Cours - How the border could cost Biden the election THE ECONOMIST. Jan 25th 2024

*To keep Trump out of power, the Democrats need to make an offer on immigration policy*

§1 Donald trump’s mother came from Tong, a remote Scottish settlement that was once in Viking territory. His grandfather came from Kallstadt, a village in Rhineland-Palatinate that produced the Heinz family. Joe Biden’s ancestors came from Ireland and England. In America everyone is from somewhere else—even Native Americans, though they have been there much longer than anyone. Such is the country’s appeal that 160m adults around the world say they would move there, too, if only they had the chance. That is many millions more than most Americans are willing to allow in.

§2 This mismatch is at the heart of the issue that could cost President Biden the election. In 2016 Mr Trump rode “border chaos” all the way to the Republican nomination and then on to the presidency. At the time, he campaigned as if record numbers of migrants were coming across the border illegally. That was not true then, but it is now.

§3 There were nearly 250,000 attempts to cross the southern border in November alone. Most of the newcomers will have sought asylum and been released into America to wait years for their claims to be adjudicated. Since Mr Biden became president, over 3.1m border-crossers have been admitted. That is more than the population of Chicago. At least a further 1.7m have come in undetected or overstayed their visas. Republican governors have paid for migrants to go to places run by Democrats, forcing the problems of the southern border northward. Their experience helps explain why voters trust Republicans to deal with border security by a margin of 30 points. It is the party’s biggest lead on any issue.

§4 This is not all Mr Biden’s fault. When America’s labour market is tight the incentive for people to head there illegally increases. That is why the numbers went up under Mr Trump too, until covid-19 came along and fixed the problem for him. When travel became possible again in 2021, pent-up demand resulted in a surge of people across the southern border. More than half of border-crossers are from countries beyond Mexico and the northern bit of Central America. Venezuelans make up the biggest part of this group. But tens of thousands now fly into the Americas from Russia (43,000 in the year to September 2023), India (42,000) and China (24,000) and then attempt a crossing. Often it is impossible to return them. China will not take back its nationals if their applications are rejected.

§5 However, some of the blame lies squarely at Mr Biden’s door. Mr Trump’s language about Mexico sending rapists across the border and his cruel separation of children from their parents as a deterrent, along with his plan to build the wall, radicalised some Democratic policymakers on immigration. They thought public opinion was on their side. Voters did indeed revolt against Trumpism and while he was in office support for immigration reached a new high. When the new Democratic administration took power its instinct was to do the opposite of whatever Mr Trump had. Work on the border wall stopped. Democrats ditched the remain-in-Mexico policy, which obliged asylum-seekers to stay south of the border until the authorities decided on their applications. Predictably, illegal immigration surged.

§6 Since the midterms in 2022, Mr Biden has quietly adopted some of Mr Trump’s policies. He has agreed to fill gaps in the wall. Asylum-seekers who try to cross undetected will, with a few exceptions, automatically have their applications rejected. They must apply online before showing up. Yet Americans are unaware of these efforts, partly because Mr Biden is loth to draw attention to his triangulation, lest his own side turns on him.

§7 The president’s room to do one thing while saying another is running out. The House of Representatives has paired a stringent immigration bill with funding for Ukraine’s war. The administration resents this, because support for Ukraine makes economic and strategic sense for America regardless of the country’s policy on immigration. That is an error. Instead, in a system in which both parties use the leverage available to them, Mr Biden should see this as an opportunity.

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§1 The USA has always been a country of immigration, as examplified by the personal histories of Trump’s and Biden’s families. While the USA still attracts would-be immigrants, most Americans are reluctant to admit that America should let more in.

§2 The situation at the Mexican border, with a growing flow of immigrants, is the current “border chaos” that Trump wrongly described when he was elected in 2016

Cf. Scare-mongering

§3 Figures and trends (I)

Describes the “busing” practice without using the word

§4 Biden is not the only one to blame: Historical overview to put the current situation back into perspective

* Today, he tight labour market means that demand for workers outstrips supply
* It was already the case under Trump, except that with Covid, it all stopped
* In 2021, with travelling possible again, the flow of migrants (“surge of people” or influx) was resumed with a vengeance (et de plus belle)
* Where people come from: Via Mexico:
  + many from even further south (Venezuela)
  + Other countries overseas, like Russia, India, China.

It is often impossible to deport them

§5 But Biden is partly to blame

* Biden’s scaremongering granddstanding with vicious hate speech (rapists) and shocking policy (separating children from parents) that caused a public outcry
* Has led the Democrats to a knee-jerk response when they came to power:
  + Stopped the building of the wall at the border
  + Scrapped (“ditched”) the “remain-in-Mexico” policy: Only the asylum applications filed
    - “Illegal immigration surged”

§6 Since the midterms (Biden lost the majority at the House of Representatives), Biden has moved.

To crack down more on asylum seekers who try to cross illegally “will have their applications rejected. Must apply online before.

But Biden doesn’t publicize his efforts “lest his own side turns on him” (le lui reprocherait)

§7 Baden can’t waver any more, according to The Economist. Indeed, the House of Representatives has launched un ultimatum, in the form of a bargain: the House will greenlight further funding to Ukraine provided Biden agrees on a “stringent immigrarion deal”

The Economist thinks Biden should accept it

The balance of power obliges Biden to be pragmatic

Room: marge de manoeuvre