



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on May 11, 2026

WaPo: Illegals Voluntarily Leaving in Record Numbers

Illegal aliens are fed up with waiting for release from detention centers and are leaving the country in record numbers.

The number of illegals who are dropping their appeals to stay in the country is significantly higher than during Joe Biden's administration, [which illegally aided and abetted](#) an invasion of some eight million illegals in just four years.

Now some of them, but not enough, are leaving.



AP Images

The Washington Post

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Immigrants are giving up their claims for humanitarian protection and opting to depart the U.S. in exponentially higher numbers under the Trump administration, according to court data obtained by the Vera Institute of Justice and shared with The Post.

washingtonpost.com
Immigrants are giving up their cases and leaving the U.S. in soaring ...

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Millions Left?

Immigration judges, *The Washington Post* revealed in its report on the exiting illegals, “issued more than 80,000 ‘voluntary departure’ orders from January 2025 through March of this year, according to court data obtained by the Vera Institute of Justice.”



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Unhappily, those orders are not formal deportations. That means the border jumpers might just return to the country *legally* in the future.

“The number of people abandoning their immigration cases is at least seven times as high as the number seen in the last 15 months of the Biden administration, when 11,400 took that option,” the [Post reported](#):

More than 70 percent of those granted a voluntary departure order during President Donald Trump’s second administration were being held in immigration detention when they made the request, a far higher share than those who departed willingly while Joe Biden was in the White House.

The shift is one of the most striking data points to emerge from Trump’s mass deportation campaign and appears to be part of his broader effort to purge millions of immigrants from the U.S. Officials have promoted the option on social media and in posters plastered in detention centers and courts. Immigration attorneys say the spike reflects the mounting strain on people who are facing long stints in detention as they await a hearing in immigration court, where it has become increasingly difficult to win asylum. ...

Voluntary departure has long existed under federal law for those who are facing removal from the country and it’s an option for those who are unlikely to win in immigration court. To qualify, immigrants cannot have a serious criminal record and must demonstrate good moral character. They must depart within a specific time frame established by a judge and are typically required to leave at their own expense.

In fact, if the illegals use the [CBP Home app](#) of U.S Customs and Border Protection, they don’t go home — where they belong — “at their own expense.”

“Illegal aliens who register for voluntary self-departure through the CBP Home Mobile App will receive cost-free travel, a \$2,600 exit bonus, and forgiveness of any failure to depart fines,” [the Department of Homeland Security \(DHS\) website explains](#):

Illegal aliens requesting assistance will have a timely departure arranged for them.

The CBP Home Mobile App allows illegal aliens to plan their return, including having an opportunity to depart in a timely manner — allowing illegal aliens to wrap up work, school, and personal matters and organize their return in an orderly and lawful way.

As well, once the illegals use the app, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) no longer prioritizes them for arrest and deportation.



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Departures Increase

A Vera Institute chart shows the number of voluntary departures rocketing from less than 2,000 in January 2025 to more than 8,000 in January 2026, and the *Post* drilled into the data.

July 2025's immigration raids in Los Angeles put the illegals on notice, and those granted voluntary departure zoomed to 6,370. And the same month, acting ICE chief Todd Lyons ruled that illegals would not get bond hearings while they fought deportation. "That has meant many immigrants are being kept in custody for the duration of their removal proceedings, though some have successfully challenged their detentions in U.S. district courts," the *Post* reported.

In March 2026, more than 9,000 people received voluntary departure permission, which means "many are choosing to leave because they are frightened by the possibility of being stuck in detention indefinitely," the [Post continued](#):

"People are taking it because they're trying to get out of detention more quickly, because they don't see any possible avenues for relief for themselves," said Shayna Kessler, director of the Advancing Universal Representation initiative at the Vera Institute of Justice. "It really appears as though it's a component of this mass deportation agenda where people are being encouraged to depart even when they have potentially a lawful right to stay."

Ariel Ruiz Soto, a senior policy analyst at the Migration Policy Institute, said it is likely that one of the factors driving the rise is detainees' inability to seek release on bond in immigration courts.

"It's pretty clear that the trend has increased, that more people in detention are seeking voluntary departure as an alternative to staying in detention," he said.

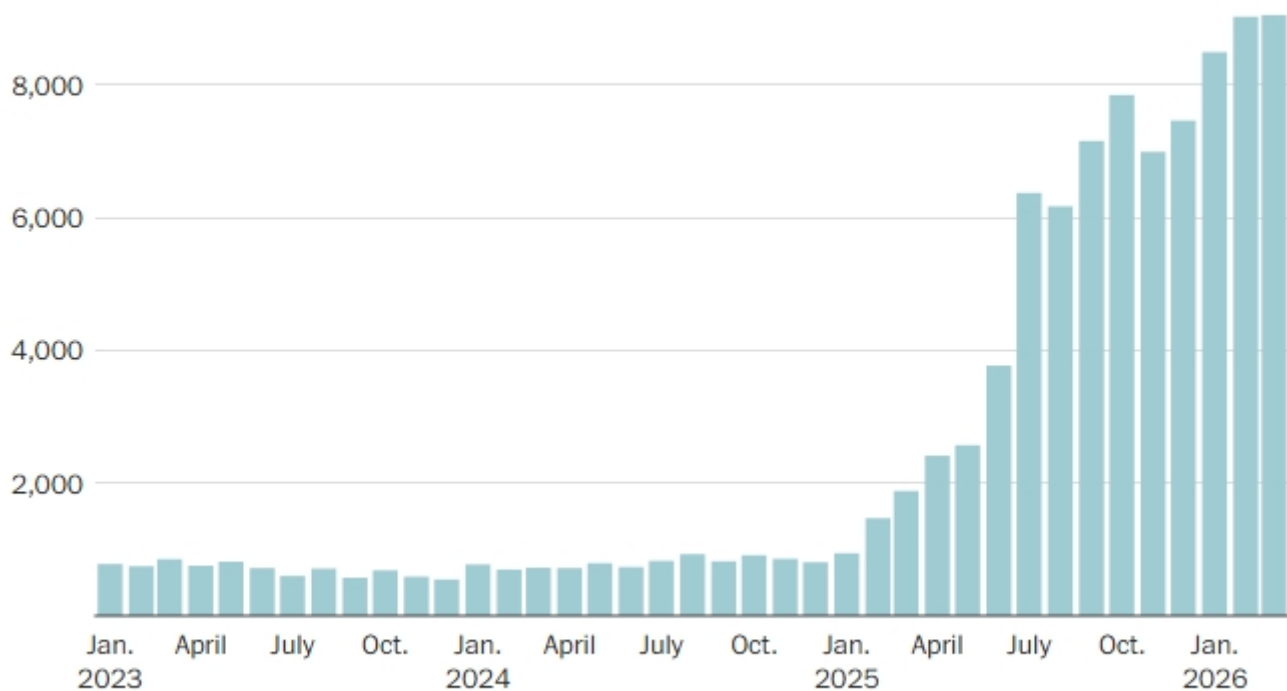


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Of course, the *Post* ran off to the nearest illegal and told his sob story. He had chest pain and panic attacks, and “banged his head on the door repeatedly during a stint in solitary confinement. He has no criminal record.”

Once he learned he might be deported to Uganda, the illegal came to his senses and decided to leave. He told his brother, the [Post reported](#), that he is “dying here anyway. I’d rather die in my country instead of going to a place where I’m going to die. I cannot live without freedom.”

Immigrants granted permission to 'self-deport'



Source: Vera

[Chart image courtesy of The Washington Post](#)

Voluntary Departures by State

The *Post* also detailed the states with the highest number of illegals who agreed to voluntary departure from September 2025 to February 2026:

- Texas: 12,400
- Louisiana: 5,400
- Florida, Georgia, and California: more than 3,000 each
- New York: 1,500

Naturally, the *Post* gave an immigration lawyer the last word: “This type of voluntary departure is not voluntary. It’s coerced.”

Maybe, but the illegals wouldn’t be detained if they hadn’t jumped the border at the invitation of the Biden administration, which, again, imported some eight million of them.

“Biden and [then-Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas] recklessly unleashed millions of unvetted illegal aliens into American communities — and they abused many loopholes to do so,” [DHS](#)



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[told](#) the *Post*:

President Trump and Secretary [Markwayne] Mullin are now enforcing this law as it was actually written to keep America safe.



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