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What's actually happening at the Southern Border?

As the Biden administration marks 100 days in office, its immigration agenda has zeroed in on a recent surge of migrant arrivals at the southern border. Over 170,000 border apprehensions occurred in March 2021, the highest number since 2006. The high numbers of apprehensions pose a challenge to infrastructure left in disarray, short staffed, and underfunded by the Trump administration, and have created a perception of crisis. We offer a quick fact check in order to put this into context:

- Humanitarian crises in the form of several devastating hurricanes in Central America displaced upwards of 9 million people and are driving migration north. The hurricanes destroyed crops, home, and infrastructure. Heavily impacted countries, Honduras and Guatemala, have accounted for the most migrants traveling to the United States.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded volatility cause by humanitarian crises, further destabilizing communities and has increased migration trends; border apprehensions began to increase in April 2020 after a short period of decline.
- Border apprehensions historically peak in the spring when the weather is most conducive to the journey across the southern border. In May 2019, border apprehensions peaked at approximately 144,000.
- Presidential election cycles tend to create a perception of changing immigration policy, whether true or not.
- While apprehensions are similar to 2019, migrants are being expelled at much higher rates; about half of all apprehended migrants are expelled under Title 42, which is a public health authority implemented by the Trump Administration in March 2020, and continued by the Biden Administration. Title 42 allows for the immediate expulsion of a migrant who has recently been in a country where a communicable disease was present. However, in November 2020, a judge blocked the Trump Administration from expelling unaccompanied children. Since then, the numbers of unaccompanied children apprehended have increased, which has challenged existing shelters to provide adequate care.

All of these underlying factors (and more) contribute to the increased rate of border apprehensions and challenge the new Biden Administration as it seeks to evaluate existing immigration policy and implement its own agenda. We hope that the Biden administration can implement a more humane approach than his predecessor.

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