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The US-Mexican border : perceptions of texans in the context of heightened border militarization

Marie-Arzhelen Le Carrer

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The US-Mexican border: Perceptions of Texans in the context of heightened border militarization



Master 2 mention Urbanisme et Aménagement
Spécialité DYSATER

Master dissertation realised under the direction of
Guy Baudelle (Université de Rennes 2) and Sarah
Blue (Texas State University)

Marie-Arzhelen Le Carrer

Université de Rennes 2 / Texas State
University

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Table of abbreviations

CBP: U.S. Customs and Border Protection

IRCA: Immigration Reform and Control Act (1986)

GAO: General Accounting Office

NAFTA: North American Free Trade Agreement

US: United States

Introduction

a. Globalization and the US-Mexico border wall

The study of the border, since the end of the Cold War, appears to be in a global paradox. Indeed, in this era of growing globalization, as there is simultaneously a multiplication of various multi-national agreements (such as the European Union and NAFTA), the decline of many barriers concerning economic or financial exchanges and a massive tendency to close borders and a certain isolationism (recently, the countries inside the EU or NAFTA are again good examples), we can observe at the same time a phenomenon of world opening and closing.

In practice, some borders are more “closed” and opaque than others. In particular, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the vision of the US-Mexican border around the world seems to be more and more focused on the closing of the border, focused on the “wall” separating the two countries, erected since almost twenty years. The problem is seen by the fact that, right now, the US-Mexico border is already highly secured and militarized in connection with the implementation of various national and local policies in the past thirty years, generating a net decrease of immigration rates. However, the call for a border wall made by Donald Trump during his 2016 campaign was the main point of rally through the US, especially in Texas, though this border could difficulty be more secured. This phenomenon is then quite paradoxical and introduced the idea that the wall is used as a political and ideologic construct by Trump administration to mobilize the citizens.

In the current call made by the Trump administration to extend the wall at the US-Mexico border, the trans-border interactions but above all the global perceptions of the border are evolving pretty fast especially in border states. While the idea of a wall is not new, as it was already advanced and constructed under Bush administration, it became increased and reinforced during the past few years with Donald Trump, who has included this project in his presidential program in spite of the negative opinion of Mexico.

The issue is: in light of the recent events and as we have said previously, we can affirm that even if the border has already been highly secured in the past thirty years, in regard with the large reduction of illegal immigration through the US-Mexico border, this call for a border wall by President Trump is still a rallying point all over the country and especially in Texas. In connection with the increasing populism all over the country, Texans who not live directly near the border seem to be massively influenced by security discourses impregnated by the fear of the “alien”, as named in the 1994

Operation Gatekeeper (see below in the background section for more information), and the feeling that the southern border is currently not enough fenced.

If I want at first to understand Texans' current perceptions about the US-Mexico border, this study also seeks to examine how Americans living in the borderlands conceive of the border and its history of militarization according to their geographic location, why the wall generates so much support for Trump given that it already exists, and to observe how mass media discourses can influence the opinions and political partisanship of these inhabitants as well as the geographical locations of border states inhabitants. At last, I want to understand how the border wall became (and still is) an instrument of power in the current US political game, especially at the local level.

b. Research questions

As this subject of the US-Mexico border is a very large theme, frequently studied, there are a lot of questions I can think about I when analyze this topic. I wanted to study the perceptions of the border by the people who live more or less close to it, and for that I explored further the political point of view of the border. I can gather these ideas in one main research question which is “why does the wall discourse is still mobilizing so many Americans and especially Texans to support Trump, since the US-Mexican border is already highly secured”?

In order to give an answer to this global question, in relation with the geographical location of the populations studied, I will examine a few other sub-questions, especially how do Americans living in borderlands conceive the border, its history of militarization and the cross-border collaboration, but also what do Central Texans think will be the impacts of a border wall on security and US-Mexican relations? Last but not least, one last aspect of the topic I will consider and interrogate is what role did Trump's promise to build a wall played in the 2016 election, how did Trump mobilize the threat of an insecure border and the wall discourse in his presidential campaign, all of that with a special focus on the influence of mass media discourses and supports.

c. Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: My first hypothesis is that the inhabitants living in border states, and here Texas, are not fully aware of the history of militarization at the border and the current situation. I mean by that that global discourses diffused by mass medias and Trump administration let them think that the US-Mexico border is not secured enough: I argue that it generates a feeling of “fear” in their minds, a need for a concrete border wall to put an end at these massive immigration and drugs trafficking.

Hypothesis 2: For my second hypothesis, I would argue that the opinion about the border wall are quite dissimilar according to the geographic location: I am assuming that Texans living directly close to the border – in places such as Brownsville, McAllen or Laredo – have a different opinion (and more negative) about President Trump’s call for a border wall than Texans living further from the border like in San Marcos.

Hypothesis 3: At last, I argue that, since the 2016 election campaign, the border wall played an essential role in Trump’s support all over the US. the Trump administration is using the wall discourse as a way to get more support among the country, especially in border states. It takes advantage of this border wall in utilize it as a political and ideological construct to prove that the US-Mexico border does need more security. I hypothesize that Donald Trump succeeded to use the ideology of the border wall as a way to rally his electorate.

Methodology

I tend to think that my researches are identified more in the post-positivism/social constructivist epistemology, because they are gathering several qualitative methods to truly explore and understand the interaction, lived experiences and belief systems that are a part of individuals, institutions, cultural groups and even the everyday. Indeed, even if I believe in a mixed approach of both quantitative and qualitative methods for most of the researches, I was more interested by the use of the human mind than the numbers. It calls on inductive as well as deductive logic and accepts multiple perspectives and realities that the positivism paradigm doesn't take into account: as a matter of fact, my research topic is not a larger-scale study that attempt to describe a broad population, but more a quite small population – the borderlands populations and the population of the border states as Texas – studied in depth, at a cultural level.

I feel actually more comfortable with the “question-driven perspective”, mentioned by O’Leary in chapter 8, which consists to put the questions before paradigm, and to premise neither the quantitative nor the qualitative tradition: I think it is quite interesting because there are strengths and challenges for each paradigm.

Then, for this research project, I will mainly use the ethnographic methodology. This methodology allowed me to use mainly qualitative methods and to go to the field to meet the people. Since I’ve studied the points of view and perceptions of Texas inhabitants and the use of the wall in security discourses by the Trump administration and mass media, it is important for me to speak to people, emphasizing the value of depth over quantity. Ethnography attempts to understand the world from the point of view of its participants (rather than searching for an objective truth). Thus, I tried to avoid assessing a culture or opinions using pre-existing frames of references or from a particular worldview, which means forget about the references I have from my “European culture”, which has a specific opinion and many preconceived ideas about the US-Mexican border and its inhabitants.

Phenomenology was also relevant to this study, because it concentrates on individuals and, rather than the socio-historic context or even the supposed ‘reality’ of an object, its focus centers on perception. This study seeks to understand the perceptions of Texans about the border and the political partisanship implied by these perceptions, why many of them think it is so important to build a wall at the southern border given it is already highly secured.

These qualitative forms of methodology were combined with post-positivism paradigm methods, as well as some methodologies from the quantitative tradition. Using scientific methods that are

hypothesis driven allows for the use of both inductive and deductive reasoning and offers more than one way of looking at a situation. Thus, I used a qualitative perspective that is informed by quantitative data, especially with the use of a survey. I used also other methods from the post-positivist perspective, as the support of the discourse analysis to understand the different uses of the “wall” discourses among the Trumps administration and the media.

a. Key terms

Border militarization and its history: The border militarization is “the systematic intensification of the border's security apparatus, transforming the area from a transnational frontier to a zone of permanent vigilance, enforcement, and violence”, according to the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR). It implies the implementation of a fence or – at least – the growth of Border Patrol agents, many security policies and the restriction of goods and people. By this expression of border militarization history, I mean that I want to understand what the Texans really know about the past of the border security at the US-Mexico border: What are the roots of this militarization, when the security has been highly increased and why, etc.

Border wall discourses: The border wall discourses refer to the different speeches made by President Trump, the Trump administration or the different news media – mainly TV channels – mentioning the wall. It aims to analyze these discourses and to understand how the wall is used as a political and ideological tool.

b. Methods used for each hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Inhabitants living in border states, and here Texas, are not fully aware of the history of militarization at the border and the current situation

Hypothesis 2: The opinion about the border wall are quite dissimilar according to the geographic location in Texas

Hypothesis 3: Since the 2016 election campaign, the border wall played an essential role in Trump’s support all over the US: Donald Trump succeeded to use the ideology of the border wall as a way to rally his electorate.

For hypotheses 1 and 2:

- 🕒 Field investigation at the US-Mexico border fence in Brownsville, Texas, where I was able to see what the current fence looks like, and where I had the opportunity to meet the population living directly at proximity of it.
- 🕒 Document analysis: I started my study by this one, by reading various books and articles about the topic, by studying official reports, decisions and/or communications in the past

few years, to see the evolution. It permitted me to have a consistent support of the past theoretical framework.

☞ Interviews: Semi-structured interviews with a sample population living in a border state, here Texas, and more precisely the area surrounding San Marcos, to analyze individual perceptions of the border, what individuals know about the past border militarization and what are the role of mass media in the constructions of their opinions. I conducted these semi-structured interviews around San Marcos, using a snowball sample, but also by asking people in the streets. All interviews were anonymous.

The interviews were semi-structured because it allowed the conversation to follow more freely.

☞ Survey: One survey was spread among the population of a state border – Texas, more specifically around San Marcos but also at the border to have a various sample of geographical location – in order to have more objective and quantitative results about the idea of border wall support, the influence of media, as well as to understand their perception of the US-Mexican border.

☞ Census data analysis: I used US Census data, in order to understand population changes in Texas and if it had an impact on the border perception.

Hypothesis 3:

☞ Discourses analysis: I analyzed some discourses about the wall made by President Trump and his administration since the 2016 campaign, in order to understand how he mobilized the threat of an insecure border to rally so many people. In the same idea, I analyzed the discourses made by different mass media (Fox News, CNN, NPR, etc) relaying the same ideologies.

Then, the data I gathered was mainly consisting of many qualitative data with the contents of the interviews I provided – the perceptions of the people interviewed, their apprehensions – but there were also quantitative data gathered under the survey issues. I tried to put in link the individual opinions and perceptions about the border (more subjective) with the results of the survey or the statistical data I found. The data is also in form of the discourse analyzes and the study which emerges from it.

This research project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas State University, with ID# 2018585.

c. Limitations of proposed methods

The challenges with the methods issued from ethnography generally involve ‘immersion’, and how to be really integrated into the studied community. For example, I had some difficulties to fully understand the people perceptions because I am obviously a non-Texan and as a foreigner, they may have not said the same to me than an interviewer from Texas. In the same idea, as they don’t know me or my opinions, they might have not answered sincerely my questions about the border perceptions and what they think of the call for a wall, because it is always easier to discuss with someone if the person knows they have the same ideas. Another limitation is the possible “homogenization” of the observations I will take – the fact that it is important not to generalize what I observe and collect in a specific place to every border state population. I had to be careful to be aware of my own researcher worldview.

There are also a few limitations concerning the mixed approach – both quantitative and qualitative methods – especially by the fact that this approach necessitates an understanding of the two paradigms and the appropriate criteria for credibility for each paradigm. Also, different skills are needed to do an interview than to do a survey, or to do a participant observation than to do statistics or GIS.

Part 1. The militarization of the US-Mexico border

I > The US-Mexico border: a border highly documented and commentated

1) Understand the notion of border in the current context of border militarization
In this section, I gathered the articles and books I found interesting about the notion itself of border, and what it means nowadays in a context of a border militarization in many parts of the world. If, at the end of last century, many people had the feeling that borders were condemned to disappear with the globalization and the multiplication multi-national associations (such as the European Union or NAFTA), it appears that this globalization is accompanied with an intensification of the limits and that the word “security” is now - paradoxically - a corollary of globalization (Foucher, 2012). In the same time, the border militarization engenders different habits and ways to secure the border, more and more with the establishment of walls (Israel/Palestine, US/Mexico, etc) which generates uneven power relations (Heyman, in A Companion to border studies, 2012). However, in most of the cases and especially the US-Mexican border, these fences are doomed to failure – especially because people always find a way to pass or because the economic and financial exchanges need to go on – and the “third nation” will prevail (Dear, 2013). However, what is seeming to miss in this portion of the literature is the recent role of the border wall in the political game all over the US, with the importance of the Trump administration on the question, looking for a further militarization of the US-Mexico area. According to all this literature, it seems interesting to focus for my topic on one specific case, one specific area on the US-Mexican border and to study if what these authors are saying can be applicable and understandable.



Population growth in the western portion of the u.s.-Mexico border region (2000-2010). Adapted from Good Neighbor Environmental Board 14th Report (GNEB 2011). Source: U.S. Census Bureau and Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI).

Map 1: Population Growth along the US-Mexico border, 2000-2010 (Source: Researchgate, Gregg Garfin)

2) US-Mexican border: Cross-border cooperation and perceptions

This section aggregates a few articles I have read about the US-Mexican border and the cross-border cooperation in general and between both countries. Indeed, the cross-border cooperation is not at the same level according to the location around the world: for instance, we can find very advanced cooperation and exchanges all over the European Union with the implementation of the different EU regio and Euroregion which are a real improvement for communication – especially with the case of the Finnish-Russian border (Marin, 2005). But, in the other hand, most of the world borders cannot show such a good cooperation, even if it is improving (in particular in North-America at the border between the US and Canada): the essential pre-conditions - “common territorial identity”, “convergence of knowledge and values” and “willingness for cooperation” - are still not set up (Buckley, 2017). Thus, it can be relevant to observe if these conditions are perceptible around the US-Mexican border, or why the cross-border cooperation is not functioning at every level, or again NAFTA affected the cooperation around the border. On this US-Mexican border, some cases of cross-border cooperation can be found, especially regarding water but it also takes place on an academic level (Herchner, 2016). Concerning perceptions, according to most of authors, the border has been often seen as the same time as a barrier and as an exchange interface, as a conduit and an obstacle (Chacon, 2010; Herchner, 2016), however this question has not been apprehended recently, which could be the point of this research topic.

3) The border militarization, security discourses and the question of political partisanship

As advanced is in the background section, the border militarization is not a recent idea on the US-Mexican border: it has begun a long time ago already, situating the first roots of this “fear” of the outside already when the border was defined in the 19th century, and enhanced during the Cold War (Bier, 2017; Chacon, 2010; Kil, Allen & Hammer, 2011). This final section is, however, about the fact that it has become increasingly secured since thirty years (the decision of president Donald Trump to build a wall only ensuing the tendency) which has also led to multiple human rights abuses – especially regarding migrants – with actions which has generated severe critics among the country but also at the international level (Febriyanti, 2017; Laughland, 2017; Martinez & Hard, 2017). Critics, but also more organized movements, with a further mobilization that there were existing before, especially amongst unauthorized and authorized migrants (Martinez & hard, 2017): these actions show that a mass movement is possible, and that such thing could play a meaningful role and have potential broad political effects (Collingwood, Lajevardi & Ar Oskooii, 2017).

II > History and situation of the border militarization

The US-Mexican border has only been in existence for less than two hundred years. The population surrounding this area, however, has a much more broader history. The continuity and connectivity across the border line existed before the border was implemented, for example during the Spanish colonial era, because the Rio Grande river attracted early settlements. When the border was progressively settled in the middle of the nineteenth century, the border separated it into two parts, but the population shared a common culture and identity. Rapidly, a cross-border economy and culture started to emerge, distinguishing the border region from the interior of each country and developing a Mexican dominated culture that was distinct from the rest of the US, with generally negative perceptions. But what is interesting here is to study the progressive transformation of the US-Mexico border into a region physically separated by a “wall”, from a boundary to a barrier.

A few decades after the independence of Mexico in 1821, the border as we know it today was established in 1853 with the Gadsden Purchase, ending the US territorial expansion started by the Mexican-American war (1846-1848) and the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The border has not changed since 1953. If the geographic and administrative position has remained stable, that is not the case of the border cultures and perceptions all along the border states on the American side. Justin Akers Chacón (2010) argued that this border has been built by war and has never been a static or peaceful entity. From the American side, every time this border emerges in public opinion, it is to evoke the rhetoric of Homeland Security, the immigration problems or even the drugs trafficking issues. Indeed, the end of the Cold War has generated in the US foreign policy doctrine the idea of considering any “non-state actor as external threats to the nation” (Chacón, 2010). One policy that has had a major influence on public opinion, especially on border states populations in the last 30 years, was that the concept of border security – especially on the Mexican border – became interweaved with anti-terrorism and stronger nativist impulses, motivating the people to mobilize either to defend their country against the outside enemy or, instead, to promote a greater openness.

With this context in mind, this border is now more than ever depicted in media as the only and last facility that can separate the United States from the potential hostile world existing at its boundaries. Political changes over the past fifty years also have made the entry into the country harder. Since the middle of the twentieth century, it has been possible to observe a huge growth of the US-Mexican border, especially demographically: indeed, “*the population of the Mexican border states multiplied by 4.4 times, while that of the US border states multiplied 3.1 times*” (Ganster & Lorey, 2007).

Several large twin-cities developed and introduced more and more complex interrelationships and interdependencies (enhancing the importance of commuter workers). Martinez (1994) distinguished until 10 groups of border social experiences in both sides, mentioning also the



Photography 1: US Customs agents patrolling the border in 1993 (Source: Getty Images)

essential role of growing economic integration and interactions (Martinez, 1994).

However, in the past twenty years, the border situation changed quite drastically especially after the events of the 9/11. This has generated a global security movement with new “fortifications”. The beginnings of this phenomenon can be traced back to the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) which engendered a broader surveillance of the border and an increased security, but also the legalization of many undocumented migrants settled in the US for several years. This law stipulates the “*legalization of undocumented aliens who had been continuously unlawfully present since 1982,*

legalization of certain agricultural workers, sanctions for employers who knowingly hire undocumented workers, and increased enforcement at U.S. borders” (USCIS)¹. Under this law, 2.7 million unauthorized migrants (on 3.2 million) obtained a legal status: it was then the largest legalization movement in US history. But in the same time, the objective was to secure the US-Mexico border with more staff and new surveillance technology, with unintended consequences: migrants began moving to other parts of the border to cross it, rather than the “traditional” spots as California or Texas, generating a rise of the number of border-crossing deaths (Plumer, 2013).

Following that, in 1994, introduced under Clinton Administration at the California-Mexico border (in the area of San Diego), the Operation Gatekeeper implemented a new strategy to control immigration and to stem the tide of illegal migrants crossing the border: named the strategy of “control through deterrence” by the Clinton administration, it has involved the construction of fences and a major border militarization with a large increase of the Border Patrol personnel along the divide where it was the most easily crossed, surging dramatically the number of deaths (Hing, 2015). Noam Chomsky evenly alleged in a lecture in Mexico in 2009 that Operation Gatekeeper “[...] militarized the US-Mexican border” (Chomsky, 2009). In the same vein, in 1993 took place the Operation “Hold the Line” (previously named “Blockade”) around El Paso, Texas, which was quite similar to the Gatekeeper operation, with an increase of the number of Border Patrol staffing and activities: this operation considerably changed the face of the border, with a net decreasing of the number of apprehensions and illegal crossings.

Then, the 2006 Secure Fence Act under the Bush administration authorized the construction of a wall, which has been partly erected along the border (on 650 miles of walls and fences along the 700-mile boundary with Mexico). This major law, fundamental for the future of the border, acted for the construction of 700 miles of high-tech and militarized wall along the southern border to prevent the crossing of “unlawful aliens” as mentioned in the text². In one of his speeches, in May 2006, President George W. Bush commentated the topic by saying that “*We must face the reality that millions of illegal immigrants are already here*”³, stimulating a sense of paranoia towards the “other”. After his mandate came to an end, President Barack Obama and the Department of Homeland Security continued the erection of the fence, until the goal was completely achieved in 2011, with the construction of 649 miles of fencing (99.5% of the 652 miles planned). Since then, multiple fence

¹ According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website. To read in: <https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary/immigration-reform-and-control-act-1986-irca>

² “*physical infrastructure enhancements to prevent unlawful entry by aliens into the United States*”, Secure Fence Act of 2006. Available at: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/109th-congress/house-bill/6061/text>

³ “[...] *Fourth, we must face the reality that millions of illegal immigrants are already here already. They should not be given an automatic path to citizenship [...]*”, Bush’s Speech on Immigration, May 15, 2006. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/15/washington/15text-bush.html>

parts have been added to the barrier. In 2017, a report made by the government Accountability Office notes that “in addition to the 654 miles of primary fencing, the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has also deployed additional layers of pedestrian fencing behind the primary border fencing, including 37 miles of secondary fencing and 14 miles of tertiary fencing” (GAO report, February 2017, p. 9). On the 1954 miles of the US-Mexico border, there was then 654 miles fenced in 2017, leaving only the deserts (and extremely dangerous) territories without fence.

In various high-traffic spots, there are two or three layers of fence, and it is often built inside the territory of the United States and not only on the border itself: for example, in the area of the twin-city Brownsville (Texas) – Matamoros (Mexico), after the Secure Fences Act in 2006, the fence has isolated a Golf course of Brownsville (the Fort Brown Memorial Golf Course), creating a kind of a border dead-zone between Mexico and the US. The course had to close its doors since then. In the same idea, the border fence – that you can see in the picture below – goes through a part of the Brownsville university (University of Texas Rio Grande Valley) in the Alice Wilson Memorial Park which is directly close to the Grande Rio, asking the question of public and private propriety.



Photography 2: The border fence separating Brownsville (US) from Matamoros (Mexico) and going through the University of TRGV propriety (Credits: Marie-Arzhelen Le Carrer, 2018)

Also, to a lesser extent, under the second Obama administration, the 2013 Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act increased the securitization of the border by allocating \$46.3 billion in funding for border security and asking the government to double the number of Border Patrol staff and fencing along the border.

This fencing represents different methods of surveillance, including sound and motion detectors, but also the multiplication of detention centers. Since 2017, the Trump administrations has pushed to construct and finish the wall and enhance the border militarization to further control illegal immigration and drugs trafficking. These constructions can be discerned as threats to the “third nation” (Dear, 2013). Increased militarization has, in fact, created interruptions in border residents’ everyday lives, with more time spent on crossing the border, more US Border Patrol guards, etc, which also impacts the populations of border states.

Along with these manifestations, we can observe a paradox: the militarization of immigration enforcement strategies as well as the heightened calls for a border wall are seen as the representations of the old “containment” strategy already in practice during the Cold War, at first against the communists then the drug smugglers. But it appeared at the same time as the NAFTA agreement, generating in parallel a barrier AND the integration of the two economies, which is representative of the contradictory forces at work – at the national level but also among the population. The Trump election has enhanced this paradox, further separating the population who sees the border as a threat, and the other part of the population who sees it as a resource. But if the wall construction and the border militarization engendered interruptions among the “third nation”, the border dwellers adapted their ways of life and the cross-border interactions continued to go on: it is still the more crossed border in the world - though crossers can only traverse through official ports of entry – and trade continues to increase, for instance, because the third nation at the border is essential to the prosperity of both countries according to Michael Dear.

For a long time, the wall between Mexico and the US was more present in the minds of the population than in the field, a fact that now has changed: indeed, if before the border was only constituted of 276 “obelisks” marking the US-Mexico divide after the end of the Mexican-American war in 1848, today it has become a real fence – almost a wall – though still in construction. Since the beginning, the border was raised in a dualistic and paradoxical manner, in the same time as a conduit and a barrier: imagined as good for economic opportunities (and cultural exchanges) but creating and maintaining unequal power relations. In the context of previous policies and impacts, this study asks how border perceptions are evolving in border states such as Texas, as well as the security discourses made by Trump administration and mass media.

All of this militarization history develops the US-Mexico border as one of the most secured and militarized borders in the world, which makes the crossing very difficult and often dangerous and yet. It makes the desire of the Trump administration and its electors to build a wall very difficult to understand, especially since illegal crossings have only been decreasing since the beginnings of the 2000s.

III > The evolution of illegal crossings through the US southern border

According to Business Insider, the Southeastern Texas is one of the highest priorities to secure along the US-Mexico border for the Trump administration. President Donald Trump also seeks to build at least 1 200 additional miles of wall to the border, even if this border is already highly secured and militarized and, mainly, even if the illegal immigration rates consequently decreased during the past two decades. Indeed, since 2000, the rate of new unauthorized immigrant per year has only been decreasing. We can notice that border crossings have decreased significantly since the 2000s, and the border patrol statistics show that the number of apprehensions on the southwest border – a good indicator of the rate of illegal crossings – has plunged in this fiscal year compared with last: indeed, apprehensions of unaccompanied child decreased by 36%, and those of families by 46% (CBP). The numbers come from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), are for fiscal years (October 1st through September 30th) and date back to 1960.

According to a report made by CBP and the Department of Homeland Security in December 2017 and their previous statistics, the number of apprehensions at the border decreased to historic lows in Fiscal Year 2017 (FY2017), saying that 2017 saw the “*lowest level of illegal cross-border migration on record*”⁴ (CBP Report, p. 1). It specifies that “*CBP recorded 310,531 apprehensions by U.S. Border Patrol agents and 216,370 inadmissible cases by CBP officers in FY17, a 23.7 percent decline over the previous year*” (*ibid*, p. 1). The CBP, at the end of 2017, created multiple tables indicating the total of border apprehensions since 1960 or the number Border patrol agents, that we will use here and that you can find in annexes. As we can analyze with previous years and the graphic below (Figure 1), these statistics align with a significant drop in apprehensions since 2005, and 2017 does represent a low in CBP’s arrests during this year.

⁴ “*In FY17, CBP recorded the lowest level of illegal cross-border migration on record, as measured by apprehensions along the border and inadmissible encounters at U.S. ports of entry*”, CBP Border Security Report – Fiscal year 2017, December 5 2017

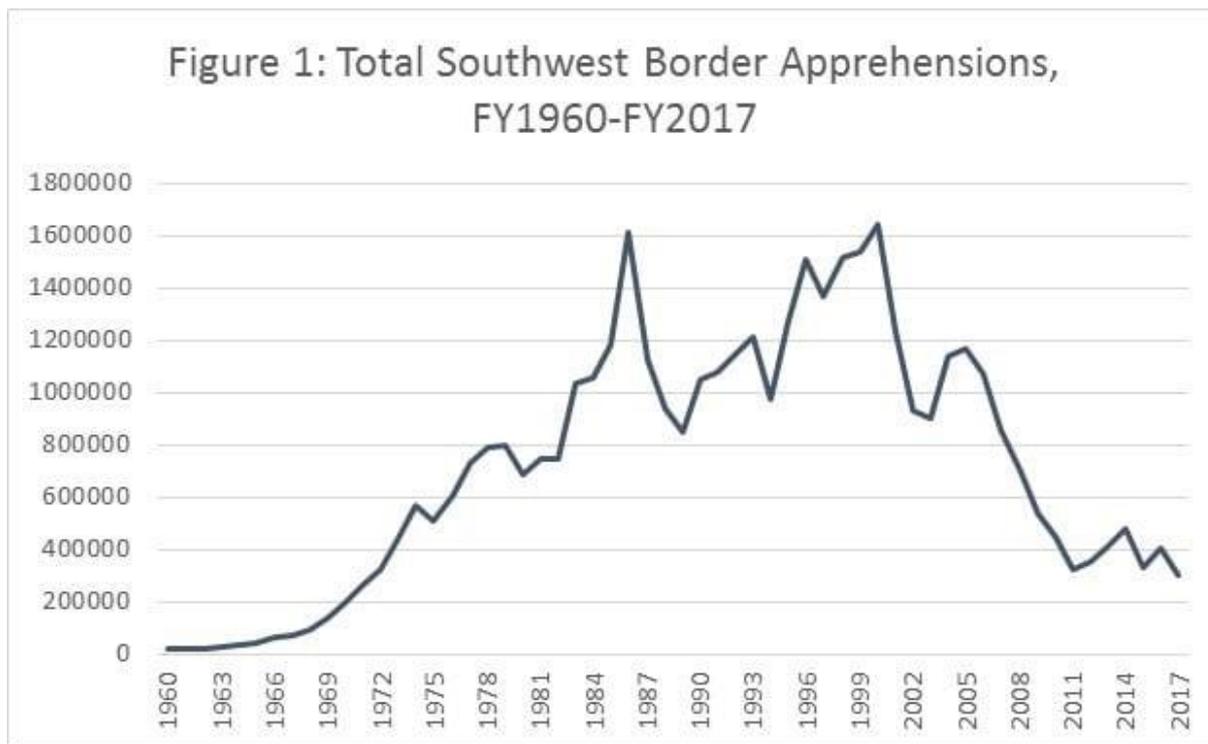


Figure 1: Total southwest border apprehensions, FY1960-FY2017 (Source: CBP 2017)

Even if these apprehensions started to rise again at the end of 2017 and 2018, due to a rise of unaccompanied children arrests (a phenomenon which highly concerns the authorities), they had a peak in 2000 at 1.64 million and have generally and progressively declined since, totaling 303 916 in 2017: it represents an 81.5% decline in the total number of apprehensions between 2000 and 2017. The Obama administration, especially, generated a decline by 35% of the apprehensions from FY2008 through the end of 2016. These numbers tell us that the security of the border has been already highly developed and improved over the past two decades, generating a net decrease of the illegal crossings over the border. Many migrant advocate groups comment this call for a border wall by saying that *“given the scale of the armed law enforcement presence, the extensive surveillance infrastructure, fencing and numerous checkpoints, the border is, in effect, already militarized. Texas has spent hundreds of millions of dollars to supplement federal border enforcement programs”* (Dart, 2018), many of them considering the presence of soldiers as deterrent.

Moreover, in the same idea, the number of Border Patrol agents at the US-Mexico border has largely raised over the past two decades: if the peak was in 2013 with 18,611 members staff, there was in 2017 still 16,605 agents. It is almost 10,000 more than 20 years before in 1997, where there were only 6,315 agents. As a point of comparison, there are only 2,048 agents at the US-Canada border. Their efficiency seems to be proved because, as Lori Robertson mentions it in her article *“Illegal Immigration Statistics”* in June 2018, *“Back in fiscal year 2000, when apprehensions peaked at*

1.64 million, there were 8,580 agents assigned to the border with Mexico. In 2017, when apprehensions were 303,916, there were 16,605 Southwest border agents” (Robertson, 2018).

Yet, the political debate – and the people opinion, we will observe it in the second part – concentrates above all on how to further militarize an already militarized border, with two times more of Border patrol agents compared to the beginnings of the 2000s, the construction of

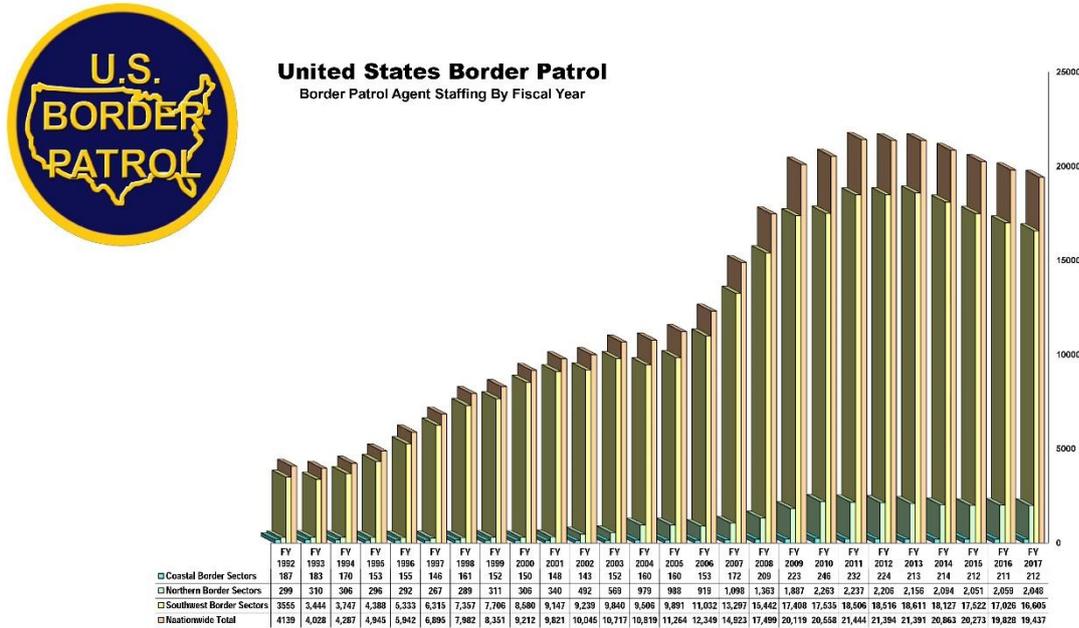


Figure 2: Border Patrol Agent Staffing by Fiscal Year, 1992-2017 (Source: U.S. Border Patrol)

hundreds of miles of barriers and new high-tech surveillance equipment. Republicans as well as Trump administration are focused on further militarizing the border against the people who are no longer crossing it. In these national political logics and discourses, what is the position of the populations of border states like Texas? As the border further militarization has already proved his efficiency, do they still valid and encourage the idea of a border wall? How do they react along with these injunctions to secure the border?

Part 2. The points of view of the Texan population: more security is needed

This part is gathering the results of the survey and the different interviews I conducted around San Marcos, in Texas, and analyzes the answers of the persons interrogated, in link with the field observations I did at the US-Mexico border in Brownsville, Texas. If these persons globally disagree on the reasons and the ways used for, most of them believe that more security is needed at the US-Mexico border, in spite of the generalized phenomenon of border militarization since the past thirty years we detailed in the previous part.

I > Methodology and field

Survey

The survey was developed during my semester in Texas State University, with the help of my two professors and advisors Dr. Sarah Blue and Dr. Jennifer Devine. It was composed of 21 questions, answerable in five minutes, that you will find in annex. The questions were separated in three sections: the first one (minor) was about the demographics, the second one about the border perceptions and US-Mexico border knowledges, and finally the third one about the border security and the political discourses.

I developed the questions in April, which explains why I asked some very specific ones, like question 6 on the thoughts about the decision of Nick Perry, Governor of Texas, to send the National Guard troops to the border at this time of the year, following and then supporting the decision of Donald Trump to send the U.S. military at the border⁵ (while other border states as Arizona refused to do so).

The survey was conducted mainly online, transmitted by email through the Texas State University network and through the different contacts of my two advisors Dr. Blue and Dr. Devine, and it was also given to the interviewees I received. At the end, I had 51 answers to my survey, which is much less than I expected at first. Yet, it gave me many indications of the real-life experiences in

⁵ On April 3rd, 2018, at a lunch meeting with Baltic leaders, President Donald Trump announced plans for the US military to guard the border with Mexico, until the border wall is built. *“We’re going to be doing things militarily [...]. Until we can have a wall and proper security, we’re going to be guarding our border with the military. That’s a big step. We really haven’t done that before, or certainly not very much before”* (President Donald Trump, April 2018, speech available at: <https://www.c-span.org/video/?443442-1/president-trump-military-guard-southern-border>).

Nevertheless, his last sentence isn’t totally true, since President Bush did it between 2006 and 2008, with Operation “Jump Start” which sent a total of 6000 troops along the border; and President Obama renewed it in 2010 with Operation Phalanx and its 1200 Guard members. With the benefit of hindsight, these operations weren’t very successful: it was lacking a precise role in a clearly-define strategy, with prerogatives which was against those of the Border patrol.

Texas, and how its inhabitants feel about the border. 28 of the participants were men, and 22 were women (one person didn't want to say), distributed between 18 and 70 years old. The large majority of them were from Texas, with only three people coming from another US state, but only 20.8% are from the border region (100 miles around the border). Among the rest of the voters (so the 41 persons who are not from the border region), only five of them have never been to this border.

Interviews

Based on the same interrogations and approximately the same questions than for the survey, the script for the interviews was also developed in order to answer two majors thematic: perceptions and knowledge about the current border situation, and opinion about the border security and political discourses. Without the demographic questions, it included twelve different questions, plus a few other sub-questions. I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews, because it was allowing me to follow the conversation more freely, with people living in or around San Marcos, which lasted between 15 and 30 minutes.

As I was running out of time for my semester in San Marcos (Texas), I had the opportunity to conduct only seven interviews, but each one of them were very interesting and rewarding, with opinions quite different, structured, and well argued.

Field investigation

These two study methods were completed by a field investigation I did at the end of April, with my Texas State University advisor Dr. Blue, in south-east Texas, around the twin-city of Brownsville (USA) – Matamoros (Mexico), in a sector which is massively secured and militarized. I had the opportunity to go directly close to the border fence of Brownsville, which is erected along the Rio Grande, and so to watch and understand what the border fence (or wall, it depends of how we see it) really means in cities with important levels of crossings (legal and illegal). With a topic like this one, it was obviously necessary to visit the field. I will have the occasion to discuss about that later.

II > A generalized feeling of “the border is too open, we have to close it”

Most of the people interrogated are in favor of the construction of a border wall, with 51% of the participants who answered “yes” at the question “do you think a border wall at the US-Mexico border is necessary”. However, we can notice a large proportion of voting who are uncertain about this issue, including 11.8% of the voters.

However, we can observe with the next question that there is an even more important majority to say that the border needs “more security than what currently exists”, with 72.5% of the voters. It tells us that, if most people don’t necessarily want the building of a complete border wall, they are in favor of a reinforcement of the security at the border (and consequently not the total closing of the border). One of the interviewees, for instance, explained that more security would be helpful, but a border wall is not necessary: “*I don’t think it really provides much value, there are other ways to accomplish the same thing*” (interview n°3, 24/04/2018). He considers that more border patrol agents and funding would be more appropriate, it would be the way to control security without a wall. Besides, only 13.7% think that the current level of security is good as it is.

However, the most important lesson I learned with the survey and the interviews is that people don’t know much (or nothing) of the history of the border and its security.

At the question of what they know about the history of the US-Mexico border and when they imagined the heightened border security began, all of the seven persons I interviewed responded that they don’t know much about this topic. Apart of the very recent history and especially since the election of the President Donald Trump and his “build the wall” actions, they are not aware of the various operations landed to the southern border since the past thirty or forty years – described in the first part and which have highly militarized the border – which might let them think that nothing or only a few occurred to secured the border.

The survey tells us the same thing: at the question, “How would you characterize the current situation regarding border security”, we can observe that most of the participants are quite unaware of the reality of the border, with 52.9% characterizing the current situation regarding border security as “A little fencing and border patrol presence that somewhat limits illegal crossing”, and “Almost no fence or border patrol presence, making it easy to cross illegally” for 23.5% of the voters (when only 19.6% of the voters think there is an “Extensive fencing and border patrol presence, making it very difficult to cross illegally”). This doesn’t really reflect the reality since, as mentioned before, the number of people caught crossing the border illegally has dropped by 82% from its peak in 2000 (Almukhtar & Williams, 2018).

Also, as illustrated by the graphic below (figure 3), the repartition of the answers of the question “When do you think heightened border security started” informs us that the knowledge about the border militarization is kind of weak, with most people thinking that it started only in the past 18 years, while I’m defining the beginning of the phenomenon in 1986, with the Immigration Reform and Control Act. Of course, this date is not the only date possible to define the start of the militarization, it is a choice I personally made because I consider this year as the first time that the government officially invested to secure the border against immigration and traffics.

When do you think heightened border security started concretely?

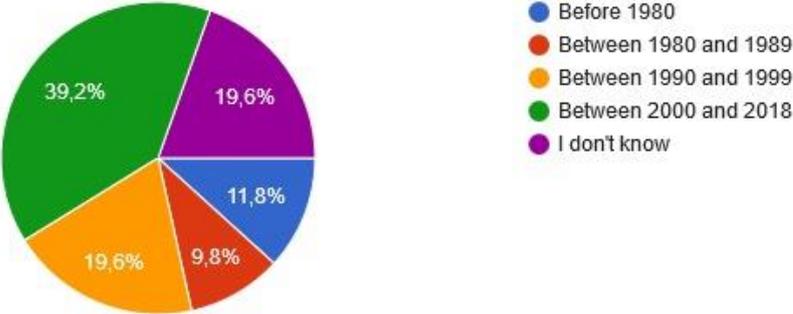


Figure 3: The vast repartition of the question 11’ answers (Le Carrer, 2018)

However, if the date can fluctuate depending of the point of view adopted, it is clear for me and for most experts (among them: Chomsky, 2009; Dear, 2013; Ganster, 2017; Matthews, 2007) that the premises of this phenomenon of heightened security go back to before the 2000s. This information is not something commonly learned among American population, and that might be part of the issue. We can observe that most of the answers are really diversified (11.8% says before 1980, 9.8% only says between 1980 and 1989, 19.6% says between 1990 and 1999, 39.2% says between 2000 and 2018 and finally 19.6% have no idea about the date), which indicates that the border history is not something commonly known and learned by the population.

In this logic, we observe that most people underestimate the length of the US-Mexico border already fenced, with 9.8% thinking that nothing is fenced and 47.1% thinking that only 300 miles of the 2000 miles are fenced, when the good answer is around 650 miles (at the beginning of 2018), as mentioned before.

If not all of them want the building of a wall, they are still persuaded that much more security must be given to the border. The question “Do you support the recent decision of Governor Dan Patrick to send national guard troops to the US-Texas border” and its answers indicate us that most

participants support this strong decision, following the decision of President Trump, with 56.9% of the voters. The same percentage believe that building a border wall will improve border security, but 35.3% of them think the contrary, that it is not going to change anything. One of the participants said, “*the border should be militarized, a wall by itself will not work*”. Yet, we have to remind that that 28 participants on 51 believe that building a border is necessary.

For one of the interviews I conducted, the respondent argued that “as a 4th generation native Texan whose family still holds an original Texas land grant in North Texas, and a graduate of Texas A&M in Hort. Science, I have watched in my lifetime the "invasion" of this country by illegals from South of the border decimate my originally chosen professions. [...] It is my shared belief with huge numbers of Americans that the entire country of Mexico has become a de facto narco-terrorism state, way more deadly to the USA than Syria, Afghanistan or Iraq”. Another says: “The War on Drugs is a huge failure, millions of our young are drug addicts with the evil Mexican cartels their suppliers”. This is obviously non-sense, since there has never been a successful terrorist attack on the US territory involving the crossing of the U.S.-Mexico border. Instead Mexico and the United States are cooperating closely to prevent narco-trafficking, and as Christopher Wilson argues in his article “Five myths about the US-Mexico border”, “Security improvements at ports of entry and cooperation with Mexican officials may contribute to a comprehensive anti-opioid strategy, but a border wall would not” (Wilson, 2018).

The use of the term “evil” is almost puerile and caricatural: the evil Mexicans against the nice and brave Americans (and especially, Texans!), a simplistic dichotomy which is perpetuating in the minds of many “native” US citizens. Also, the notion of invasion has been found a lot in the opinion about the border: to fight this feeling of being invaded, we have to protect ourselves and build a protection in order to remain among us.

One of the participants to the survey commented at the end that “based on this and more I am a staunch supporter of border security, it's just too little too late, "The Wall" should have gone up 20 years ago, and I am concerned there are way too many of these illegals in this country”. The thematic of invasion is coming again, even if Central America's guerillas never came in the US via Mexico, even if there are almost no Muslim or African population in Mexico, even if the unauthorized population of America has felt by million persons between 2008 and 2009 (from 12 million to 11 million) and since then this population stagnated around 11 million. As Douglas Massey mentioned it in 2015 in one of his interventions, “the only people crossing at this point are the children of Central American parents who fled the violence of the US intervention in the 1980s, but these people number only in the tens of thousands compared to the hundreds of thousands of unauthorized migrants seeking entry two decades ago” (Massey, 2015).



Photography 3: The border fence and the Rio Grande. View from the bridge between Brownsville and Matamoros.
(Credits: Marie-Arzhelen Le Carrer, 2018)

Yet, and fortunately, not everyone thinks the same about border security, and among those who are not in favor of an excessive militarization (the 7.8% who answered “Less security than what currently exists” to the question “What do you think of the current state of the border? Does it need?”), some are for a further border opening: “*I definitely don’t think that there is a need for more security [...] The militarization, I think, is dangerous, especially for migrants who try to cross. It’s not good for migrants, neither to the US*” and some other believe in total freedom of circulation (“*The border is wide open for birds, snakes, deer, raccoons, skunks, bears, beavers, mountain lions, collared peccaries, insects, fish, and turtles---it should be open for humans, too*”).

III > The role of the border security and press media in political choices

These thoughts that the border isn't enough secured are obviously influencing the political choices of American electors, as in every country, but this is probably more prominent in the United States. Indeed, the arrival of Donald Trump changed the situation and the landscape of traditional political parties, since his main and major promise for his campaign was to build the wall at the US-Mexico border, which generated a vast passion for him among the crowds.

The answers to question 15 are telling us that 78.4% of the voters considers that Trump's campaign promises to build a wall influenced the 2016 US elections. As mentioned by one of the interviewees, this promise corresponded with a lot of "racists' fears", individuals who were maybe not publicly expressing that before. With this proposition, Donald Trump opened a vast field of new possibilities which were before kind of condemned by medias and political discourses, the possibilities to say no to migrants, to assume his fear of the "Other". He succeeded to gather a large panel of electors who, for many of them, were losing faith in their political representatives.

The news media and how they diffuse information aren't neutral neither: there is always biases in the way to present the news, they bring their own subjectivity, and sources of news such as Fox News or CNN are simplifying this information – and sometimes even transmitting "fake news". And this feeling goes in various sense, according to the political situation: for instance, one participant believes that *"the national and even some of the local media are decidedly biased against conservatives. I do not trust them, nor do I trust most Republicans. Many are conservative in name only. Once elected, they do not follow through on commitments and that has been the case for decades"*. In the other side, a Suffolk University/USA Today poll released and published on October 23, 2016, indicates that, at the question "Who do you think the media, including major newspapers and TV stations, would like to see elected president: Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump?", 75.9% of the 1000 persons interrogated said Hillary Clinton, while only 7.9% picked Donald Trump⁶.

During his campaign, Donald Trump has also repeatedly complained and argued that media are against him. In an interview for ABC's "Good Morning America" on October 25, 2016, he announced that "It's the greatest pile-on in American history. [...] I go to rallies and they're starting to hate the media because they see it's all a big lie. Not all, but a lot of it's a big lie"⁷. With this assertion, he creates and amplifies a dichotomy between "good" and "bad" media.

⁶ Suffolk University/USA Today poll of October 2016. Results available here: <https://www.suffolk.edu/academics/10741.php>

⁷ Concha, Joe. October 31, 2016. "Poll: Public overwhelmingly thinks media is in the tank for Clinton" <https://thehill.com/media/303552-poll-public-overwhelmingly-thinks-media-is-in-the-tank-for-clinton#.WBjCWjUuKQM.twitter>

The opposition between “democrat medias” and “republican medias” is very sensitive and has been part of the political game for a long time. One interviewee said *“I hear a lot of discussion among legal Americans about how in the coming years the balance will be shifted such that there will be a new majority of those who were the formerly the minority, and everything will go downhill from there. They expect politically everything will turn democrat”*. Him, clearly, hopes for the contrary.

But these medias that Donald Trump despites that much are also those who created his public image: Trump was not very popular among America’s newspapers, more than 200 of them supported Clinton, while Trump got the support of fewer than 20. But the important thing is that medias, even “against” Trump, gave him so much coverture to criticize him that rather than being appalled, many people liked what they were watching. Besides, this campaign marked the triumph of television, especially with Fox News and CNN. And, as David Sillito is explaining, *“what’s strange about Trump’s speeches is how much of what he says refers to issues and topics that are not part of the mainstream news agenda [...]. Analyze Trump’s speeches and there are references to dozens of stories that are dismissed by most mainstream media but have enthusiastic support in the growing world of alternative news sources”* (Sillito, 2016). These alternative medias support and diffuse the “fake news” (or, at least, adapted news), the conspiracy theories, such Hillary Clinton who would have “invented Isis” (as Trump said in summer 2016) or who has a secret “Satanic network”, or about our topic that nothing has been done for the US-Mexico border and that millions of illegal migrants are invading the country every year. These alternative “alt-right” news source are Infowars⁸, or again Breitbart⁹, whose executive chairman Steve Bannon became the Trump campaign’s chief executive. The role of social medias – especially twitter – was finally essential during the 2016 campaign, and is still essential to understand how fake news or misinformation about the US-Mexico border are transmitted: *“Trump was giving people more to talk about and saying it in a way that resonated. When it came to “share of voice” online, he was winning”* (ibid).

At the question “what is your main source of news?” (multiple choices possible), 29.4% of the participants mentions NPR as the principal media, 27.5% cites Fox News and 17.6% CNN. Among the other possible answers, the local news are coming out a lot, and seems important for the voters (see Figure 4 below). The next question tells us that only 21.6% of the participants admit being influenced by the news media’s discourses, which is very little, and almost the totality of the sample considers that they sometimes question the truth of the information delivered by media (only one person said no). One person said about this topic that he does *“question the truth of news media: for the most part [he] trust them, maybe 98% of the time, but periodically [he does]”*. Are they really not influenced

⁸ <https://www.infowars.com/>

⁹ <https://www.breitbart.com/>. Many are

by them, about that I can't tell, but it seems that American people are becoming more and more critical toward the news media. In the second interview I conducted, the person considered that we are currently living in an era where media can change any perceptions, "for the better or the worst", and in reaction to that the readers evolve their opinions with more critic spirit. Yet, media outlets still obviously influence the readers and electors.

What is your main source of news?

51 réponses

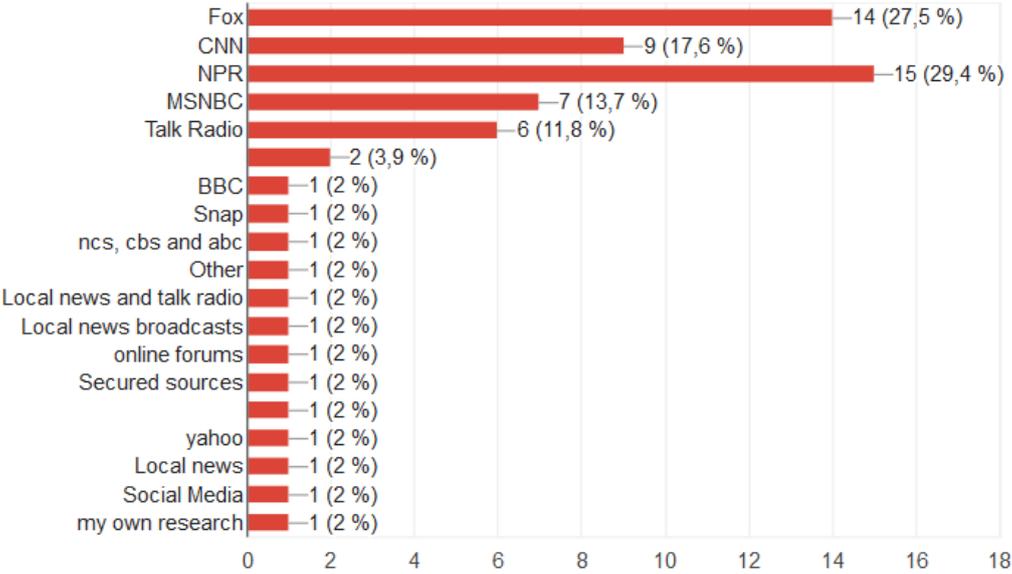


Figure 4: Main sources of news (Source: Le Carrer, 2018)

The last question was about the decision of vote at the US 2016 Presidential elections: it appears that among the participants to the survey, 52.9% voted for Donald Trump (27 on the 51 participants), 21.6% for Hillary Clinton (11 persons), 19.6% did not vote (10), and one voted for Jill Stein (the Green Party), one for Gary Johnson (Libertarian Party) and one for Bernie Sanders (I'm guessing then this person did not vote at the finale election).

Many of these Trump's electors voted for him because of the wall, one event said that "now that we finally have Donald Trump who fulfills promises made in the campaign, I will support him to the end no matter what I may find distasteful regarding his personality or public pronouncements. It is his policies that I support". This term of "no matter what" is telling us the total trust his electors are giving to the Trump administration, in spite of what they can say or do, in spite of the fact that what they describe is the reality or not.

So here we are. But some of these partisans of the border wall – or, in any case, of an increased border militarization – are aware that their attitudes becoming more and more protectionist and

conservative. One of them concluded the interview by saying “*I would argue the vast majority of those from the South are here illegally, and I admit that a portion of my attitude stems from some degree of protectionism. [...] So, there you have it. Can you really expect much different from a 63 years old old male, 4th generation Texan, White Anglo Saxon Protestant (WASP) type? I guess in some ways when I reflect back, it's sad to me how much I have actually become the type of person I probably despised when I was a teenager*”.

So what are the reasons of such behaviors, while the Mexico-US border is presently as controlled as ‘effectively’ as it will ever be?

Part 3. The use of a border wall as a political tool

Despite all of that, and “*although unauthorized migration has fallen, calls for more border security continue to emanate from politicians in both parties*” write Douglas Massey (Massey, 2015), but also from the electors, who still answer positively to the politician calls. Despite Trump’s rhetoric, there is no evidence of an immediate crisis that might call for a drastic response. So why? Why do they still believe that the southern border needs more security since it is already militarized? During this last part, we will give a try to provide the reasons of such attitude.

I > Misinformation: A clear lack of transmission of the border situation

The main factor which contributes to this popular mobilization for a border wall can be identified with the issue of misinformation. A misinformation is a false or incorrect information, which has been spread intentionally or unintentionally: this term can be now attached to the popular notion of “fake news”, while this is not a new practice. This era of technological advances is the perfect period for the propagation of the misinformation, because social media and social networking sites can provide to the readers and user the ability to transmit information without confirming its truth. The fact that anyone can write anything on the internet without qualifications, verified sources or peer review is alimending the misinformation.

Christopher Wilson (deputy director of the Wilson Center’s Mexico Institute) gathered in May 2018 the five more common misinformation – or “myths” – transmitted about the southern border, and destructed each one of them to reestablish and to transmit the truth about the border situation (Wilson, 2018):

- ☪ At the assertion “the border is out of control”, he answers that FBI statistics from 2011 to 2015 are telling us that all of the 23 U.S. counties along the border had “*violent-crime rates lower than the national average for similar counties*”, and with only 300 000 apprehensions in 2017, the border is currently as secured as it has ever been since the 1960’.
- ☪ When people say that “a border wall would stem the opioid epidemic”, he counters by saying that almost all of the traffic is produced and shipped by legal means (directly from China for instance, or in vehicles through official crossings).
- ☪ Also, to contradict the belief that “border enforcement does not curtail illegal crossings”, he argues that “*Enforcement does push migrants to cross in more remote and dangerous areas. But U.S. border officials have become increasingly effective in detaining those seeking to cross the border illicitly, as demonstrated by economists Bryan Roberts and John Whitley*”: indeed, according to a Migration Policy Institute survey from 2016, if 95% of the migrants apprehended and returned over

the Mexico border were saying in 2005 that they would try to cross again, they were only 49% in 2015.

☞ To the fourth myth, “terrorist groups are exploiting a porous border”, he explains that there has never been a “*successful terrorist attack on the United States involving the crossing of the U.S.-Mexico border. Instead, as the State Department has reported, Mexico has cooperated closely with the United States on counterterrorism issues*”.

☞ Finally, to the fifth assertion “Mexico’s border laws are strong, and ours are weak”, he’s arguing that “*rather than a weak legal framework, the United States has an under-resourced asylum and immigration court system. Indeed, asylum applications have more than quadrupled over the past decade, causing a backlog of more than 300 000 cases*” (Wilson, 2018).

Then, if many “fake news”, or wrong information, are diffused everyday about the US-Mexico border, with people claiming the false number of illegal crossings for instance, I believe this is not the main reason of the border wall mobilization. I think the main problem is not that people know wrong things about the border, but that they don’t know anything about the border, and this is that situation which let them trust anything that they read or heard. To fight the misinformation, we have to fight at first the lack of knowledges about the border, and the lack of transmission of knowledges. This phenomenon occurs with the survey and interviews, since most people admit that they don’t know much about the current situation at the border. As mentioned earlier, this is visible with answers at the question below (figure 5), with a majority of people thinking that just a little fencing is present at the border, limiting a bit the crossing.

How would you characterize the current situation regarding border security? There is currently:

51 réponses

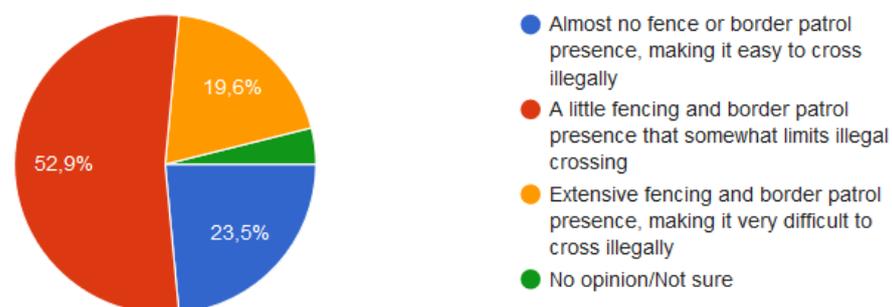


Figure 5: Current situation regarding border security (Le Carrer, 2018)

The problem is that the history of the border, its security evolution and its different migration paradigms are not enough learned in America, and people usually fear what they don't know. As mentioned in the first part, in the early 1980s, the border geography had changed markedly, with a massive urbanization (development of big twin-cities, which propelled by farming, tourism and steady gains in production). Then, the recommitment of US Army forces to the Mexican border began gradually in the early 1980s with the passage of the Defense Authorization Act of 1982 and additional laws were passed by Congress in the early 1990s to strengthen the military's role in the ongoing drug war.



Photography 4 : «Neutral » space between the US and Mexico, dedicated to the Border Patrol (view of the Rio Grande) (Credits: Marie-Arzhelen Le Carrer, 2018)

The fact that most people don't know much about the border militarization is letting them think that almost nothing to secure the border occurred and that they are not protected: them as individuals, but also them as a nation. The push for even more security is due in part to people's misperception of what the fence is currently accomplishing.

Besides, as Franck Clifford is reminding, "the fence is simply one component in the militarization of the border, a \$90 billion project that marshaled thousands of Border Patrol agents and National Guard, deployed manned aircraft and aerial drones, established military-style bases and a network

of radio-transmission towers, and carved thousands of miles of new roads in national parks and wildlife refuges” (Clifford, 2012).

Then, my April field investigation helped me to have a better understanding to what really looks like the US-Mexico border, especially in territories with many affluences such as Brownsville. It is kind of impressive to first see the border at this region, because we don’t understand what they could possibly do to secure the border even more: what they call only a “fence” is impassable. But the population in Brownsville learned how to live with it, and the thousands of commuters who cross the border everyday learn the patience to wait sometimes for hours to cross the only bridge which connect Brownsville to Matamoros (see photos 4 and 5).



Photography 5: The bridge between Brownsville and Matamoros (Credits: Marie-Arzhelen Le Carrer, 2018)

What is ironic is that today many critics of the border fence come from people it was not supposed to protect, such as farmers, ranchers or rural inhabitants, an unintended effect which tells us that the geographical situation is primordial to understand to opinion concerning the US-Mexico border. People living in a (relative) proximity of the border will be more likely to have a negative opinion of the heightened border security, because they live it every day.

II > Alimented by political discourses: the fear of the “other”, the “alien”

Another major reason which make people want a border wall, very diffused among American citizens and almost alimented by the political discourses and news media discourses, is the sort of fear of the “other”, the “alien”, the one who is not American born (or who does not look like him).

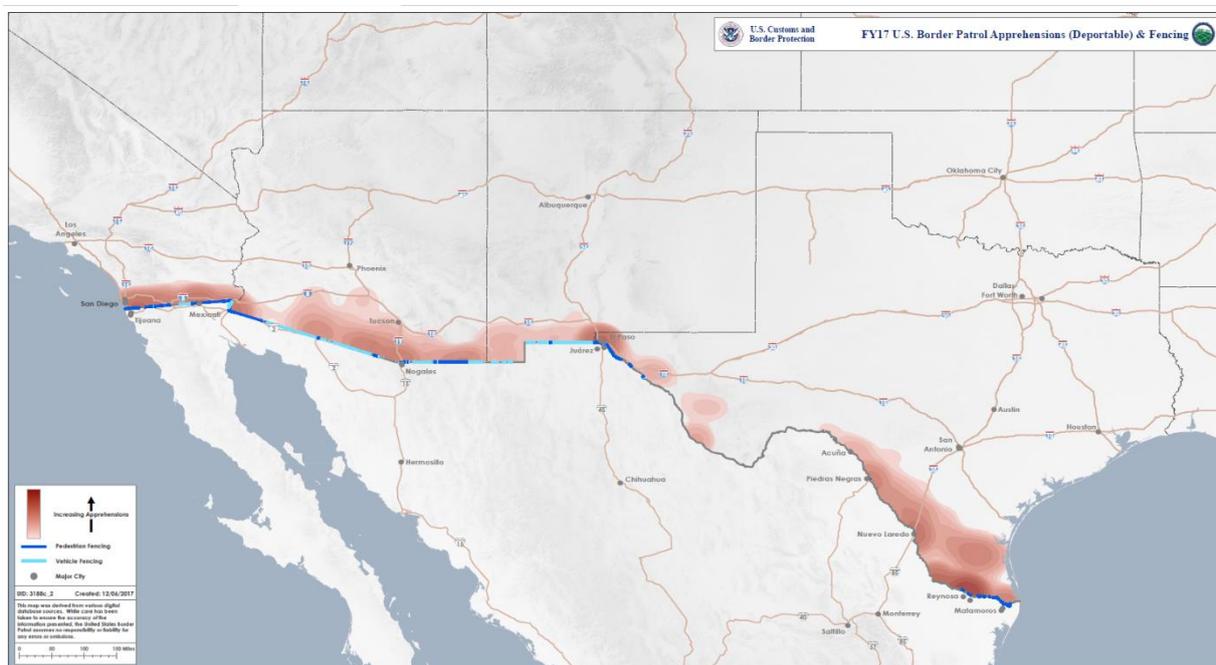
The fear that this other is invading the US territories, stealing the jobs of the good American people, aggressing the citizens, etc. One of the people interviewed said to me that *“the most well-known is how so many of them abuse the social and health care systems, such as pregnant illegals sitting outside our hospitals waiting for labor to occur so they can rush in and be given mandatory free medical care, the same care that US citizens must pay dearly for. Another method of abuse is so many of them apply for and receive the Texas Lone Star card, which allows them to obtain free food. I have stood in line behind them in the supermarket and watched as they use the Lone Star card to pay for all their food in the basket, then simply use a few bucks of their “unreported” tax-free cash to buy their liquor and cigarettes”*. He was persuaded that every migrant is just profiting of the US system, on the back of fair American workers, and that every one of them is a burden.

This feeling of invasion is alimented by many government discourses and positions. For instance, in one of his speeches, in May 2006, President George W. Bush commentated this topic of migration by saying that *“We must face the reality that millions of illegal immigrants are already here”*, stimulating an intense sense of paranoia towards the non-American one, the “alien”.

But this form of rhetoric is not new. For what appears to be centuries, American political leaders transformed the immigration debate as one of national security instead of solidarity, while dehumanizing these persons that they identified as the enemy. In recent years, phrases like America’s “broken borders” have become increasingly commonplace in political discourse. The use of terms and notions like these ones are not the fruit of hazard, they are cleverly chosen by news medias and political discourses to enhance the feeling of distrust and fear. Though this rhetoric is often associated most closely with political firebrands like Donald Trump, there is nothing new to this type of xenophobia towards Latin America.

The fear of the immigrants, the other, is also amplified according to the geographical location, and whether or not the person is in direct contact with migrants. Again, the proximity with the border, like living close to Brownsville, will not have the same impact than living around Dallas or in the countryside: one of the participants, definitely not in favor of the border militarization, said *“and honestly, I mean, anyone who are in favor of the border wall don’t live near the border, so why do that matter them, it doesn’t really impact them”*. And I guess it is kind of true.

Many officials are considering that more security and defense are needed to better organize the immigration that is happening. They want the construction at least of a partial wall or fence, which seems to be needed to funnel immigration to checkpoints, according to them. As another participant of the survey has commented, “*we MUST know who is coming in*”, it seems important to understand, to know who this dangerous alien is, who’s coming into our lands. This fear is sometime exaggerated until its maximum: when you heard someone saying that “*I hear a lot of discussion among legal Americans about how in the coming years the balance will be shifted such that there will be a new majority of those who were the formerly the minority, and everything will go downhill from there*”, you can be worried about the future. They are so worry about the migrants that they believe they will “disappear” one day, and that migrants is going to be the new normal.



Map 2: FY17 U.S. Border Patrol Apprehensions (Deportable) & Fencing (Source: US Customs and Border Protection)

In this context of the fear utilization by political leaders, Donald Trump is not making exception, him who has used the rhetoric of the wall during his whole 2016 campaign to develop an insidious sensation that, yes, this border wall is really needed. As Alex Altman is saying in “No President Has Spread Fear Like Donald Trump”, “*fear has been a fixture of Trump’s oratory since the start of his campaign, which began with an attack on Mexican immigrants*” (Altman, 2017).

We could resume Donald Trump’s political figure during his campaign by saying: “Existing outside the usual boundaries of what’s generally been allowed, the Trump style has three identifying

markers: not exactly entertainment, but entertaining just the same. Not really populist, but popular. Not politics, but very political” (Shafer, 2016)¹⁰.

Indeed, the problem of border security continue to be central to the broader debate over immigration reform that has agitated Washington in recent years and has emerged as a major point during the 2016 presidential campaign. Congressional Republicans have insisted on greater border security before they consider legalizing any immigrants who came to this country without proper documents. While the decreasing number of arrests is not conclusive proof that illegal immigration is down, according to many participants of the study, other less publicized researches has strongly suggested that this is actually the case.

Wayne Cornelius, the director of the Mexican migration field research program at the University of California at San Diego, has interviewed hundreds of people each year from 2005 and 2015 in the Mexican state of Yuca-tan and asks them “*whether they are planning to come to the United States in the next 12 months: In 2006, 24 percent said yes. By 2009, as the U.S. economy was cratering, 8 percent said yes. This year [in 2015], 2.5 percent answered in the affirmative*”.

Yet, the apprehension of the invasion is still mobilizing people to support Trump in order to build a better defense against these innumerable invaders. But, somehow, they don’t really have another choice than to think this way, for many of them: we mentioned in the previous part the importance of some alternative “alt-right” news media such as InfoWars or Breitbart. Well, whether it is in these media outlets, or in other more traditional such as Fox News or CNN, when you read some big titles like “Mexican Cartel Kills Border State Cop in Wave of Targeted Attacks”, or again “Mexican Cartel Retakes Border City after Military Retreat” (articles from Breitbart both from October 10, 2018¹¹) all the time and every day, you obviously have negative image of the border security and of Mexican people (or migrants in general) which is constructing in your mind.

¹⁰ Shafer, Jack. June 2016. Did we create Trump? <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/04/did-media-reporters-create-trump-2016-campaign-213840>

¹¹ I have to precise that it was the first articles I saw when I opened their website. Available at: <https://www.breitbart.com/border/2018/10/10/mexican-cartel-kills-border-state-cop-in-wave-of-targeted-attacks/> and <https://www.breitbart.com/border/2018/10/10/mexican-cartel-retakes-border-city-after-military-retreat/>

III > Discussions and limits of the study

This study was led in the risk of an exaggeration, almost caricatural, of the standard elector of Donald Trump. I did it this way in order to demonstrate in what extent the fact that so many people still want to secure more and more the US-Mexico border while it is already highly militarized is a bit absurd. It is obviously not the way everyone is thinking in Texas. Above all, for this master thesis, I wanted to focus on the persons who wanted to increase the militarization, instead of the opposite, and the reasons which push them to do so.

Then, I had multiple comments on my survey saying things like, among others, “Trump is clueless about the Texas-Mexico border. Yes, we need security. No, not all Mexicans are criminals. I lived in Mexico for a year. Trump is an embarrassment” or “I don’t mind anyone coming to the United States. I just want everyone to enter the United States legally”. Indeed, if there were 26 persons who answered “yes” at the question “Do you think a border wall at the US-Mexico border is necessary?”, there were also 19 other persons to say the contrary, which is noticeable.

Do you think a border wall at the US-Mexico border is necessary?

51 réponses

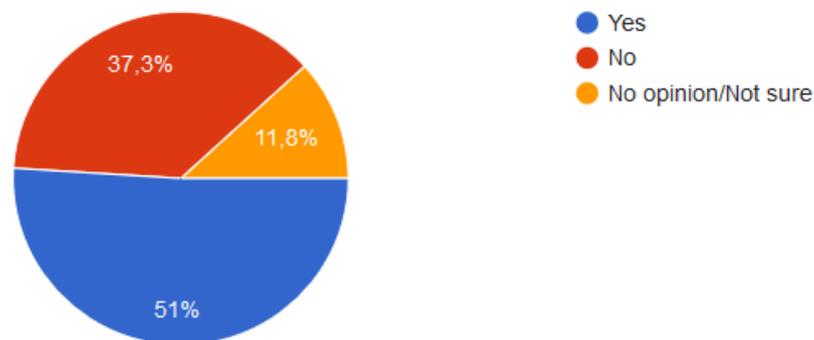


Figure 6: Repartition of opinions on the border wall (Le Carrer, 2018)

Yet, if the results of the survey were a good sample of the Texan vision of the US-Mexico border issue, with very various points of view, I am aware of the very few numbers of respondents to the questionnaire – only 51 – which is making the study a bit weak, and probably with very little value. A good deepening of the study would be to find other ways to diffuse the survey, in a larger extent of persons.

With the benefit of hindsight, I would also modify the writing of some questions in order to make them more relevant, especially those about what people do really know of the border militarization

history, and the questions about the news media and their influence. The same logic is found for the semi-conducted interviews, but if there were even less respondents than for the survey, it was much more rewarding regarding the exchanges which have followed.

At the end, with this study, I bring another angle of view concerning the various researches about the US-Mexico security border, by giving the reasons of such infatuations for Trump's promise to build a border wall while the border is already militarized, and I hope it could open other possibilities to invest the topic.

Conclusions

We have to face it: whatever are the virtues or the vices of this wall, it has massively become political symbol, and a point of rally. In one side President Trump and the Republicans love it; in the other Democrats and immigration groups despise it. In light of these facts, the debate is backward. Republicans in the House of Representatives are focused on further militarizing the border against the people who are no longer crossing it; at the same time, they are loath to do anything about the millions of real undocumented immigrants who are the legacy of the last buildup.

If we give attention to the financial part, we can notice that, even if the number of illegal border crossers decreased to unprecedented levels, the US are still spending more money than ever on border security (Massey, 2015). As a result, whereas the cost per apprehension was just \$90 in 1986, it had reached \$10,431 by 2011. But the most startling turn in these militarization policies is the dramatic rise of deaths at the border, and Massey was then writing in 2015: *“Far more troubling than the wasted money, however, is the waste in lives, for even though the number of attempted border crossings is way down the number of border deaths is way up. Whereas there were 139 border deaths and 1.7 million border apprehensions in 1986 there were 477 deaths but only 365,000 apprehensions in 2012. The correlation between the Border Patrol budget and the number of border deaths is 0.80. How many more people have to die before the political theater of border enforcement ends its run on the national stage?”*. Indeed, the phenomenon has only been worse and wore since then, and we can wonder what kind of more dramatic event we have to wait until someone is reacting.

Even Brandon Judd, president of the National Border Patrol Council, said in April 2017 that he *“will not advocate for 2,000 miles’ worth of border. That is just not necessary”* (Geraghty, 2018).

In spite of a lot of literature about the border identity and the perception of the border, there are only a few studies to debate about the current evolution of the border, the border militarization, its impact(s) on people’ points of view and why it is still such a powerful tool to incite people to support the Trump’s administration. Thus, the present study focused on perceptions of Texan people about the border militarization, and the reasons which make that the border wall is still such a powerful tool to rally people in border states given it already exists (as a symbol, with the fence, but also in reality since it is highly dangerous to cross illegally the border nowadays).

At the end, this project allowed me to understand better the role of security discourses in everyday politics, and to add more information and understanding about the use of the “wall” as a political and ideological tool.

I distinguished mainly two major reasons of this enthusiasm for a border wall construction, which are: 1) the lack of information and knowledges about the border situation, 2) the use of this lack by political discourses and news media to generate and nourish a feeling of fear of the “Other” (with a big “O”), the “alien”.

It occurs that it is essential for the United States to start an action in order to fight back the many stereotypes, with strong and logical argumentations. What kind of stereotypes? Stereotypes which are saying that previous governments did nothing to secure the southern border, while it is obviously not true, or which consider every migrant (especially illegal) as a potential invader; that kind of stereotypes. Otherwise American citizens risk to fall more and more in xenophobic and racist logics of action. And I believe the fight has to start with education, especially education to the history of the US-Mexico border.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Border Patrol data

a) Number of illegal aliens apprehensions at the Southwest border by Fiscal year



United States Border Patrol Southwest Border Sectors

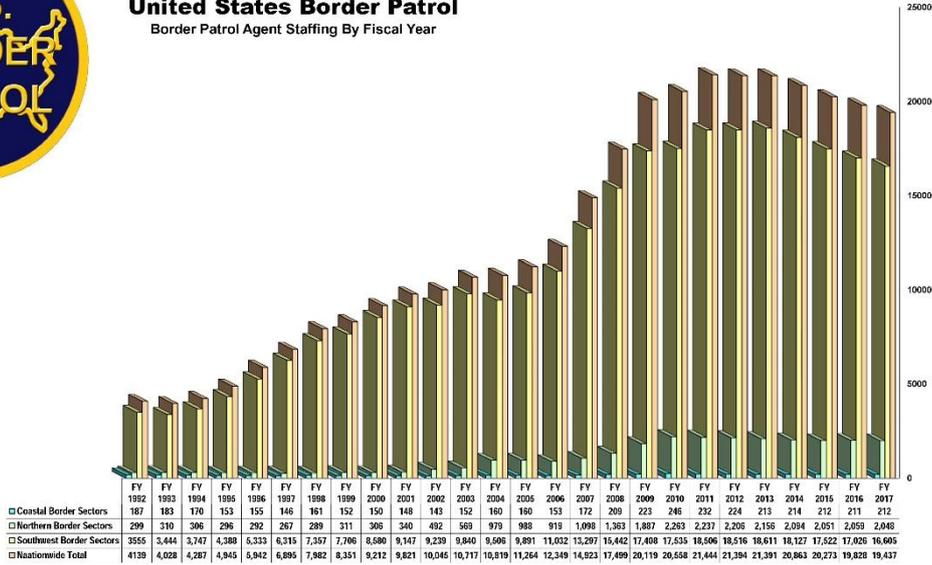
Total Illegal Alien Apprehensions By Fiscal Year (Oct. 1st through Sept. 30th)

Fiscal Year	Big Bend (formerly Marfa)	Del Rio	El Centro	El Paso	Laredo	Rio Grande Valley (formerly McAllen)	San Diego	Tucson	Yuma	Southwest Border Total
2017	6,002	13,476	18,633	25,193	25,460	137,562	26,086	38,657	12,847	303,916
2016	6,366	23,078	19,448	25,634	36,562	186,830	31,891	64,891	14,170	408,870
2015	5,031	19,013	12,820	14,495	35,888	147,257	26,290	63,397	7,142	331,333
2014	4,096	24,255	14,511	12,339	44,049	256,393	29,911	87,915	5,902	479,371
2013	3,684	23,510	16,306	11,154	50,749	154,453	27,496	120,939	6,106	414,397
2012	3,964	21,720	23,916	9,678	44,872	97,762	28,461	120,000	6,500	356,873
2011	4,036	16,144	30,191	10,345	36,053	59,243	42,447	123,285	5,833	327,577
2010	5,288	14,694	32,562	12,251	35,287	59,766	68,565	212,202	7,116	447,731
2009	6,360	17,082	33,521	14,999	40,569	60,989	118,721	241,673	6,951	540,865
2008	5,391	20,761	40,961	30,312	43,658	75,473	162,390	317,696	8,363	705,005
2007	5,536	22,920	55,883	75,464	56,714	73,430	152,460	378,239	37,992	858,638
2006	7,520	42,636	61,465	122,256	74,840	110,528	142,104	392,074	118,549	1,071,972
2005	10,536	68,506	55,722	122,679	75,346	134,186	126,904	439,079	138,438	1,171,396
2004	10,530	53,794	74,467	104,399	74,706	92,947	138,608	491,771	98,060	1,139,282
2003	10,319	50,145	92,099	88,816	70,521	77,749	111,515	347,263	56,638	905,065
2002	11,392	66,985	108,273	94,154	82,095	89,927	100,681	333,648	42,654	929,809
2001	12,087	104,875	172,852	112,857	87,068	107,844	110,075	449,675	78,385	1,235,718
2000	13,689	157,178	238,126	115,696	108,973	133,243	151,681	616,346	108,747	1,643,679
1999	14,952	156,653	225,279	110,857	114,004	169,151	182,267	470,449	93,388	1,537,000
1998	14,509	131,058	226,695	125,035	103,433	204,257	248,092	387,406	76,195	1,516,680
1997	12,692	113,280	146,210	124,376	141,893	243,793	283,889	272,397	30,177	1,368,707
1996	13,214	121,137	66,873	145,929	131,841	210,553	483,815	305,348	28,310	1,507,020
1995	11,552	76,490	37,317	110,971	93,305	169,101	524,231	227,529	20,894	1,271,390
1994	13,494	50,036	27,654	79,688	73,142	124,251	450,152	139,473	21,211	979,101
1993	15,486	42,289	30,058	285,781	82,348	109,048	531,689	92,639	23,548	1,212,886
1992	13,819	33,414	29,852	248,642	72,449	85,889	565,581	71,036	24,892	1,145,574
1991	8,764	38,554	30,450	211,775	72,293	87,319	540,347	59,728	28,646	1,077,876
1990	7,180	41,373	28,708	223,219	89,052	97,018	473,323	53,061	36,387	1,049,321
1989	5,560	46,786	27,524	168,105	75,292	79,650	366,757	51,445	31,387	852,506
1988	6,209	59,403	41,179	182,566	69,912	60,294	431,592	48,683	42,723	942,561
1987	9,586	64,934	55,291	231,994	74,139	71,038	500,327	47,481	67,277	1,122,067
1986	23,796	123,952	95,186	312,892	143,685	121,783	629,656	71,675	93,219	1,615,844
1985	23,667	99,280	71,519	240,350	114,931	82,826	427,772	55,269	67,737	1,183,351
1984	22,196	87,058	68,563	212,652	87,059	66,860	407,828	46,283	59,777	1,058,276
1983	20,829	83,733	71,897	205,944	65,279	57,706	429,121	35,870	63,595	1,033,974
1982	20,268	48,753	55,440	152,882	40,385	32,533	314,979	32,344	48,236	745,820
1981	17,584	50,455	59,774	146,872	36,910	32,809	326,836	33,085	45,483	749,808
1980	15,602	50,762	57,009	127,488	39,167	35,012	285,984	33,668	45,862	690,554
1979	20,116	50,262	55,532	149,722	50,666	41,915	337,930	37,075	52,580	795,798
1978	23,501	54,098	42,118	174,010	36,627	45,201	325,557	34,991	53,338	789,441
1977	22,239	42,322	38,421	145,059	27,289	38,704	337,195	33,295	48,669	733,193
1976	19,846	32,988	32,327	114,886	24,665	38,839	266,709	34,641	42,598	607,499
1975	20,472	32,008	27,217	99,000	26,199	31,300	185,499	39,941	50,628	512,264
1974	23,291	44,098	26,143	112,432	30,061	38,668	196,981	50,108	49,824	571,606
1973	22,378	42,232	23,125	82,386	23,854	37,092	128,889	44,824	36,286	441,066
1972	20,269	31,110	15,327	78,168	21,781	29,338	73,115	32,272	19,946	321,326
1971	22,026	25,780	14,292	57,796	17,665	28,281	59,375	23,548	15,228	263,991
1970	16,770	18,711	12,028	43,640	11,569	20,708	50,663	14,222	13,469	201,780
1969	11,973	12,991	9,195	31,159	8,129	14,076	33,311	8,301	8,833	137,968
1968	8,834	9,576	8,358	19,408	5,715	10,093	24,116	4,537	6,004	96,641
1967	7,049	7,906	6,974	13,656	4,178	9,029	17,844	3,068	4,269	73,973
1966	6,592	6,845	6,916	10,119	3,658	8,706	13,362	2,392	4,050	62,640
1965	3,973	4,292	5,344	6,355	2,310	8,057	6,558	1,480	1,651	40,020
1964	3,146	4,489	2,640	4,486	2,168	9,173	4,521	1,200	696	32,519
1963	2,026	4,417	1,690	3,813	1,753	9,992	3,768	1,466	719	29,644
1962	1,431	3,250	1,426	3,304	1,274	5,569	3,091	1,247	511	21,103
1961	954	3,458	1,878	3,540	1,172	6,713	2,279	1,178	573	21,745
1960	732	3,023	1,839	3,630	1,024	5,515	3,371	1,255	633	21,022

b) Number of Border Patrol Agent Staffing by Fiscal year



United States Border Patrol
Border Patrol Agent Staffing By Fiscal Year



United States Border Patrol

Border Patrol Agent Staffing By Fiscal Year

	FY 1992	FY 1993	FY 1994	FY 1995	FY 1996	FY 1997	FY 1998	FY 1999	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	FY 2005	FY 2006	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	
Coastal Border Sectors																											
Livermore *	55	52	51	47	38	23	26	22	17	12	11	7	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Miami	58	58	55	51	52	48	56	53	56	58	61	65	80	78	81	81	86	91	96	94	92	92	94	96	105	111	
New Orleans	41	41	38	34	41	40	40	43	41	41	43	44	41	46	41	52	58	65	78	70	72	62	62	66	67	63	
Ramey	33	32	26	21	24	35	39	34	36	37	28	36	34	36	31	39	65	67	72	68	60	59	59	50	39	38	
Northern Border Sectors																											
Blaine	39	45	43	49	45	38	38	48	45	48	81	89	127	129	121	133	182	241	327	331	323	315	314	297	295	296	
Buffalo	33	33	31	30	32	33	35	35	35	37	60	73	110	121	112	166	204	289	320	311	311	297	288	283	285	277	
Detroit	29	31	31	29	28	27	28	35	35	38	64	80	128	130	117	167	185	318	430	409	409	410	406	411	411	408	
Grand Forks	28	30	30	28	31	28	28	28	25	32	45	53	118	109	98	116	131	169	213	213	199	189	185	174	181	189	
Havre	32	30	30	29	28	25	25	25	29	31	42	52	108	100	93	103	119	156	221	213	208	192	164	167	175	183	
Houlton	35	34	35	31	30	26	29	31	29	33	47	47	120	118	104	113	137	190	203	201	200	202	193	193	184	173	
Spokane	35	36	36	32	32	32	36	35	34	39	63	78	120	120	119	132	186	232	255	257	246	247	244	229	234	230	
Swanton	68	71	70	68	66	58	70	74	74	82	90	97	147	161	155	178	219	292	284	302	306	304	299	297	284	292	
Southwest Border Sectors																											
Big Bend (formerly Marfa)	108	134	129	133	134	135	164	144	196	194	253	230	239	220	246	336	421	682	672	667	693	623	588	549	511	500	
Del Rio	317	297	299	399	406	471	589	639	758	893	972	980	933	907	935	1,138	1,427	1,682	1,650	1,626	1,655	1,598	1,537	1,536	1,439	1,391	
El Centro	217	198	194	190	189	249	383	423	502	589	683	755	734	694	713	894	1,080	1,187	1,181	1,164	1,168	1,141	1,074	1,004	927	870	
El Paso	627	608	643	746	841	919	972	957	1,036	1,086	1,122	1,198	1,094	1,330	1,741	2,251	2,506	2,712	2,752	2,738	2,718	2,631	2,522	2,364	2,240	2,182	
Laredo	364	353	337	421	415	451	628	685	806	921	969	1,025	981	937	925	1,206	1,636	1,863	1,858	1,871	1,879	1,804	1,785	1,670	1,670	1,666	
Rio Grande Valley (formerly McAllen)	418	393	392	474	507	760	1,107	1,166	1,368	1,451	1,484	1,524	1,439	1,380	1,431	1,822	2,063	2,422	2,441	2,504	2,546	3,086	3,064	3,056	3,135	3,130	
San Diego	1,009	992	1,290	1,433	1,865	2,281	2,274	2,136	2,053	2,004	1,807	1,972	1,651	1,562	1,671	2,019	2,328	2,570	2,594	2,669	2,623	2,572	2,546	2,430	2,325	2,199	
Tucson	300	287	282	407	702	875	1,013	1,328	1,548	1,686	1,626	1,838	2,104	2,324	2,596	2,806	3,049	3,318	3,353	4,239	4,176	4,135	4,052	3,991	3,834	3,691	
Yuma	195	182	182	185	174	175	227	228	313	323	323	358	331	547	774	825	932	972	987	969	954	911	859	804	829	859	

* Livermore Sector closed after FY 2004

Annex 2: Survey script

Survey

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Question 1:

Gender: Male Female Other

Question 2:

How old are you? _____

Question 3:

Are you: a student a worker unemployed a pensioner other: _____

Question 4:

Are you originally from Texas? Yes No

Question 5:

If yes, are you from the border region? Yes No

Question 6:

If no, how long have you lived in Texas? _____

Question 7:

Have you ever been to the US-Mexico border? Yes No

THEME 1: BORDER PERCEPTIONS AND US-MEXICAN BORDER KNOWLEDGES

Question 8: Do you think a border wall at the US-Mexico border is necessary?

- Yes
- No
- No opinion/Not sure

Question 9: What do you think of the current state of the border? Does it need:

- More security than what currently exists
- The current level of security is good as it is
- Less security than what currently exists
- No opinion/Not sure

Question 10: How would you characterize the current situation regarding border security? There is currently:

- Almost no fence or border patrol presence, making it easy to cross illegally
- A little fencing and border patrol presence that somewhat limits illegal crossing
- Extensive fencing and border patrol presence, making it very difficult to cross illegally
- No opinion/Not sure

Question 11: When do you think heightened border security started?

- Before 1980
- Between 1980 and 1989
- Between 1990 and 1999
- Between 2000 and 2018
- I don't know

Question 12: As of 2018, approximately how many of the 2000 miles of the US-Mexico border is currently fenced?

- None
- 300 miles
- 650 miles
- 900 miles
- More

THEME 2: BORDER SECURITY AND POLITICAL DISCOURSES

Question 13: Do you support the recent decision of Governor Dan Patrick to send national guard troops to the US-Texas border?

- Yes
- No
- No opinion/Not sure

Question 14: Do you think that building a border wall will:

- Improve border security
- Not change anything
- No opinion/Not sure

Question 15: Do you think Trump's campaign promises to build a wall influenced the 2016 US elections?

- Yes
- No

Question 16: What is your main source of news? (Check all that apply)

- Fox
- CNN
- NPR
- MSNBC
- Talk Radio
- Spanish language news (Telemundo, Univision, TV Azteca, etc)
- Other: _____

Question 17: Do you considered yourself to be influenced the news media's discourses?

- Yes
- No

Question 18: Do you sometimes question the truth of the information delivered by the media?

- Yes
- No

Question 19: If yes, do you: (Check all that apply)

- Verify the source(s)
- Check on what is reported in other media outlets
- Read official statements
- Discuss what is reported with family/friends
- Other: _____

Question 20: Who did you vote for in the 2016 presidential election?

- Donald Trump
- Hillary Clinton
- Did not vote
- Other: _____

Question 21: Do you have something to add to the survey?

Annex 3: Interview script

Interview script

Interview n° : _____

Date and place: _____

Hour: _____

DEMOGRAPHICS:

- Gender: Male Female Other
- How old are you?
- Are you: a student a worker unemployed a pensioner other: _____
- Are you originally from Texas? Yes No
 - o If yes, are you from the border region? Yes No
 - o If no, how long have you lived in Texas?
 - o If no, have you ever been to the US-Mexico border? Yes No

THEME 1: BORDER PERCEPTIONS AND US-MEXICAN BORDER KNOWLEDGES

Question 1: What do you think of the current state of the US-Mexico border? Does the border need:

- More security than what currently exists
- Less security than what currently exists
- The current level of security is good as it is

a) Why?

Question 2: Do you think a border wall is needed? Yes No Unsure

a) Why or why not?

Question 3: How would you characterize the current situation regarding border security?

Question 4: What do you know about the history of the border militarization?

THEME 2: BORDER SECURITY AND POLITICAL DISCOURSES

Question 1: Do you think the Texas-Mexico border needs more border patrol agents and funding?

Question 2: What do you think will be the impacts of a border wall on security?

Question 3: How do you think the border wall will impact US-Mexican relations?

Question 4: Do you think Trump's campaign promises to build a wall influenced the 2016 US elections?

a) Why or why not?

Question 5: How would you define your view of the news media? Do you feel influenced by news media?

a) Do you sometimes question the truth of the information delivered by the media? If yes, how?

Question 6: What is your main source of news?

Fox CNN NPR MSNBC Talk Radio Spanish language news (Telemundo, TV Azteca, etc) Other: _____

Question 7: Who did you vote for in the 2016 presidential election? (You don't have to answer this question if you don't want to)

Question 8: Anything to add?

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Abstract

Abstract: The US-Mexico border was and still is one of the most controversial and paradoxical borders around the world, at the same time the most crossed on a daily basis, and one of the most secured within the past 30 years. Nowadays, and especially in the context of the election of President Donald Trump, one big paradox is the fact that even if the border is already highly secured and militarized, the campaign promise of Donald Trump to construct a wall at the southern border has been a powerful tool to rally people in border states such as Texas. The present study found two explanations to this issue, with a special focus and a field study in Texas: the first one is the lack of information of Texans people concerning the current border situation and the history of the border militarization, and the second concerns the use of this lack by political discourses and news media to generate and nourish a feeling of fear of the “Other”.

[Full text in English]

Key words: Border; Militarization; United-States / Mexico relations; Texas; International relations; Geopolitics; Migrations

Résumé : La frontière américano-mexicaine était et reste l'une des frontières les plus controversées et paradoxales à travers le monde, à la fois la plus traversée au quotidien et l'une des plus sécurisées au fil des 30 dernières années. De nos jours, et particulièrement dans ce contexte de l'élection du président Donald Trump, un grand paradoxe réside dans le fait que même si la frontière est déjà hautement sécurisée et militarisée, la promesse de campagne de Donald Trump de construire un mur à la frontière mexicaine a été un outil puissant pour rallier les habitants des États frontaliers tels que le Texas. La présente étude distingue deux explications à cette question, avec une attention particulière et une étude de terrain au niveau de l'Etat du Texas : la première est le manque d'informations des Texans sur la situation frontalière actuelle et l'histoire de la militarisation de la frontière, et la seconde concerne l'utilisation de ce manque par les discours politiques et les médias pour générer et nourrir un sentiment de peur de "l'Autre".

[Mémoire rédigé en anglais]

Mots-clés : Frontière ; Militarisation ; Relations Etats-Unis / Mexique ; Texas ; Relations internationales ; Géopolitique ; Migrations