

# [***On Immigration, Democrats Don't Even Know How to Compromise Right | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B8B-YC41-DY68-10KW-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** By the end of this week, hopes for compromise legislation unveiled by Senate leaders on Monday around immigration and the southern border are highly likely to be dashed.

**Body**

By the end of this week, hopes for [*compromise legislation*](https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-senate-unveils-118-billion-bipartisan-bill-tighten-border-security-aid-2024-02-04/) unveiled by [*Senate*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/senate?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) leaders on Monday around immigration and the southern border are highly likely to be dashed, leaving President Biden looking at various unilateral executive actions to bring the crisis under control and [*Republicans*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republicans?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) with their signature—and increasingly their only—election-year issue intact. The episode is a perfect encapsulation of two decades of failure on immigration reform, and how Democrats still haven't learned a thing from it.

Whether the bill negotiated by a bipartisan group of leaders can even get out of the Senate is an open question now that former President [*Donald Trump*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/donald-trump?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) has decided to apply his vindictive pressure to any Republican who signs onto it. It certainly won't make it through the House, where Speaker [*Mike Johnson*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/mike-johnson?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) (R-LA) [*said*](https://x.com/JakeSherman/status/1754553711622304139?s=20) on Monday that, "Any consideration of this Senate bill in its current form is a waste of time. It is DEAD on arrival in the House. We encourage the U.S. Senate to reject it."

The dead bill allows the president to "close" the border if unauthorized arrivals pass a certain average level, sets a slightly higher automatic border-closing trigger and toughens a variety of policies for asylum seekers designed to discourage them from showing up in the first place. This painstakingly negotiated compromise that will never become law also contains a very modest expansion of green-card eligible visas. The doomed legislation does not include funding for a giant wall along the southern border of the United States, but the bill throws billions at expanding the infrastructure and personnel needed to detain and process migrants and asylum seekers.

Republicans as usual are kicking away their best opportunity in a generation to impose an immigration system that is as close to their preferences as they will likely ever get. The asylum crisis has led even big-city liberals to question the practicality, if not the morality, of our current processes and laws, and overwhelmed immigration institutions are clearly failing in practice to create an orderly process. Voters keep telling pollsters that they don't trust Biden and Democrats on this issue, and in some surveys it is [*the top issue*](https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/4422273-immigration-overtakes-inflation-top-voter-concern-poll/).

In political science we call this a "[*critical juncture*](https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/advances-in-comparativehistorical-analysis/critical-junctures-and-institutional-change/D544FCBA82856F284FAD815109EFF827)," meaning a period of genuine flux during which more meaningful and far-reaching change than usual is possible. The combination of a vulnerable Democratic president whose struggles are causing blackout-level panic among party stalwarts, the looming threat of a vengeful Trump restoration in November, and a crisis whose magnitude has become visible to all, and which ranks highly on voters' lists of concerns have led Democrats in the Senate to sign onto a compromise that they would not have remotely contemplated even a year ago.

So, of course, House Republicans are going to torch it. Immigration is the most Lucy and the Football issue in American ***politics***, and Democrats seem to revel in playing their Charlie Brown role over and over again. In both [*2007*](https://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/28/washington/28cnd-immig.html) and [*2013*](https://www.politico.com/story/2013/06/immigration-bill-2013-senate-passes-093530), Democrats were willing to stomach further militarization of the southern border in exchange for a long-term settlement to the problem of undocumented immigration, only to see the Republican far right destroy the whole effort. No one has made a serious effort to bridge the gap since—until this year.

Incredibly, despite bargaining with Senate Republicans under a cloud of hostility from the House and grim prospects for ultimate success, Democrats received close to bupkis from the GOP on any of these issues. There's [*nothing for DREAMers*](https://www.reuters.com/world/us/dreamers-left-out-cold-by-us-senate-border-bill-2024-02-05/), no meaningful new pathways to citizenship for the millions of undocumented immigrants working in the United States, and no new process for economic migrants who want to work and prosper in the United States but who don't necessarily want to stay here forever.

And yet it is still likely to command a majority of Democrats who are desperate to do something, anything about an issue that is really dragging the president down in polls. They know that they are taking the 'L' here, and yet are willing to be outmaneuvered for the sake of political expediency and to placate big-city Democrats who are justifiably frustrated by the lack of help from the federal government.

Not so much for Republicans. GOP elites are looking at polls and smell [*blood in the water*](https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2023/12/biden-trump-2024-campaign-polls-nyt-siena.html). They think they have a pretty good chance of flipping the Senate and beating Biden this fall. So, they're going to use human suffering and ugly-looking chaos as a cudgel with which to beat the incumbent for the next 10 months.

But then what? Unless Republicans are willing to torch the filibuster rule in the Senate, they aren't getting anything more hard line through [*Congress*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/congress?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) next year, or any year. The ***politics*** will shift, as they always do, and popular revulsion at whatever Donald Trump has in store for us will once again invert the leverage and give Democrats the upper hand. If that seems like a failure to think and act strategically, that's exactly what it is.

Give them credit here: Republicans genuinely don't care. They don't care about the hypocrisy of screaming loudly about a crisis and then refusing to do anything about it. They don't care about suffering migrants or the overworked people trying diligently to clear backlogs in the existing system or the political and humanitarian disasters in Latin America that are creating this problem in the first place. They don't care whether the Russian army starts overrunning the positions of our Ukrainian allies as the aid that this bill is tied to dries up.

As always, their lack of shame or human decency is its own kind of superpower, and they are really showing it off this week.

*David Faris is an associate professor of political science at Roosevelt University and the author of* It's Time to Fight Dirty: How [*Democrats*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democrats?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) Can Build a Lasting Majority in American ***Politics***. *His writing has appeared in* The Week*,* The Washington Post*,* The New Republic*,* Washington Monthly *and more. You can find him on Twitter @davidmfaris.*

*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2345034/border.jpg)

**Graphic**

On the Border

GUILLERMO ARIAS/AFP via Getty Images

Asylum seekers wait to be processed by border patrol agents at an improvised camp near the U.S.-Mexico border in eastern Jacumba, California, on Feb. 2.

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