



## **Country Brief: Venezuela**

### **An In-Depth Look at Migration Trends, the Policies that Attract Illegal Alien Surges, and their National Security Implications**

A FAIR Research Report | January 2024

---

## **Introduction**

FAIR's Research Division conducted an in-depth review of the migration trends of nationals from Venezuela, the policy decisions that drive the increased flows, and the national security implications of them. The paper summarizes the geopolitical conditions of Venezuela, and focuses on the numerous pull factors that lead Venezuelans to transit through numerous countries to live, work and remain in the United States. Given the dramatic increases in recent years, and considering the risks posed to national security and public safety, FAIR provides solutions to combat the crisis and curb the illegal immigration surges.

## **Highlights**

- ❑ Venezuelans are now the second most encountered nationality of illegal aliens at the border.
- ❑ Executive Branch policies - especially parole, Temporary Protected Status and the refusal to use detention as a deterrent - have helped drive up numbers.
- ❑ Over half a million Venezuelan illegal aliens have been encountered since January 2021.
- ❑ The number of Venezuelan nationals encountered increased 77 percent between Fiscal Years 2022-2023.
- ❑ The Biden Administration's parole program allows Venezuelans and dual nationals of Venezuela to enter the U.S., even with an expired passport.
- ❑ Venezuela's government has supplied genuine Venezuelan travel documents to non-Venezuelans, including potential national security threats from countries like Iran. This is especially concerning given Venezuela's ties to state sponsors of terrorism.

## **Nature of the Problem**

Illegal immigration from Venezuela was relatively low, but this has been changing rapidly as enormous numbers of Venezuelans have entered the U.S. since 2021. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2020,

just 4,520 Venezuelans were encountered by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at America's borders.<sup>1</sup> In FY 2021, this number grew to 50,499, an eleven-fold increase.<sup>2</sup> In FY 2022, this figure surged again to 189,520, and in FY 2023, CBP encountered 334,914 Venezuelan nationals.<sup>3</sup> This makes Venezuelans the second most commonly encountered nationality at the border, second only to Mexican nationals.<sup>4</sup>

These numbers speak volumes about the scale and speed of mass illegal immigration under the Biden Administration in general, and migration from Venezuela in particular. In total, since President Biden was inaugurated, over half a million Venezuelans have illegally entered the U.S., nearly 58 percent of them having entered in the last fiscal year alone.<sup>5</sup> This marks a 77 percent increase in encounters between fiscal years 2022 and 2023. In the final month of FY 2023 (September 2023), the number of encounters with Venezuelan nationals was nearly double the figure for the previous month.

CBP statistics show that there was a 102 percent increase in Venezuelans encountered in families between FY 2022-23, and encounters of family units have risen from 35 percent of all Venezuelans encountered in FY 2022 to over 40 percent of Venezuelans encountered in FY 2023.<sup>6</sup> This poses a challenge because border processing centers were designed to accommodate single male adults.<sup>7</sup>

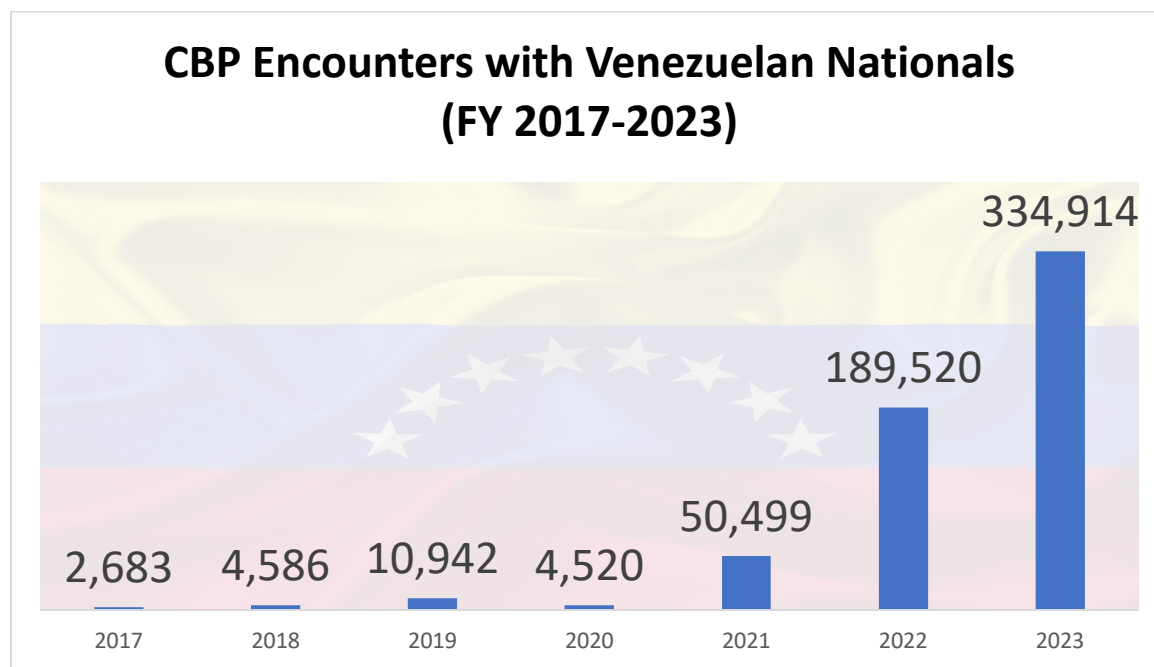
The Biden Administration announced an immigration parole program aimed at Venezuelan nationals in October 2022.<sup>8</sup> This parole allows them to enter the U.S. without a visa and even with expired passports.<sup>9</sup> Once here, they are eligible to apply for work authorization.<sup>10</sup>

The challenges posed by mass illegal immigration are compounded by Venezuela's government reportedly issuing travel documents to individuals linked to terrorism.<sup>11</sup> Venezuela has been accused of allowing terrorists to operate with relative impunity, and has increased its ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran, another notorious state sponsor of terrorism.<sup>12</sup> While the number of Venezuelan aliens with links to terror, as with all nationalities, is likely to be very low, serious national security considerations are raised by these issues.

## **Policy and Policy Announcements Drive Flows**

For nearly two decades, Venezuela has been under authoritarian rule and suffered economic hardship, reasons that are sometimes given for large-scale Venezuelan illegal immigration to America.<sup>13</sup> Yet despite this, illegal immigration from Venezuela was relatively low until FY 2021.

Figure 1: Number of Venezuelan Nationals Encountered FY 2017-2023



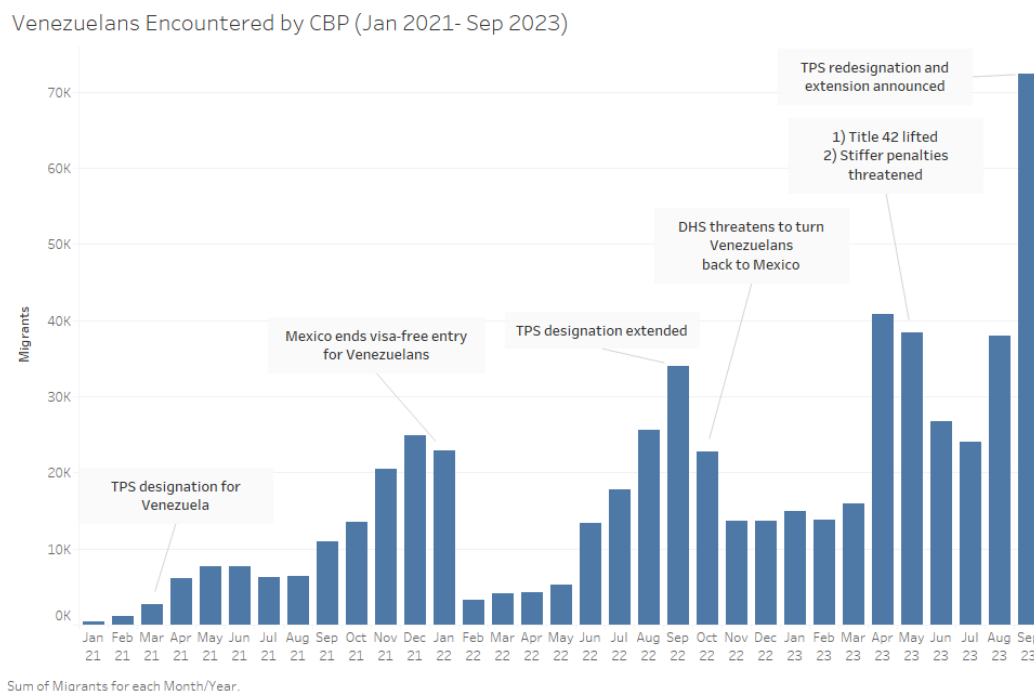
The combined number of Venezuelan apprehension and inadmissible aliens before the pandemic was relatively modest: 2,683 (FY 2017), 4,586 (FY 2018), and 10,942 (FY 2019).<sup>14</sup> The number of Venezuelans encountered in FY 2023 was over 30 times higher than the number encountered in the last full fiscal year before COVID-19.

Venezuelan illegal immigration to the U.S. is driven as much by policy as economic conditions. When the Biden Administration announces tougher enforcement policies, the number of encounters drops. For example, there was a dramatic drop in encounters of Venezuelans in February 2022 when Mexico announced it would no longer allow Venezuelans to enter Mexico visa-free,<sup>15</sup> a policy said to have been made after the Biden Administration requested it.<sup>16</sup> There was also a noticeable drop in encounters in October 2022, following the Biden Administration's announcement that Venezuelans attempting to enter the U.S. illegally would be returned back into Mexico.<sup>17</sup>

Other policy announcements in recent years have also encouraged illegal immigration from Venezuela. These include a parole program to allow Venezuelans without legal status to fly directly into the U.S.<sup>18</sup> and a Temporary Protected Status (TPS) designation for Venezuela that prevents them from being removed, no matter how they arrived.<sup>19</sup>

Figure 2 demonstrates the change in encounters of Venezuelan nationals between fiscal years 2020 and 2023, with key policy announcements mapped on the chart to demonstrate the influence they appear to have had.

**Figure 2: Number of Venezuelan Nationals Encountered by CBP between FY 2020-2023**



## Detention is Deterrence – Mass Release is a Motivator

One of the main factors driving illegal immigration to the U.S. is President Biden’s policy to release nearly all illegal aliens who cross our borders instead of detaining and deporting them. In October 2023, a U.S. House Judiciary Committee report showed that 99 percent of illegal aliens released into the U.S. were not removed from the country.<sup>20</sup> The same report found that over 90 percent of illegal aliens released into the country did not apply for asylum. The Biden Administration has relied on “Alternatives to Detention” to allow illegal aliens freedom of movement as they await their court hearings.<sup>21</sup> The Biden Administration also attempted mass releases in a policy known as “parole with conditions,” which Border Patrol feared would lead to the mass release of migrants in border communities.<sup>22</sup> This policy of allowing migrants to be released is a major driver of mass migration. This is in sharp contrast to detention policies utilized by previous administrations.

The credible threat of detention can serve as a deterrent to potential illegal aliens, and is used to ensure the deportation of individual aliens and ensure public safety. It has been used by both Democrat and Republican administrations. In 2014, then Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson announced the Obama administration’s “No Release” policy in response to surges in migration from Latin America, stating “It will now be more likely that you [illegal aliens] will be detained and sent back.”<sup>23</sup> In 2017, the Trump Administration expanded the powers of immigration officers to detain and deport illegal aliens.<sup>24</sup> The much lower rates of illegal

immigration under both the Obama and Trump administrations<sup>25</sup> seem to suggest that detention can be at least part of the reason potential illegal aliens reconsidered an attempt to cross into the U.S. Thus, detention is not a partisan policy, but rather one that presidents from both political parties have turned to as part of the array of potential policy responses to migration challenges and surges.

## **Country Conditions in Venezuela**

Venezuela is a country that has experienced challenges in recent years due to political and economic policies. These challenges began in earnest during the presidency of Hugo Chavez – who ran the country from 1999 until his death in 2013 – and have continued throughout the presidency of his successor, President Nicolas Maduro.<sup>26</sup> During the 1970s, Venezuela was the most prosperous and stable democracy in Latin America, although the 1980s and 90s saw greater economic inequality and corruption before the election of the socialist Chavez.<sup>27</sup>

After coming to power, the Chavez government began to enact radical economic policies. The government engaged in massive welfare spending. This was financed largely by profits from the country's nationalized oil industry, with Venezuela's oil reserves being larger even than those of Saudi Arabia.<sup>28</sup> These policies backfired with the global fall in oil prices in early 2014.<sup>29</sup> Thus, under the socialist regimes of Chavez and Maduro, pathologies such as corruption, mismanagement, and poverty – which many Venezuelans had initially hoped to remedy by voting for Chavez – grew increasingly worse.<sup>30</sup>

The economic policies of the Chavez and Maduro regimes made daily life difficult for most Venezuelans. Food shortages led to increased deaths, especially of children, and three out of four Venezuelans lost an average of 19 pounds in body weight.<sup>31</sup> Some Venezuelans resorted to eating trash to stay alive.<sup>32</sup> Such was the situation already in early 2017.<sup>33</sup> Arguably the most serious policy failing of the Venezuelan government was its failure to tackle inflation, with government management of the economy resulting in hyperinflation rates of over 2 million percent by 2018.<sup>34</sup> By mid-2023, the inflation rate had dropped to “just” 483 (four hundred and eighty-three) percent.<sup>35</sup>

These conditions certainly contributed to the decision of Venezuelans to leave the country. However, most did not initially seek out the United States as a home. About 84 percent of the 7.7 million Venezuelans who left Venezuela since 2014 first settled in neighboring Latin American countries.<sup>36</sup> The United Nations even launched a program called “Solidarity Cities” across Latin America to help migrants (including Venezuelans) integrate and settle in their new countries.<sup>37</sup> However, Venezuelans in these countries reportedly complained of low wages, and these low wages motivated them to seek another destination.<sup>38</sup> This was despite the fact that some Latin American countries like Colombia announced new visas to try and encourage Venezuelan refugees to stay.<sup>39</sup> Leaving a safe country such as Colombia or Chile purely because of a desire to find higher wages strongly suggests that many of the Venezuelans arriving in America are economic migrants, not refugees fleeing persecution.<sup>40</sup>

The situation the average Venezuelan finds themselves in is highly regrettable and something that cannot help but arouse sympathy. It is unsurprising that people want to flee Venezuela, as 7.7 million already have.<sup>41</sup> That said, the solution cannot be simply allowing countless numbers of Venezuelans to come to live in the United States permanently. The U.S. has an immigration system based on laws passed by Congress, which offers three main categories for immigration: employment-based, family-based, and humanitarian-based (asylum, refugee status, etc.).<sup>42</sup> Everyone wishing to permanently settle in the U.S. must abide by that system.

If the U.S. wishes to promote political change, the best way to do that is not draining Venezuela of potential change makers by encouraging and enabling them to leave their home country behind.

## Two Main Policies That Encourage Illegal Immigration from Venezuela

The Biden Administration has encouraged Venezuelans to come illegally to the U.S. through several policies, including but not limited to: catch-and-release, expanded Alternatives to Detention (ATD), parole,<sup>43</sup> and Temporary Protected Status (TPS).<sup>44</sup>

Even though all Venezuelan nationals require a visa to enter the U.S., the Biden Administration ignores this requirement for Venezuelans (among many other nationalities) crossing our southern border as a matter of policy. The Biden Administration has decided to release nearly all illegal aliens caught at the border into the U.S., with CBP reportedly given “bookout targets” to take the pressure off detention facilities.<sup>45</sup> Thousands of detention beds mandated by Congress are empty while the numbers of Notices to Appear (NTAs) issued to illegal aliens are hitting record monthly highs.<sup>46</sup> The Biden Administration and its “abolish ICE” allies have even attempted to eliminate detention altogether and instead rely on ATD (essentially composed of virtual check-ins and ankle bracelets) to allow illegal aliens to freely move about the United States. On top of the lax oversight, the Administration is attempting to turn ATD into a social services program, rather than a means to electronically monitor illegal aliens and detain those not complying.

Not only is the Biden Administration releasing Venezuelans into the U.S. from the border, the Administration has created a categorical parole program specifically favoring Venezuelans.<sup>47</sup> Under federal law, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary is authorized to parole otherwise inadmissible aliens into the U.S. **temporarily, on a case-by-case basis**, for an urgent humanitarian reason or significant public benefit.<sup>48</sup> This parole authority was intended to be used only sparingly. Examples of how the parole authority has been used include permitting entry for illegal aliens to testify in court cases against their former colleagues or persecutors, members of hostile foreign intelligence agencies who wish to defect and bring vital national security information with them, or an individual seeking emergency medical treatment not available in their homeland.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the limited intent of parole, in January 2023, the Biden Administration launched a new program to parole up to 360,000 otherwise inadmissible migrants annually from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.<sup>50</sup> This program allows illegal aliens to apply for travel authorization using the CBP One smartphone app<sup>51</sup> and fly directly into the interior of the country, where they are paroled into the U.S. Under this program, parole is granted in two-year increments, and there is no limit on how often it can be renewed.<sup>52</sup> Parolees who enter the U.S. under this program are also authorized to work.<sup>53</sup> Recent data releases show that nearly 90,000 Venezuelans were allowed to enter under parole by September 2023.<sup>54</sup> In essence, President Biden's parole programs for Venezuela and other countries have transformed the limited parole authority into a backdoor for illegal aliens to enter, remain, and work in the United States.

In addition to parole, Venezuelans have been migrating to the U.S. because of the President's decision to grant them Temporary Protected Status (TPS). TPS was enacted in 1990 as a way to allow aliens physically present in the U.S. to stay temporarily in the United States if the DHS Secretary determines they cannot safely return to their home country due to emergencies such as civil strife or natural disasters of "extraordinary and temporary" nature in that country.<sup>55</sup> While they stay in the U.S., they are shielded from deportation and authorized to work.<sup>56</sup> However, the problem with TPS is that it is not as temporary as the name may suggest.<sup>57</sup> For example, certain nationals of Honduras and Nicaragua have enjoyed TPS since 1999.<sup>58</sup> Further, there is little ability to challenge the Secretary on such decisions as the law limits judicial review of such determinations.

In March 2021, the Biden Administration announced that Venezuelans would be eligible for TPS.<sup>59</sup> Secretary Mayorkas designated Venezuelans for the special status on the basis that "there exist extraordinary and temporary conditions in the foreign state that prevent aliens who are nationals of the state from returning to the state in safety." DHS claimed that the conditions prevented Venezuelan nationals from returning in safety and that the economic and political conditions were having an impact across sectors, "including limited access to food, basic services, and adequate healthcare, and the deterioration of the rule of law and protection of human rights."<sup>60</sup> These conditions do not, however, appear to prevent DHS from returning a number of Venezuelan nationals themselves.<sup>61</sup> ICE deportation flights to Venezuela resumed just two weeks after the October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023 re-designation of Venezuela for TPS,<sup>62</sup> suggesting that it was in fact safe for nationals to return to the country. In its announcement, DHS said that, "Since May 2023 to October 11, 2023, DHS has removed or returned more than 300,000 noncitizens including more than 45,000 individual family unit members." So, despite the conditions being deemed to be too extraordinary for Venezuelans to return to their home country, it was also okay for the U.S. government to deport them. At the end of fiscal year 2023, ICE noted that it had removed 834 individuals, and that nearly 6,000 more had final orders of removal.

In general, TPS is only available to aliens who are in the United States when their country of origin is designated for Temporary Protected Status. However, the grant of TPS itself incentivizes

people from designated countries to migrate to the U.S. so that when the TPS is “re-designated” (as it often is) they too will be shielded from deportation. By September 2023, about 472,000 Venezuelan nationals had been granted TPS, and several hundred thousand were newly eligible.<sup>63</sup>

The notion of “re-designating” a country for TPS has no basis in law (INA Section 244).<sup>64</sup> Indeed, the statute governing TPS only discusses designations, extensions, and terminations. This is logical because the basis for granting temporary protected status is supposed to be **temporary** in nature.<sup>65</sup> The notion that the government could, without statutory authority, “re-designate” a country by simply using the original emergency – for the purpose of giving work authorization and protection from deportation to people who were not in the U.S. at the time of the first designation – directly contradicts the plain meaning of the statute.

Unfortunately, the Biden Administration’s granting of TPS, coupled with its refusal to enforce any immigration laws, has only encouraged more Venezuelans to illegally cross into the U.S. The month before the original designation, February 2021, only 1,085 Venezuelans were encountered illegally trying to cross into the U.S.<sup>66</sup> Since then, the number has skyrocketed to unfathomable numbers: 37,912 Venezuelans were encountered illegally crossing our borders in August 2023.<sup>67</sup>

With no statutory limits on how often DHS may renew the grant of TPS to any country, the program has become a perpetually-renewed, quasi-amnesty with significant benefits.

## Special Concerns Related to Migration from Venezuela

**The Sheer Numbers.** In 2023, Venezuelans made up over 10 percent of the aliens illegally crossing into the U.S.<sup>68</sup> Approximately 334,914 arrived in 2023 and since January 2021, over half a million Venezuelans have illegally arrived in the U.S.<sup>69</sup> It is difficult to capture the scale of these numbers without conceptualizing them in some way besides the raw figures. The number of Venezuelan nationals encountered in FY 2023 is equivalent to five times the number of people who can fit into the New England Patriots’ Gillette stadium.<sup>70</sup> It is also nearly the same number of people who are active-duty personnel in the U.S. Air Force.<sup>71</sup>

Another challenge is the composition of Venezuelans, specifically the large numbers of family groups. CBP processing centers were mostly designed to deal with lone adult males, and this made it possible to process them more quickly.<sup>72</sup> However, large numbers of Venezuelans are arriving in family groups. There is nothing specific about Venezuelan families that makes them trickier to process than families of other nationalities, but the sheer number of those arriving is overwhelming border agents.<sup>73</sup>

With the exception of Mexican nationals, no nationality of illegal alien has a higher number of individuals arriving in families.<sup>74</sup> Thus, for example, in September 2023, the month which closed out FY 2023, a record-breaking 72,000 Venezuelans were encountered, of which 29,000 (or 40

percent) arrived as members of family units.<sup>75</sup> The number of Venezuelan nationals encountered in families is nearly 54 percent higher than the next highest ranked nationality. The total proportion of all nationals encountered in FY 2023 in families is 31 percent but for Venezuelan nationals, that number stands at over 40 percent.<sup>76</sup>

Table 1: Demographic Composition of Top Ten Most Commonly Nationals Encountered by CBP (FY 2023)

Country	Single Adult	Family	UC	AM	Total
Mexico	545,320	160,136	28,355	2,126	735,937
Venezuela	197,265	134,159	3,000	490	334,914
Guatemala	85,025	87,317	49,478	29	221,849
Honduras	84,527	97,641	33,779	81	216,028
Cuba	136,679	61,830	1,395	383	200,287
Colombia	89,099	76,812	1,395	82	167,388
Haiti	112,139	49,977	455	1,210	163,781
Nicaragua	106,253	30,349	1,886	241	138,729
Ecuador	49,334	64,232	3,895	26	117,487

The huge numbers mean that immigration from Venezuela is imposing enormous burdens on American cities. Once they are released into the U.S., per the policy of the Biden Administration, finding housing for families is difficult and introduces competition with American families for a limited number of affordable family accommodations. Healthcare resources are strained by a new population at high risk of serious disease who often overuse emergency rooms to obtain medical care.<sup>77</sup> Finally, their children with limited English skills will impose a burden on teachers and taxpayers in local school systems.<sup>78</sup>

Venezuelans are also imposing a huge cost on American taxpayers nationwide. As of early 2023, illegal immigration already cost each American taxpayer \$1,156 per year (or \$957 after factoring in taxes paid by illegal aliens), and the rising Biden-era influx of illegal aliens from Venezuela will certainly make that burden even higher.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, the Venezuelans who are able to adjust status through avenues such as family-based immigration or asylum will eventually strain our immigration system through chain migration. This means that the already high number of Venezuelan nationals benefiting from illegal immigration and Biden policies will grow even larger, which inevitably translates into more costs.

**Abuse of the U.S. Asylum System.** Economic hardship does not qualify an alien for asylum.<sup>80</sup> The internationally-recognized purpose of asylum is to offer protection to individuals who have either suffered or have a “credible fear” of persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion in their country of residence.<sup>81</sup> The

present concept of asylum is rooted in the post-World War II era when millions of people were attempting to flee Nazi Germany and subsequently in the post-war age of Soviet communist oppression.<sup>82</sup> U.S. law states that “any alien who is physically present in the United States or who arrives in the United States (whether or not at a designated port of arrival and including an alien who is brought to the United States after having been interdicted in international or United States waters), irrespective of such alien’s status, may apply for asylum.”<sup>83</sup> This is consistent with the international standard.

The circumstances surrounding the massive wave of Venezuelans arriving in the U.S. undermine the argument that they are solely seeking political asylum. The fact that millions of Venezuelans had already resettled in safe third countries such as Colombia means that many of that number who had fled from genuine political persecution under the Maduro regime were safe outside Venezuela.<sup>84</sup> There is no doubt that the Venezuelan regime is brutal to its political opponents and that many of the individuals fleeing the country qualify for political asylum elsewhere, especially in nearby safe countries that share their language and are willing to accept them. However, the fact that many Venezuelan migrants leave secure resettlement in a third country and pass through multiple other safe third countries on the way to illegally cross the U.S. border is in direct contrast to the idea that all Venezuelan migrants to the U.S. specifically are political refugees simply seeking freedom from the Maduro regime.<sup>85</sup> This process is also contrary to Section 208(a)(2) of the INA, which states that aliens cannot apply for asylum if the Attorney General determines that that alien was already settled in a safe third country.

The U.S. offers much higher average wages than countries like Colombia where millions of political and economic migrants from Venezuela have resettled. Because of this, many Venezuelans living and working legally in other nations safe from political persecution uprooted their lives yet again and became economic migrants when the Biden Administration’s policies effectively opened the floodgates through parole programs, the promise of TPS, and weak border security. These open-borders policies are inhumane for Americans and migrants alike. Americans are forced to shoulder the significant costs and social burdens of illegal immigration, while Venezuelan migrants risk death or severe trauma by abandoning settlement in safe third countries to make the dangerous trek to the U.S. border.

Once in the U.S., even under the Biden Administration that actively invited them, the rate of approval for Venezuelans seeking asylum is only 29 percent.<sup>86</sup> However, applicants get to take advantage of TPS and 5-year work permits<sup>87</sup> even if they are clearly economic migrants (a group not eligible for asylum). Genuine and reprehensible political persecution in Venezuela cannot be used as an excuse for the Biden Administration to allow and actively invite hundreds of thousands of economic migrants into the U.S. from that country every year at significant risk to Americans and the migrants themselves.

**Venezuelan Drug Cartels.** Members of dangerous cartels and gangs are entering the U.S. by joining the waves of uncontrolled illegal immigration from Venezuela. One cartel of particular concern is Tren de Aragua. Tren de Aragua has taken advantage of the mass outflow of

Venezuelans to expand their footprint throughout the Americas.<sup>88</sup> The organization smuggles migrants across borders and also engages in human trafficking, extortion, forced prostitution, and drug trafficking. According to CNN en Español, Customs and Border Protection has detained 38 suspected Tren de Aragua members in FY 2023.<sup>89</sup> At least two are being prosecuted for alleged illegal entry into the United States.<sup>90</sup> In Chicago, a man with a tattoo associated with the gang was arrested for violently attacking his girlfriend at a migrant camp.<sup>91</sup> The Chicago Police Department has warned that Tren de Aragua are establishing a presence in the Windy City and Kyle Williamson, former head of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration office in El Paso, Texas, calls the gang “a huge criminal threat.”<sup>92</sup> Williamson has warned that Trend de Aragua’s true impact would be felt once they were organized in the city.<sup>93</sup>

Venezuelan criminal gangs are entering the U.S. in the current wave of illegal immigration and these gangs operate either with heavy Venezuelan government acquiescence or even outright support.<sup>94</sup> The experience of other countries is that migrant flows from Venezuela have permitted Venezuelan gangs to establish a presence in the host country.<sup>95</sup> This poses a challenge for U.S. law enforcement and for community safety.

**Terrorism.** Venezuelan mass illegal immigration also raises the specter of terrorist infiltration. For much of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Venezuela has strengthened ties with Iran, a sworn enemy of the U.S. and sponsor of some of the world’s most dangerous terrorist groups.<sup>96</sup> This includes Hezbollah and Hamas. Venezuela’s government has facilitated travel for members of Middle Eastern terror groups such as Hezbollah to the Americas, as confirmed in a U.S. House hearing of the Subcommittee on National Security in 2011.<sup>97</sup> In 2013, the House heard testimony of how the Venezuelan passport agency, Onidex, was funneling Middle Eastern operatives into the Americas.<sup>98</sup> In 2015, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee heard testimony of how Venezuela was allowing militants linked to these groups to fundraise, traffic drugs and use Venezuelan companies as shells to disguise and launder money.<sup>99</sup>

Additionally, Venezuela has provided militants with travel documents. Different hearings at the U.S. House in 2011, 2013 and 2015 have all heard testimony about this practice. This was largely facilitated by Venezuelan government minister Tareck El Aissami, who served as Vice President under Nicolas Maduro. El Aissami was added to the Top Ten Most Wanted list of criminals by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).<sup>100</sup> El Aissami’s great-uncle was Vice President of Syria, and an associate of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.<sup>101</sup> Committees in the U.S. House and Senate have heard repeated testimony of how Venezuela provided Iran-linked operatives with passports and guidance on how to obtain visas.<sup>102</sup> As recently as March 2023, El Aissami was Minister of Petroleum, one of the most powerful positions in the Venezuelan government.

As terrorism, carried by groups like Hamas, is once again in the news following the attacks in October 2023 in Israel, it is more important than ever that Americans are aware of the glaring opportunity for terrorists to slip into the U.S. and potentially commit atrocities. Iran-backed groups have already done so in other parts of the Americas.<sup>103</sup> In this respect, lone adults raise

security concerns, especially given Venezuela's strong ties with enemies of the U.S., like China, Cuba, Russia and Iran.<sup>104</sup>

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The arrival of hundreds of thousands of Venezuelan migrants began under the Biden Administration. Indeed, Venezuela's economy and political situation has been unstable for decades and yet the number of migrants arriving from Venezuela was relatively low. The new open-borders agenda has created pull factors for Venezuelans to seek entry into the U.S.

While the United States has limited capacity to change conditions on the ground in Venezuela, it most certainly has the ability – and the duty – to enforce existing law and to change the policies and laws that incentivize Venezuelans to come to the U.S. illegally. Given the numbers involved, the U.S. has an obligation to do so immediately. The urgent policy changes should be:

- ☐ Forging safe third country agreements with countries neighboring Venezuela to provide for Venezuelans in need of protection.
- ☐ Ending nationality-based parole programs and limiting work authorizations for those on parole, restoring parole's original, narrow meaning.
- ☐ Ending the catch and release of illegal aliens – including Venezuelans – into the U.S. and ensuring that Alternatives to Detention, if used, is only as a means to electronically monitor aliens, with weekly, in-person check-ins.
- ☐ Removing Venezuela from the list of TPS beneficiary countries and restoring the program's original temporary intent.
- ☐ Strongly vetting Venezuelan nationals to establish any links to gangs, terrorism, or human rights abuses, and ensuring information sharing with other countries.
- ☐ Increasing the standard for credible fear (a step in claiming asylum) in the United States.
- ☐ Deporting Venezuelans caught crossing illegally, those whose asylum claims are denied, and those who overstay their visas.
- ☐ Implementing an expulsion authority similar to Title 42 to immediately remove illegal aliens.
- ☐ Requiring family units to be detained together, undercutting trafficking efforts and cartels from exploiting children to enter the country.

If these policies are enacted, it is highly likely that the mass migration from Venezuela will slow. Given the scale and speed of Venezuelan arrivals in America, these policies must be put in place without delay, and many can be done immediately by the Biden Administration.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters> filter by fiscal year 2020

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters> filter by fiscal year 2021-2023

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

- 
- <sup>6</sup> <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters> filter by demographic FMUA (families)
- <sup>7</sup> <https://www.cbp.gov/frontline/border-crisis-cbp-s-response>
- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.uscis.gov/CHNV>
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid
- <sup>10</sup> <https://www.fairus.org/legislation/biden-immigration-border-policy/illegal-legal-immigration-and-economy/dhs-extends>
- <sup>11</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2017/02/08/world/venezuela-passports-investigation/index.htm>
- <sup>12</sup> <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2021/venezuela/>
- <sup>13</sup> <https://www.pbs.org/video/whats-driving-millions-of-venezuelans-to-flee-their-country/>
- <sup>14</sup> <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2019/table37>; <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2019/table34>
- <sup>15</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexico-formally-unveils-new-visa-requirements-venezuelans-2022-01-06/>
- <sup>16</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/exclusive-mexico-considers-tighter-entry-rules-venezuelans-after-us-requests-2021-11-12/>
- <sup>17</sup> <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2022/10/12/dhs-announces-new-migration-enforcement-process-venezuelans>
- <sup>18</sup> <https://www.uscis.gov/CHNV>
- <sup>19</sup> <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/temporary-protected-status>
- <sup>20</sup> <https://judiciary.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/republicans-judiciary.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/2023-10-09-New-Data-and-Testimony.pdf>
- <sup>21</sup> <https://www.ice.gov/features/atd>
- <sup>22</sup> <https://www.fairus.org/legislation/biden-immigration-border-policy/illegal-immigration/biden-administration-issues-mass>
- <sup>23</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/16/us/homeland-security-chief-opens-largest-immigration-detention-center-in-us.html>
- <sup>24</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2017/01/28/politics/donald-trump-immigration-detention-deportations-enforcement/index.html>
- <sup>25</sup> [https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2020-Jan/U.S.%20Border%20Patrol%20Monthly%20Apprehensions%20%28FY%202000%20-%20FY%202019%29\\_1.pdf](https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2020-Jan/U.S.%20Border%20Patrol%20Monthly%20Apprehensions%20%28FY%202000%20-%20FY%202019%29_1.pdf)
- <sup>26</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2019-venezuela-key-events/>
- <sup>27</sup> <https://theworld.org/stories/2019-02-07/venezuela-was-once-richest-most-stable-democracy-latin-america-what-happened>
- <sup>28</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/rpapier/2023/02/21/inside-venezuelas-contradictory-oil-industry/?sh=4fe958697c13>
- <sup>29</sup> <https://money.cnn.com/2017/07/26/news/economy/venezuela-economic-crisis/index.html>;  
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/timeline-how-the-crisis-in-venezuela-unfolded/>
- <sup>30</sup> <https://theworld.org/stories/2019-02-07/venezuela-was-once-richest-most-stable-democracy-latin-america-what-happened>
- <sup>31</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/venezuela-weight-loss-average-19lb-pounds-food-shortages-economic-crisis-a7595081.html>
- <sup>32</sup> <https://www.voanews.com/a/hungry-venezuelans-pick-through-garbage-for-food/4692082.html>
- <sup>33</sup> <https://money.cnn.com/2017/07/26/news/economy/venezuela-economic-crisis/index.html>;  
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/venezuela-weight-loss-average-19lb-pounds-food-shortages-economic-crisis-a7595081.html>
- <sup>34</sup> [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/16/world/americas/nuevos-billetes-venezuela-new-banknotes.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/16/world/americas/nuevos-billetes-venezuela-new-banknotes.html?_r=0)
- <sup>35</sup> <https://tradingeconomics.com/venezuela/inflation-cpi>
- <sup>36</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/us/emergencies/venezuela-situation>
- <sup>37</sup> <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/104038> [Spanish]
- <sup>38</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/24/world/americas/why-are-so-many-venezuelans-going-to-the-united-states.html>
- <sup>39</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/08/world/americas/colombia-venezuela-migrants-duque.html>
- <sup>40</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/24/world/americas/why-are-so-many-venezuelans-going-to-the-united-states.html>



- 
- <sup>78</sup> <https://www.fairus.org/issue/illegal-immigration/elephant-classroom-mass-immigration-imposing-colossal-cost-and-challenges>
- <sup>79</sup> <https://www.fairus.org/issue/publications-resources/fiscal-burden-illegal-immigration-united-states-taxpayers-2023>
- <sup>80</sup> <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/asylum>
- <sup>81</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/us/about-unhcr/who-we-are/1951-refugee-convention>
- <sup>82</sup> <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/our-history/stories-from-the-archives/refugee-timeline>
- <sup>83</sup> <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/8/1158>
- <sup>84</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/24/world/americas/why-are-so-many-venezuelans-going-to-the-united-states.html>
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid
- <sup>86</sup> <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1107366/download>
- <sup>87</sup> <https://www.fairus.org/legislation/biden-immigration-border-policy/illegal-immigration/biden-administration-announces-5>
- <sup>88</sup> <https://insightcrime.org/venezuela-organized-crime-news/tren-de-aragua/>
- <sup>89</sup> <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2023/11/09/narcofiles-tren-aragua-estados-unidos-detenidos-frontera-sur-orix/>  
[Spanish]
- <sup>90</sup> <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/venezuela/article281620278.html>
- <sup>91</sup> <https://chicago.suntimes.com/2023/11/10/23953154/venezuelan-migrants-el-tren-de-aragua-gang>
- <sup>92</sup> Ibid
- <sup>93</sup> Ibid
- <sup>94</sup> <https://ocindex.net/country/venezuela>
- <sup>95</sup> <https://insightcrime.org/venezuela-organized-crime-news/tren-de-aragua/>
- <sup>96</sup> <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2021/iran/>
- <sup>97</sup> <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-112hhrg71297/html/CHRG-112hhrg71297.htm>
- <sup>98</sup> <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-113hhrg85689/html/CHRG-113hhrg85689.htm>
- <sup>99</sup> [https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/031715\\_Farah\\_Testimony.pdf](https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/031715_Farah_Testimony.pdf)
- <sup>100</sup> <https://apnews.com/ae626af252a1423984abb279da219aec>
- <sup>101</sup> <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-journal-of-middle-east-studies/article/abs/ruling-political-elite-in-bathi-iraq-19681986-the-changing-features-of-a-collective-profile/D9A7804A74A3D9B781BC31A827B3FED9>
- <sup>102</sup> <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-112hhrg71297/html/CHRG-112hhrg71297.htm> ;  
<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-113hhrg85689/html/CHRG-113hhrg85689.htm> ;  
[https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/031715\\_Farah\\_Testimony.pdf](https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/031715_Farah_Testimony.pdf)
- <sup>103</sup> <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2023/10/28/hezbollahs-terror-threat-in-latin-america/>
- <sup>104</sup> <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/venezuelas-authoritarian-allies-ties-bind>