

Following the Money, Guarding the Covenant

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · 22 October 2026

Transparency, Membership, and Non-Domination in the Migrant Shelter Pipeline

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · Jerusalem · 11 Cheshvan 5787 / Thursday 22 October 2026

Abstract

This essay expands the public data and tool released by DataRepublican in collaboration with the Oversight Project—the Mass Migration Explorer—into a sustained analysis of fiscal transparency, the architecture of civic membership, and the conditions of non-domination. Drawing on FEMA Shelter and Services Program (SSP) awards totaling hundreds of millions of dollars to NGOs and local governments for post-release migrant shelter, documented cuts of approximately \$537 million since January 2025, and CBP data showing southwest border encounters down roughly 96 percent from peak levels, the piece synthesizes Orthodox Jewish theology (the *ger toshav*, Ki Teitzei boundaries, particularist peoplehood), Chassidic thought, academic migration and NGO studies, and republican political theory (Philip Pettit's non-domination, the necessity of shared civic norms). The central claim is that a self-governing people must retain the capacity to know, debate, and set the terms of membership and resource allocation; opacity in the shelter pipeline and open-ended absorption without integration capacity erode that capacity from within.

Jewish historical experience of maintaining boundaries while extending hospitality supplies both warning and resource. The work is offered for copy-paste, further expansion, and professional dissemination.

Introduction: The Tool as Catalyst and the Question of Capacity

On 15 October 2026, DataRepublican released an updated Mass Migration Explorer in joint work with the Oversight Project. The tool maps monthly border encounters (showing a 96 percent drop from the December 2023 peak of roughly 302,000 to levels near 12,000 by mid-2026), county-level foreign-born settlement patterns back to 1990, and—newly—the full pipeline of FEMA Shelter and Services Program awards and related city/state contracts that paid NGOs and localities to shelter migrants after release from DHS custody. According to its authors, it tracks 1,275 organizations, with every link backed by a USASpending award, IRS filing, FEMA allocation, or municipal contract, and flags 150 awards totaling \$537 million terminated, cut short, or clawed back since 20 January 2025 (single source, not yet confirmed). The tool does not allege criminality. It makes visible what had been dispersed across federal, state, and local ledgers.

Visibility itself is the political act. In a republic, the demos cannot deliberate about membership rules, fiscal burdens, or integration capacity if the flows of people and money remain opaque. Republican theory of non-domination, most sharply articulated by Philip Pettit, holds that freedom consists in the absence of arbitrary interference—the capacity of citizens to control the powers that affect them. When large-scale resource allocation for new arrivals is routed through networks of NGOs and local contracts whose full picture requires specialized data work

to reconstruct, the ordinary citizen experiences a form of domination by complexity and administrative distance. Orthodox Jewish theology supplies a parallel grammar. The Torah distinguishes the *ger toshav*—the resident stranger who accepts the fundamental laws of the host community and lives under its jurisdiction—from the full citizen. Hospitality is commanded (Leviticus 19:33–34); unlimited absorption that dissolves the host’s capacity to transmit its norms is not.

Ki Teitzei places a parapet on the new roof precisely because responsibility for the integrity of the dwelling is not optional. The portable commonwealth of *galut* preserved Jewish peoplehood by maintaining internal boundaries while negotiating external ones. Chassidic teaching, particularly the Rebbe’s emphasis on particular mission alongside universal ethical demand, rejects both rootless cosmopolitanism and crude ethnic essentialism. The task is stewardship of a shared order, not its dissolution. This essay takes the Explorer’s data as its focal evidence and expands it through these lenses. It summarizes competing approaches (humanitarian facilitation, fiscal skepticism, selection-effect analysis, faith-based service models), criticizes both opacity and open-endedness, and advances a covenantal-republican standard: a people retains self-government only if it can know the numbers, set the conditions of membership, and insist on integration. The sharp post-January 2025 drop in encounters demonstrates that policy will can alter flows; the continued visibility of the shelter pipeline shows that the administrative residue of earlier policy remains a subject for ongoing democratic accountability.

Parashat Noach, read on 17 October 2026 (Genesis 9:8–17), supplies an additional frame: the rainbow as the sign of *brit olam* after the storm—divine self-restraint transforming the potential of judgment into ordered care for all life without dissolving the distinctions that make covenantal life possible.

The Shelter Pipeline: Scale, Recipients, and the Fact of Cuts

FEMA’s Shelter and Services Program, authorized by Congress and funded through CBP transfers (distinct from the Disaster Relief Fund), provided grants to non-federal entities for shelter, food, transportation, and related services to noncitizens released from DHS custody. Public records show substantial awards in FY 2023–2024 to Catholic Charities affiliates (San Diego, San Antonio, Rio Grande Valley), Jewish Family Service of San Diego, cities including New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Denver, and counties such as Pima, El Paso, and Maricopa. Individual awards frequently exceeded \$10–20 million; aggregate documented minimums for the program run into the hundreds of millions annually. Local contracts extended the pipeline beyond pure federal awards. The Explorer aggregates these into a single filterable view and records the post-January 2025 modifications: by its count, 150 awards (\$537 million) terminated, cut short, or clawed back, including the February 2025 FEMA shelter pullback.

These records are not imputations of motive. They establish that the pipeline was large, multi-jurisdictional, heavily NGO-mediated, and subject to subsequent administrative reversal under a change in executive policy. Academic literature on migration and NGOs notes that such intermediaries can increase service capacity and reduce immediate street homelessness while also, some scholars argue, creating selection effects and political constituencies for continued flows. Does that happen here? The data now let citizens ask. Fiscal analyses show heterogeneous lifetime net fiscal impacts by skill and integration cohort; low-skill, low-

integration inflows can impose net costs concentrated in housing, education, and local services even when aggregate GDP rises. The political difficulty is that benefits (labor for specific sectors, humanitarian signaling) are diffuse or captured, while costs are localized.

Republican non-domination requires that citizens retain the capacity to revise these allocations; opacity and path-dependence undermine that capacity.

Numbers, Selection, and the 96 Percent Drop

CBP Nationwide Encounters data confirm the scale of the change. Southwest border encounters peaked near 302,000 in December 2023. By August 2026 the monthly figure had fallen to the low teens of thousands—a drop of approximately 96 percent from the peak, with every month since February 2025 remaining below the lowest pre-2025 month in the recent series. The change coincided with restored enforcement posture, resumed barrier construction, diplomatic pressure on transit countries, and the end of certain parole and release practices. This is not a claim that “nothing else changed.” It is evidence that policy will alters flows. Selection effects matter: systems that offer rapid release into shelter networks with onward travel create different incentives than systems that enforce return or detention.

Academic work on migration consistently finds that the composition of inflows—skills, origin-country norms on gender and authority, language acquisition—predicts integration outcomes more reliably than aggregate volume alone. Putnam’s diversity-and-trust findings, even after qualifications, and European studies of parallel societies document short-to-medium-term declines in social capital under rapid compositional change without strong assimilation expectations. Jewish theology does not supply a numerical formula. It supplies an architecture. The *ger toshav* accepts the Noahide framework and lives under the host’s jurisdiction; full membership requires deeper identification. The restrictions in Deuteronomy 23 on certain groups entering the congregation reflect concern for the long-term integrity of the people. Unlimited openness without the capacity to transmit norms produces domination by parallel orders or by the administrative state that manages them. The post-2025 drop demonstrates that the capacity to set boundaries is not mythical; it is a political choice.

The rainbow after the flood models the same logic at cosmic scale: restraint after judgment, ordered reconstruction under higher law, care for life without the erasure of distinctions.

Faith Networks, Civic Membership, and the Limits of Subsidized Hospitality

A substantial share of SSP awards went to faith-based providers, especially Catholic Charities diocesan agencies and certain Protestant and Jewish service organizations. These groups often possess local infrastructure, volunteer networks, and a theological commitment to hospitality. The Explorer’s faith-network filters make the pattern visible. From a covenantal perspective this is neither automatically praiseworthy nor automatically suspect. Hospitality to the stranger is a *mitzvah*; the use of public funds to underwrite large-scale, low-integration absorption that strains local capacity and alters the civic demography without explicit democratic consent raises questions of non-domination and fiscal responsibility. Republican theory insists that the common good includes the cultural and linguistic preconditions of self-government. When public money subsidizes settlement at scale, and the full picture of that subsidy takes

specialized tools to reconstruct, do citizens still control the powers that affect them? Or are they subject to arbitrary interference by administrative and NGO networks? That is the question the tracker lets them ask.

The subsequent cuts illustrate both the possibility of correction and the prior opacity. Jewish particularism supplies the reminder that durable communities transmit distinctive norms; treating transmission as optional or suspect produces the parallel societies visible in multiple Western cities.

Counter-Arguments and the Path of Hishtadlut

Critics note that SSP funding was Congressionally authorized, that disaster-relief and shelter programs are separate accounts, and that many recipients provided immediate humanitarian services under conditions of high arrivals. These points are accurate and must be registered. They do not erase the scale of the pipeline, the multi-jurisdictional dispersion that obscured the total, or the legitimacy of subsequent democratic revision. Others argue that economic contributions of immigrants outweigh costs; the literature shows this is true for high-skill cohorts and less clearly true for low-skill, low-integration cohorts over the life cycle. Colonial or historical guilt narratives do not obligate open-ended absorption that undermines the host's capacity to remain a selfgoverning order. The practical path consistent with both the data and covenantal-republican standards is continued transparency, selective admission keyed to integration capacity, enforcement of membership rules, and the end of automatic public subsidy for open-ended shelter-to-settlement pipelines.

Bitachon does not cancel hishtadlut. The sharp drop in encounters shows that the will to set boundaries can be exercised; the Explorer shows that the residual fiscal and organizational architecture remains visible and therefore subject to ongoing accountability. Full reversal of prior compositional change is impossible; slowing further unselective inflows and insisting on integration is not.

Conclusion: Stewardship under Higher Law

The Mass Migration Explorer makes visible what had been dispersed: the people who arrived, the places they settled, and the public money that paid to shelter them. Visibility is the precondition of non-domination. A people that cannot know the numbers, debate the terms of membership, and revise the allocations ceases to govern itself and becomes a managed population. Orthodox Jewish theology and republican political theory converge on the necessity of boundaries that protect the capacity for covenantal life and shared civic norms. Hospitality without architecture dissolves the host; architecture without ethical content corrupts it. The post-2025 reduction in encounters and the documented cuts to the shelter pipeline demonstrate that both the flows and the subsidies are subject to political choice. The remaining work is the ordinary hishtadlut of a free people: continued transparency, selective membership, and the transmission of the norms that make selfgovernment possible.

From Jerusalem's luminous hills the ancient walls remind us that particular peoples endure when they maintain the architecture of their own integrity. Pittsburgh grit adds the practical test: does the policy produce self-reliant citizens who strengthen the whole, or dependency and

parallel orders that weaken it? The rainbow after the storm is not the end of judgment; it is the sign that ordered reconstruction under higher law remains available. The covenant can still be tended. Am Yisrael Chai.

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