAR in Tapachula, Mexico, told me a year ago. “This is just their first chance to get into the United States, of course. The threats from Trump can’t deter them from eventually getting into the U.S.”

As I pointed out in a recent blog post, pandemic border closures south of Mexico have bottled up untold thousands more “extra-continental” migrants from a hundred countries around the world. These ones are pooling in Suriname, Guyana, Panama, and Costa Rica, likewise keeping a sharp eye and ear out for any wavering of American resolve further north.

The Havana Times newspaper quoted a Cuban migrant couple in the large “Por la Libertad” U.S.-bound caravan temporarily stopped in Suriname as saying they joined it when Joe Biden won the U.S. presidential election as their big chance to chase the American dream.

No matter how the arithmetic works out, a vast human reservoir is dammed up behind floodgates that will soon be under the control of a Biden administration. What the incident on the bridge between Juarez and El Paso showed most is that the Biden administration may well have to choose much sooner than expected between either the stick and status quo for a while or the carrot and a mass migration crisis at the border.

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Source: <https://cis.org/Bensman/Migrants-Chanting-Biden-Attempt-Rush-Border>

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