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THE TEXAS NATIONAL GUARD ALONG THE TEXAS-MEXICO BORDER

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The following report is the result of a year-long investigation by graduate students at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. These students were part of a Policy Research Project (PRP) that examined enforcement efforts along the Texas-Mexico border. The students conducted their analysis on two specific actors—the Texas National Guard and the Texas Department of Public Safety—and produced corresponding policy reports. The reports were prepared for the class client: the Texas Immigration Law Council (TxILC), which is a nonpartisan center that coordinates public policy work on immigration and creates resources for legal service providers.

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List of Acronyms

ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
BSOC	Border Security Operations Center
CARES	Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act
CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement
INM	National Migration Institute (<i>Instituto Nacional de Migración</i>)
TDCJ	Texas Department of Criminal Justice

Foreword

The Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs has established interdisciplinary research on policy problems as the core of its educational program. A major element of this program is the nine-month Policy Research Project, during which one or more faculty members direct the research of ten to twenty graduate students of diverse disciplines and academic backgrounds on a policy issue of concern to a government or nonprofit agency. This “client orientation” brings students face-to-face with administrators, legislators, and other officials active in the policy process and demonstrates that research in a policy environment demands special knowledge and skill sets. It exposes students to challenges they will face in relating academic research and complex data to those responsible for the development and implementation of policy, and teaches them how to overcome those challenges.

The curriculum of the LBJ School is intended not only to develop effective public servants, but also to produce research that will enlighten and inform those already engaged in the policy process. The project that resulted in this report has helped to accomplish the first task; it is our hope that the report itself will contribute to the second. Neither the LBJ School nor The University of Texas at Austin necessarily endorses the views or findings of this report.

JR DeShazo
Dean

Executive Summary

Since the 1880s, the United States has treated immigration policy and the corresponding border enforcement as a federal responsibility. While states have periodically supported federal efforts during specific historical moments, their role has traditionally been auxiliary and temporary. Today, the federal agency in charge of enforcing immigration policy at the border is the U.S. Customs and Border Protection and its components of the Border Patrol and Office of Field Operations. These agencies' stated mission is to protect the American people, safeguard the nation's borders, and enhance the United States' economic prosperity by preventing the unauthorized entry of people and contraband and facilitating lawful trade and travel.ⁱ

However, for more than a century, the Texas National Guard—and its earlier form as a state militia—played an active role in defending the Texas frontier. These early activities did not focus on immigration enforcement, and, instead, the soldiers engaged in repelling Native American raids on frontier settlements, suppressing internal uprisings, and defending against incursions along the contested Texas-Mexico border.

In recent years, the National Guard's duties have evolved in response to shifting state and national priorities. Since the early 2000s, Texas authorities and the federal government have repeatedly sent Texas National Guard soldiers to the border to augment federal law enforcement. These soldiers conduct surveillance, construct border barriers, and support Border Patrol agents. Additionally, in March 2021, the Texas National Guard began its most recent and largest sustained deployment, Operation Lone Star, with thousands of soldiers continuously stationed along the border.

This report addresses three questions regarding the Texas National Guard along the Texas-Mexico border. These questions include:

1. How has the Texas National Guard historically engaged with border and migration enforcement in Texas?
2. What role does the Texas National Guard currently play in border enforcement, particularly as part of Operation Lone Star?
3. What have been the outcomes of these enforcement efforts?

To answer these questions, we used a mixed methods approach. Specifically, we reviewed publicly available news articles, press releases, and social media posts, and obtained a National Guard dataset through a public records request to the Texas Military Department. We also conducted ten interviews with a range of individuals, including current and former National Guard soldiers, a Texas government contractor, journalists, an academic, policy experts, and legal professionals.

The report has various findings. First, it finds that although the Texas National Guard has long participated in border-related missions, its historical role was episodic and in direct response to specific security threats. Second, it finds that Operation Lone Star has transformed the National Guard's role along the border, by allocating unprecedented levels of state funding to the Texas Military Department, deploying thousands of troops to the border, and establishing a significant infrastructure presence throughout the borderlands. Third, this transformation has generated a

broad range of effects, touching not only the National Guard and its soldiers, but also migrants, border communities, local government agencies, and state, national and international policy.

This report is structured into three chapters. Chapter One examines the Texas National Guard's historical origins and its evolving role in border operations over more than a century. Chapter Two focuses on the Texas National Guard's role in Operation Lone Star, which is the state's largest border operation to date. Finally, Chapter Three assesses the Texas National Guard's involvement in Operation Lone Star across a range of dimensions.

Chapter One: National Guard Origins and Early Border Activities

Early National Guard History (1636-1795)

The National Guard tradition in the United States can be traced to the seventeenth century and the first American colonies. On December 13, 1636, the Massachusetts Colony organized the first permanent militia in the future U.S. territory.ⁱⁱ This militia was modeled after the British system, which decreed that all able-bodied men between the ages of 16 years old and 60 years old be required to join and defend the settlements.ⁱⁱⁱ The Massachusetts militia was organized into three permanent regiments—North, South, and East—from which several of today’s oldest U.S. military units claim descent.^{liv}

Colonial militias were also quickly expanding across New England. By June 1636, Connecticut settlers had organized militia activities, and in March 1638, Rhode Island also required its townsmen to own weapons and be prepared to fight.^v The militias served as a form of self-defense and played a role during the Pequot Indian War of 1636-1638.^{vi} In 1638, allied colonial militia forces with Native allies, including the Narragansett and Mohegan, defeated the Pequot, and the militia model became an established form of colonial defense.^{vii}

By the mid- to late-1700s, colonial militias had evolved from local defense forces into a central component of American military strategy, particularly during the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783). During the Revolutionary War, local militia units frequently served alongside the Continental Army, providing manpower, experienced officers, and community-based defense forces.^{viii} After U.S. independence from Britain, Americans were wary of standing armies and continued to rely heavily on militias rather than a large permanent national force.^{ix} However, this continued reliance on state militias soon raised concerns about coordination and effectiveness at the national level.

The newly-independent United States recognized the need to better coordinate militia forces across its states and took its first steps toward coordinating the previously decentralized militias.^x On May 8, 1792, Congress passed the Militia Act to create a more standardized system. This law allowed for existing militia units to retain their "customary privileges," such as allowing states to elect their own company-level officers, keeping their own training schedules and regimental structures, and state control in peacetime.^{xi} However, it also established a national organizational framework.^{xii} Additionally, the Militia Act authorized the president to call state militias into federal service during crises.^{xiii}

In 1795, Congress expanded this authority by providing President George Washington with permanent statutory power to command the state militias when necessary.^{2xiv} This legislation established the legal foundation for the federal government’s emergency mobilization powers and marked the transition from colonial militias to a nationalized militia structure.^{xv} However, despite

¹ These are now named the 181st Infantry, the 182nd Infantry, the 101st Field Artillery, and the 101st Engineer Battalion of the Massachusetts Army National Guard.

² This meant that the president did not need congressional approval to reauthorize this power, and it also ensured that the federal government could override state resistance and retain full control over federalized troops.

this new legal framework, militias remained largely under state control, and their organization and effectiveness continued to vary widely.

Texas Frontier Militias (1820s-1870s)

In Texas, the militia tradition can be traced back to the 1820s. In September 1821, Mexico established its independence from Spain, and the country's new 1824 Constitution combined the former Spanish province of Texas with the Mexican state of Coahuila to form *Coahuila y Tejas*.^{xvi} The new state was sparsely populated and geographically distant from the political center in Mexico City, leaving it vulnerable to raids by the Comanche and other Native nations.

To stabilize and develop its northern frontier, the Spanish and then the new Mexican government adopted the *empresario* system, and granted large tracts of land to individuals who agreed to recruit and settle families in the region. In January 1821, the Spanish colonial government granted Moses Austin an *empresario* grant for central and eastern Texas.^{xvii} However, Moses died in June 1821, and his son Stephen F. Austin took over the *empresario* grant. Soon after, Austin brought the first 297 U.S. settler families to Texas.^{xviii}

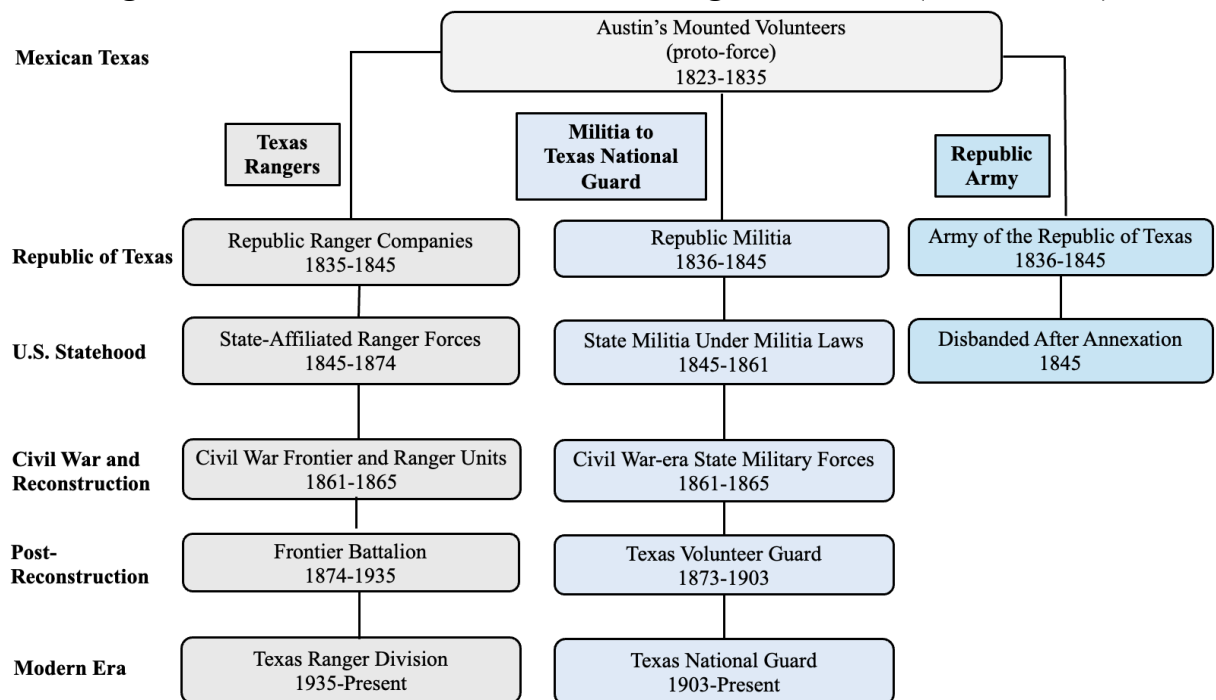
Figure 1: Map of *Coahuila y Tejas* (1824-1835)



Source: *Wikimedia Commons* ^{xix}

In the absence of a formal Mexican military presence, early Texas settlers developed their own locally organized defense forces to protect the frontier communities. On August 4, 1823, Stephen F. Austin organized the first informal defense force of ten men.^{xx} These corps disbanded shortly after their conception, but Austin soon issued a new call for a defense force.^{xxi} In 1826, Austin and the six other district leaders agreed that they would maintain a force of 20 to 30 men to protect the settlements.^{xxii} Under Austin's plan, every landowner (or a paid substitute) was required to serve one month of duty for every half-league of land that they owned. This force eventually evolved into the first Texas Rangers.^{xxiii} However, it also established the first structured, semi-permanent militia unit in what would become the state of Texas.

Figure 2: Timeline of Militias and Texas Rangers Evolution (1823-Present)



Source: Authors' elaboration

On March 2, 1836, Texas declared independence from Mexico and formed the Republic of Texas.^{xxiv} Texas' new Constitution established the Texas Militia, Texas Army, Texas Navy, and the Texas Rangers as the bodies tasked with providing security to the republic.^{xxv} These forces served distinct functions. The Texas Army was a standing professional force intended for conventional defense of the republic. While the Texas Militia was a broader citizen force comprised of all free able-bodied male residents between the ages of 17 years old and 50 years old.^{xxvi} This latter force could be called upon to enforce the law, suppress insurrections, and repel invasions.^{xxvii} However, over the following two years, the Texas Army faced significant financial constraints, leaving the Texas Militia and the Texas Rangers as the primary forces guarding the republic's frontier.^{xxviii}

In the late 1830s, Texas leaders attempted to centralize frontier defense. In December 1838, Texas' second president, Mirabeau Lamar, moved to revitalize the Texas Army.^{xxix} The centerpiece of Lamar's plan was the Frontier Regiment, which was a 15-company army force stationed at forts stretching from the Red River to the Nueces River.^{xxx} Lamar also significantly expanded the Texas Rangers, and obtained legislative authorization to raise additional companies for aggressive operations against the Cherokee and the Comanche.^{xxxi} However, the Frontier Regiment never grew beyond half of its authorized size, and Texas' Congress soon stopped appropriating funds for the force.^{xxxii} This meant that frontier defense once again fell primarily to the Texas Rangers, Texas Militia, and mounted volunteers.^{xxxiii}

On December 29, 1845, the United States annexed Texas as the country's 28th state, and its militia system was incorporated into the broader U.S. framework.^{xxxiv} This meant that Texas maintained responsibility for organizing, equipping, and commanding its militia forces unless they were

federalized during wartime.^{xxxv} However, Mexico refused to recognize Texas's annexation and rejected the state's claims that its southern border was the Rio Grande. Instead, Mexico continued to consider the more inland Nueces river as the Texas-Mexico border, creating tension between the two nations.^{xxxvi} In April 1846, the border dispute came to a head when Mexican forces crossed the Rio Grande and attacked a U.S. Army patrol. In response, Congress declared war on Mexico.^{xxxvii} On February 2, 1848, the war concluded with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and Mexico recognized the Rio Grande as Texas' southern boundary.^{xxxviii}

After the Mexican-American War, Texas leaders shifted their focus back to fighting the region's Indian tribes and outlaws.^{xxxix} The United States Army also assumed primary responsibility for frontier defense.^{xl} However, the Civil War and Reconstruction fundamentally disrupted Texas's existing militia and Ranger systems, leading to their reorganization in the postwar period. During the Civil War, the Texas Militia was redirected toward coastal defense and suppression of Union loyalists.^{xli} It was only after Reconstruction that the Texas Militia returned to its traditional defensive roles of repelling invasions and suppressing insurrections.^{xlii}

Federal Legislation Formalizes National Guard Units Across the Country

Post-Civil War Shift (1870s–1898)

Beginning in the 1870s, many states gradually moved away from compulsory militia service for all able-bodied men and shifted toward volunteer companies.^{xliii} These companies often adopted the name "National Guard."^{xliv} However, because these units remained under state control, their organization, training, and equipment varied widely.^{xlv} These challenges became especially evident in 1898 during the Spanish-American War, when the War Department struggled to mobilize, equip, and integrate state militiamen alongside full-time Regular Army units. The difficulties of this mobilization exposed the uneven quality and preparedness of National Guard forces compared to professional soldiers.^{xlvi} In response to these shortcomings, federal officials increasingly pushed for reforms to standardize and strengthen the militia system at the national level, culminating in a series of legislative efforts in the early twentieth century.

Federal Reform Era (1903–1908)

On January 21, 1903, Congress passed the Dick Act to impose greater federal standardization and control over the United States' militia system.^{xlvii} The Dick Act of 1903 formally repealed the Militia Acts of 1795, promoted universal training standards, and incentivized a structure similar to the United States Army. It also allowed for the federal government to mobilize the state militias quickly under certain conditions.^{xlviii} Specifically, the Dick Act includes a provision that the president can federalize the state militia system "whenever the United States is invaded, or in danger of invasion from any foreign nation, or of rebellion against the authority of the Government of the United States, or the President is unable, with the other forces at his command to execute the laws of the Union in any part thereof."^{xlix} While the Dick Act significantly strengthened federal authority and improved standardization, further amendments would soon expand these powers and clarify the militia system's structure.

Five years after the passage of the Dick Act, the 1908 Militia Act introduced a series of amendments. The 1908 revisions outlined the division between the organized militia (the National Guard) and the unorganized reserve militia, while reinforcing federal standards by requiring that the National Guard's organization, armament, and discipline conform to those of the U.S. Army.ⁱ The amendments also removed legal restrictions on federal service, allowing the National Guard to be deployed outside the United States. These changes expanded federal authority over National Guards.^{li} However, despite these reforms, the National Guard's readiness and resources continued to vary significantly among states.

Crisis and Modernization (1915-1916)

At the turn of the twentieth century, the United States entered a period of mounting international conflicts. On May 7, 1915, in the midst of World War I, a German submarine sank the *RMS Lusitania*, killing 1,198 passengers and crew, including 128 Americans, and intensifying fears that the United States could be drawn into the European conflict.^{lii} Less than a year later, in March 1916, Pancho Villa crossed the United States' southern border and attacked Columbus, New Mexico, killing approximately 18 Americans and burning much of the town.^{liii} These events underscored the nation's vulnerability and highlighted the need for a more effective and coordinated military system.

In response to these vulnerabilities, the federal government enacted sweeping reforms to strengthen and modernize the National Guard. On June 3, 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed the first National Defense Act, which formalized the "National Guard" name into law.^{liv} The Act significantly expanded federal authority over the National Guard and integrated it more closely into the U.S. military framework. It also standardized training and personnel standards, provided guardsmen with Army uniforms, and provided funding and equipment to 450,000 troops over five years.^{lv} Additionally, the Act established the Militia Bureau within the War Department and provided that, when called into national service, the National Guard would serve as part of the U.S. Army rather than under state authority.^{lvi} With these reforms, the National Guard was fully integrated into the national military system, marking the culmination of a decades-long shift from decentralized militias to a federally coordinated force.

The National Guard's First Federal Border Deployment (1916)

In the months following Pancho Villa's attack on Columbus, New Mexico, President Woodrow Wilson ordered Major General John J. Pershing to lead soldiers into Mexico in an attempt to capture Pancho Villa (named the "Punitive Expedition").^{lvii} While the group was able to push Pancho Villa and his men deeper into Mexico, the expedition failed to capture him. The expedition also pulled soldiers away from the border and left large swathes of the U.S. frontier completely unmanned.^{lviii}

On May 8, 1916, following attacks by Mexican raiders in the small Texas towns of Glenn Springs and Boquillas, President Wilson mobilized 5,000 National Guardsmen from Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico.^{lix} However, it quickly became apparent that 5,000 men would not be enough to defend the border. On June 18, 1916, only two weeks after the passage of the 1916 National Defense Act, President Wilson called up an additional 110,000 National Guard soldiers for border

service.^{lx} Given the quick turnaround, the majority of the U.S. states, especially the larger ones, had not yet implemented the new National Guard standards, resulting in a rocky deployment process.

During the National Guard's first deployment to the border, the states experienced various logistical hurdles. Overall, smaller states could mobilize more quickly, while bigger states had to contend with arranging transportation to the mobilization sites for large numbers of soldiers. Nearly all states faced issues with procuring sufficient equipment and transportation to the border.^{lxi} Ultimately, the National Guard units reached the border and assumed a defensive mission—protecting U.S. towns, railroads, and ranches—rather than undertaking offensive operations into Mexico.^{lxii} The deployment was short-lived as President Wilson pulled the guardsmen back from the border in February 1917, in preparation for their deployment to Europe the following year for World War I.^{lxiii}

The National Guard's Expanding Border Authority (1950s-1990s)

Following World War II, the United States undertook a sweeping reorganization of its military and national security apparatus. Since the passage of the National Defense Act of 1916, Congress had passed nearly 400 provisions regarding the organization of the U.S. Army, some of which contradicted each other.^{lxiv} Additionally, President Harry S. Truman and others took the view that the different components of the U.S. military had been insufficiently integrated to wage World War II effectively, and in response Congress passed the National Security Act of 1947, which established the Department of Defense to provide a unified direction for the military.^{lxv}

On August 10, 1956, Congress passed Public Law No. 84-1028 as a part of this broader reorganization effort. This law consolidated existing laws into Title 10, governing the regular armed forces, and Title 32, governing the National Guard.^{lxvi} The National Guard forces operate under Title 10 when the president federalizes National Guard units. In this status, National Guard soldiers are federally funded and operate under the federal chain of command.^{lxvii} By contrast, when National Guard forces operate under Title 32 authority, they remain under the command and control of their respective state governors but receive federal funding.^{lxviii} The third duty status is state active duty, which is when a state's governor activates its National Guard and is responsible for their pay.^{lxix}

Notably, the type of National Guard authority determines whether the National Guard action falls under the Posse Comitatus Act. The Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 places limits on the armed forces, and prohibits them from engaging in civilian law enforcement unless Congress or the Constitution explicitly authorizes it.^{lxx} The Posse Comitatus Act applies when a president federalizes the National Guard under Title 10 to perform duties for the federal government. However, the Posse Comitatus Act does not apply to the National Guard when they remain under state control, either through Title 32 authority or when a governor deploys the forces through state active duty. This allows state governments to deploy the National Guard in roles that may involve law enforcement support without triggering the Posse Comitatus Act.

Transformations in Border Enforcement Amid Growing Drug Trafficking (1950–2000)

By the late 1960s the use of recreational drugs in the United States rose sharply and began to transform the role of authorities engaged in border enforcement.^{lxxi} As smuggling escalated through the 1970s and 1980s, Mexican drug trafficking groups shifted “from being couriers for Colombian criminal organizations...to being wholesalers.”^{lxxii} With the increased flow of drugs, Congress faced mounting pressure in the 1980s for the military to assist drug-enforcement agencies. In May 1987, at the request of the House Armed Services Committee, the National Guard Bureau issued a plan for increasing the level of National Guard support in drug interdiction operations.^{lxxiii} Four months later, in September 1987, National Guard troops from Arizona, Missouri, Utah, and Wisconsin engaged in Operation Autumn Harvest to stop smugglers from bringing drugs by airplane across the Arizona-Mexico border.^{lxxiv} During the 30-day mission, the National Guard did not successfully interdict any drug-running aircraft. However, National Guard leadership emphasized the operation’s value in readiness, training, and morale, and it became an early model for how states could use National Guard units along the border.^{lxxv}

In November 1989, Congress amended federal law to allow National Guard members to undertake counter-drug efforts under the control of their state governors.^{lxxvi} These National Guard members would operate under Title 32 authority and states had to create plans for how the National Guard would be used, which the Department of Defense would then review and approve.^{lxxvii} During fiscal years 1989 and 1990, the federal government funneled a total of \$150 million to states through this program.^{lxxviii} These resources quickly translated into large-scale operational support for law enforcement. National Guard personnel assisted with inspections of commercial cargo at land border entry points, seaports, and international airports, and conducted surveillance. Over time, the collaboration expanded to involve the Border Patrol and the initial migration enforcement activities. Specifically, since 1989, National Guard personnel have constructed border barriers in California and roads to assist Border Patrol operations in both California and Texas.^{lxxix}

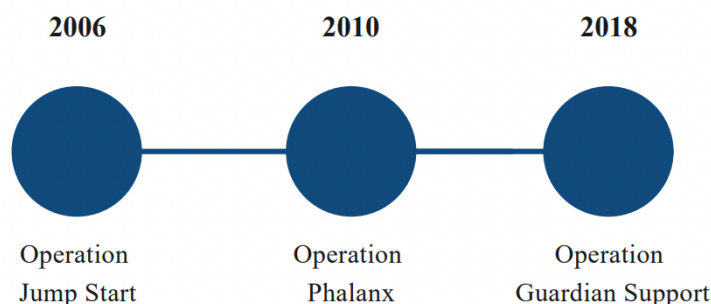
Federal Deployments of the Texas National Guard at the Border (2001-2021)

Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York City, the National Guard underwent its largest activation since World War II.^{lxxx} At the time, the federal government feared that terrorists might cross into the United States along the U.S.-Mexico border. In response, between March 2002 and August 2002, the Department of Defense mobilized 1,600 National Guard troops along the U.S.-Canada and U.S.-Mexico borders to support the U.S. Customs Service, Immigration and Naturalization Service, and Border Patrol.^{lxxxi} According to the then-Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense, these troops provided “a security presence, vehicle inspection, traffic management, tactical operations advice, air operations, cargo inspection, and administrative support until the requesting agencies could hire and train new employees.”^{lxxxii}

From 2006 through 2021, U.S. presidents called for the deployment of National Guard troops to the border under three separate operations, which were all given specific names. These federal deployments—Operation Jump Start (2006-2008), Operation Phalanx (2010-2012), and Operation Guardian Support (2018-2021)—were initiated in response to federal concerns regarding terrorism, transnational crime, and migration at the border.^{lxxxiii} All of these federal deployments were under Title 32 authority, meaning the federal government called on the National Guard to

deploy to the border and funded the operations, but the specific soldiers remained under the control of their state governors. The following subsections cover these three federal deployments.

Figure 3: Timeline of Federal National Guard Operations at the Border (2006-2018)



Source: Author's elaboration

Operation Jump Start (2006-2008)

In May 2006, President George W. Bush launched Operation Jump Start and deployed the National Guard to the U.S.-Mexico border. President Bush and others in his administration were concerned about terrorists crossing the U.S.-Mexico border and there was a growing number of clandestine migrants.^{lxxxiv} In Arizona, hundreds of migrants were crossing the border each day. The Governor of Arizona asked for the state's National Guard to assist the Border Patrol, and the three other border governors quickly followed suit.^{lxxxv} President Bush responded, and deployed the National Guard under Title 32 authority.

As part of Operation Jump Start, President Bush called for 6,000 National Guard troops to travel to the border during the operation's first year, and an additional 3,000 troops over the following year.^{lxxxvi} These troops rotated in contingents from National Guards across all 50 states, and deployed in Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas to support Border Patrol operations.^{lxxxvii} Each border state managed its own soldiers and utilized its own deployment plan. The Texas National Guard deployed 1,676 soldiers in support of the operation.^{lxxxviii}

Overall, these National Guard troops helped the Border Patrol by operating surveillance systems, analyzing intelligence, interdicting drugs, installing fences and vehicle barriers, and building patrol roads.^{lxxxix} National Guard soldiers also acted as extra eyes on the ground and spotted people crossing the border.^{xc} If they saw someone attempting to cross, they would notify Border Patrol agents, who then would make the decision on how to act.^{xci} Additionally, in some areas, National Guard members were involved in community events, such as luncheons, meetings with local officials, and working at holiday celebrations and blood drives.^{xcii}

Within the operation's early months, National Guard troops and Border Patrol officials hailed Operation Jump Start as a success. In December 2006, the then- chief of the National Guard Bureau noted, "Infrastructure is up, fencing is up, roads are built, lighting is up, apprehensions are down."^{xciii} The operation was volunteer-based and was an "optional extra" with other domestic or foreign service.^{xciv} When the operation ended in 2008, more than 30,000 Army and Air Guard personnel from across the country and U.S. territories had rotated to the border.^{xcv}

Operation Phalanx (2010-2012) and Operation River Watch I & II

In May 2010, President Obama kicked off the second federal National Guard deployment.^{xcvi} At the time, President Obama was pursuing comprehensive immigration reform, and officials also cited concerns regarding spillover violence from Mexico.^{xcvii} Operation Phalanx sought to be a “stopgap measure” and provide increased border security.^{xcviii} Operation Phalanx deployed National Guard troops under Title 32 authority, and Texas managed its own soldiers with its own deployment plan.

The operation deployed 1,200 National Guard soldiers to the U.S.-Mexico border. Unlike in Operation Jump Start, these National Guard soldiers came directly from the border states.^{xcix} The soldiers supported Border Patrol operations, and conducted aerial detection and monitoring.^c They also conducted criminal investigative analysis, command and control, mobile communications, transportation, logistics, and training support.^{ci} In 2010, Pentagon officials stated that National Guard troops would be armed and could only use their weapons for self-defense.^{cii}

Texas named its specific deployment Operation River Watch, which involved 286 soldiers.^{ciii} Specifically, Texas deployed the Task Force Border Guard, consisting of both Texas Army and Texas Air National Guard.^{civ} Within the Task Force, there was an entry identification team to assist the Border Patrol.^{cv} Overall, the Texas mission cost \$31.1 million, out of the operation’s \$110 million total budget.^{cvi}

In January 2012, the Obama administration stated it would reduce the number of troops along the U.S.-Mexico border from 1,200 soldiers to 300 soldiers.^{cvii} Then, in March 2012, the operation became an aviation-only mission.^{cviii} National Guard leaders stated that they were concerned with recruitment dwindling because of low morale and that it would “create a perception of a militarized” U.S.-Mexico border.^{cix} At this time, the Texas National Guard began Operation River Watch II, where guardsmen provided 500 hours a month in aviation and criminal analysis in support of the Border Patrol.^{cx} They used 12 Blackhawk helicopters and fixed-wing manned surveillance planes to conduct patrols above the Rio Grande.^{cx1}

Operation Guardian Support (2018-2021)

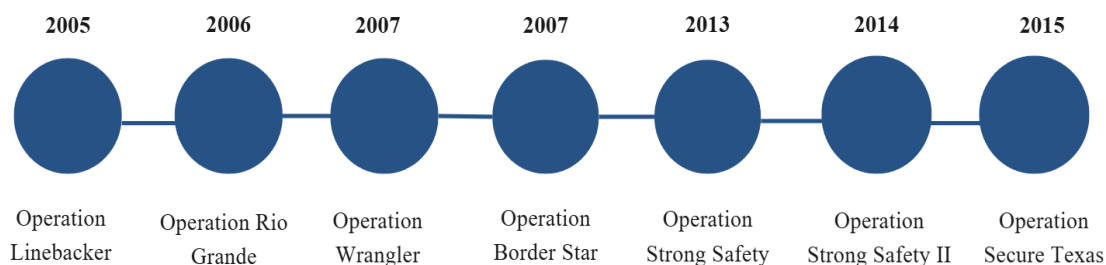
On April 4, 2018, President Donald Trump launched Operation Guardian Support.^{cxii} At the time, more than 1,000 migrants from Central America were heading through Mexico toward the United States as part of a caravan.^{cxiii} In response, President Trump launched the operation under Title 32 authority, and all four border states agreed to deploy their National Guard troops to the border.

Operation Guardian Support deployed 4,000 National Guard troops to the border across all four states.^{cxiv} Texas sent 250 Texas National Guard members to the border.^{cxv} The National Guard soldiers assisted Border Patrol with “vehicle maintenance, manning camera rooms, surveillance, and a few administrative roles.”^{cxvi} In 2021, the Biden administration dropped the name Operation Guardian Support, but continued the mission’s efforts along the border.^{cxvii}

Texas State Deployments of the Texas National Guard at the Border (2005-2020)

A state governor can activate the National Guard through what is called “active state duty.” Governors often use these activations as a response to state-level emergencies and disasters. The state manages and funds this type of deployment, and it is not subject to the Posse Comitatus Act.^{cxviii} Texas’ first state-directed National Guard deployments began in 2005 and continued over the following years.^{cxix}

Figure 4: Timeline of State National Guard Operations at the Border (2005-2015)



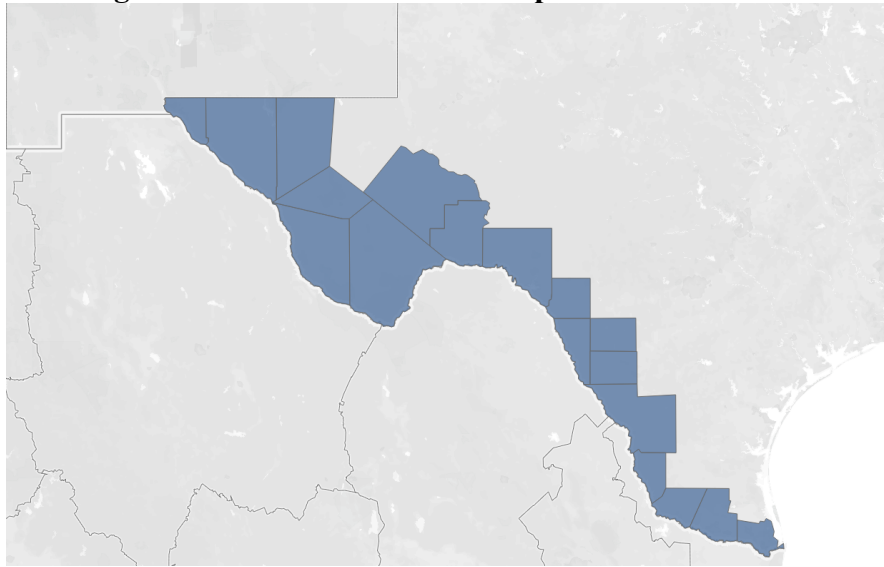
Source: Authors’ elaboration

Notably, from 2006 to 2020, Texas governors deployed National Guard troops to the Texas-Mexico border in seven different active state duty operations. Over the years, the deployments’ explanations and justifications have shifted from attempting to stop possible terrorist activity to preventing drug and migrant smuggling. The following subsections detail the National Guard’s roles in each of Texas’ active state duty operations during this time period.

Operation Linebacker (2005)

On October 12, 2005, Governor Rick Perry deployed the Texas National Guard to the border for the first time under Operation Linebacker. Perry explained that the operation’s rationale was to prevent the transportation of drugs, weapons, and people into Texas.^{cxx} Overall, Operation Linebacker awarded federal grants to local sheriff’s offices in 16 border counties to expand local patrol capacity.^{cxxi} The Texas National Guard played a supporting role in Operation Linebacker by providing training to local law enforcement in these counties.^{cxxii}

Figure 5: Counties Involved in Operation Linebacker



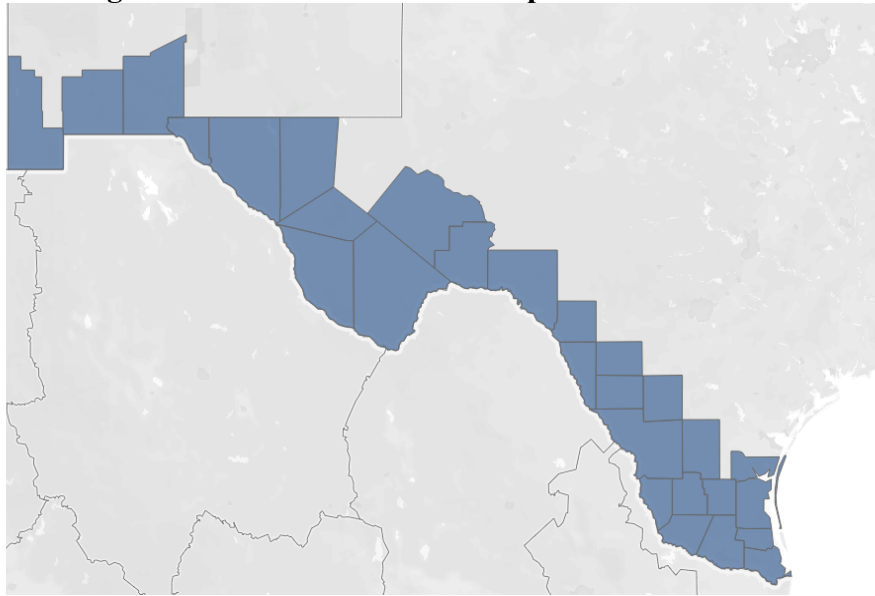
Source: Office of the Texas Governor

Operation Linebacker cost a total of \$9.7 million.^{cxxiii} A January 2015 Texas Legislative Budget Board report shows that 63 percent of the money given directly to counties went toward staff costs, such as hiring more personnel, 29 percent was used to purchase equipment, and 8 percent was used for travel expenses, equipment installation costs, and general supplies.^{cxxiv} Operation Linebacker's funding came from a federal government grant program that required law enforcement to use it for drug related or violent crime. However, in November 2006, civil society organizations alleged that some local law enforcement entities were using the operation's resources to focus on apprehending migrants.^{cxxv}

Operation Rio Grande (2006)

On February 9, 2006, Governor Perry launched Operation Rio Grande as the follow-up initiative to Operation Linebacker. The governor's office explained that this operation would continue preventing organized crime groups and potential terrorists from entering the country.^{cxxvi} The operation aimed to coordinate state and local law enforcement to better combat crime. It also established the Border Security Operations Center (BSOC) to centralize border planning.^{cxxvii} Once again, sheriff's offices were the lead actors, with the Texas National Guard playing a supporting role.

Figure 6: Counties Involved in Operation Rio Grande



Source: Office of the Texas Governor

Operation Rio Grande became the umbrella operation for individual operations across five border sectors: the Rio Grande Valley, Laredo, Del Rio, Big Bend, and El Paso. The El Paso Sector operation also included counties in New Mexico.^{cxxviii} These specific operations began in June 2006, and each lasted 8 to 24 days. During these operations, the National Guard provided administrative support, with National Guard planners and analysts partnering with local authorities in El Paso, Laredo, and Del Rio.^{cxxix} According to a 2016 congressional report, the National Guard also supported the Border Patrol’s surveillance programs, and provided engineering, aviation, and technical support.^{cxxx}

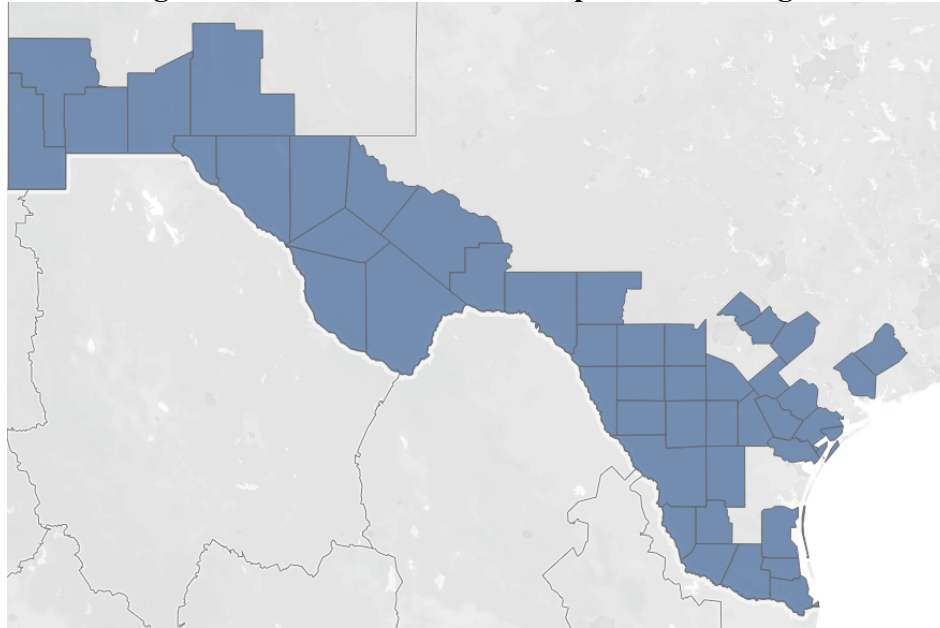
Operation Rio Grande’s exact cost remains unclear. In September 2006, a spokesperson for Governor Perry reported that, from October 2005 to September 2006, Operation Linebacker and Operation Rio Grande cost a combined \$25 million.^{cxxxi} However, in June 2006, Governor Perry announced \$20 million in state funds to sustain and expand Operation Rio Grande.^{cxxxii} In the same press release, Governor Perry also asked the Texas legislature for a \$100 million increase in funding to sustain Operation Rio Grande and other border security activities “until the federal government fulfills its responsibility of securing the border.”^{cxxxiii}

Operation Wrangler (2007)

In January 2007, Governor Perry launched Operation Wrangler at the border. The operation’s stated rationale was to combat rising violence in Mexico, and came at a time when Mexico’s President Felipe Calderón was deploying his country’s military against organized criminal groups.^{cxxxiv} Governor Perry claimed that Operation Wrangler would “send a message to drug traffickers, human smugglers and criminal operatives that their efforts to exploit [the] international border will come at a great cost to them and their illegal operations.”^{cxxxv} The operation was not limited to the border and focused on “smuggling corridors” throughout the state.^{cxxxvi} It also

included counties in New Mexico, where state police and border sheriffs were the main actors in running the operation.^{cxxxvii}

Figure 7: Counties Involved in Operation Wrangler



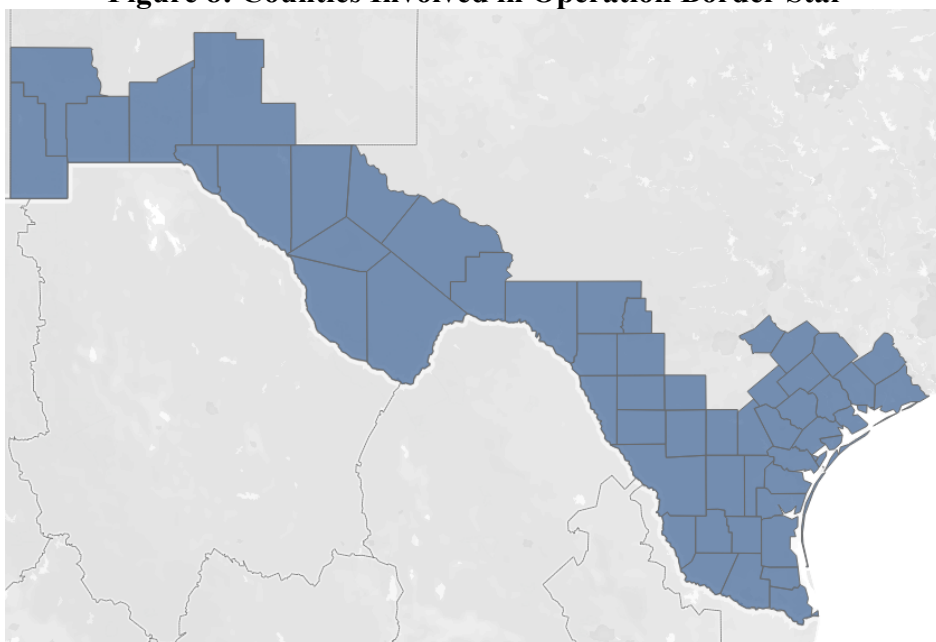
Source: Office of the Texas Governor^{cxxxviii}

Operation Wrangler deployed 550 Texas National Guard members to the border.^{cxxxix} The National Guard were specifically sent to various crossover points along the Rio Grande, and were accompanied by a Border Patrol agent and a local law enforcement officer.^{cxli} Due to the National Guard not being able to arrest migrants, they relied on Border Patrol agents to detain migrants. Operation Wrangler lasted 12 days—from January 17, 2007, to January 29, 2007—although Governor Perry suggested there could be future iterations.^{cxlii} In total, the National Guard deployment under Operation Wrangler cost \$1.1 million.^{cxliii}

Operation Border Star (2007)

In September 2007, Governor Perry launched Operation Border Star as the follow up to Operations Linebacker, Rio Grande, and Wrangler. A January 2008 press release stated that the operation aimed to protect Texans “from terrorism, border crime and violence.”^{cxliiii} Operation Border Star involved 53 counties, with Texas authorities providing financial support to law enforcement agencies to pursue drug traffickers.^{cxliv} The areas of focus were the Coastal Bend, Rio Grande Valley, Laredo, Del Rio, Big Bend, and El Paso Sectors. The El Paso Sector also included counties in New Mexico, where state police and border sheriffs were the main actors in running the operation.

Figure 8: Counties Involved in Operation Border Star



Source: Office of the Texas Governor

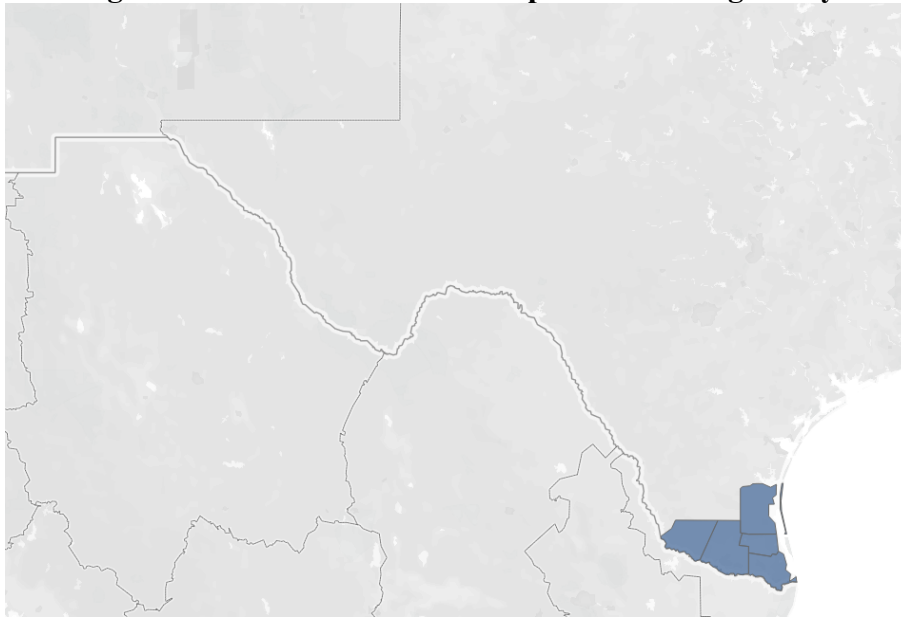
The National Guard participated in Operation Border Star to address crime hot spots in rural border areas. Together with Texas Department of Public Safety troopers, the National Guard created joint command centers to organize operational, strategic, and tactical efforts against cross border crime and analyze intelligence from each border sector.^{cxlv}

After the initial three-year surge from 2007 to 2010, Texas authorities institutionalized Operation Border Star as a funding source for local law enforcement agencies and intelligence sharing.^{cxlvi} From 2008 to 2013, Operation Border Star received at least \$452 million in state funding.^{cxlvii} However, after 2013, Operation Border Star functions were increasingly embedded inside broader border security appropriations. Between 2018 and 2024, roughly \$36 million in Local Border Security Program grants were explicitly earmarked to “support Operation Border Star.”^{cxlviii}

Operation Strong Safety (2013)

In June 2013, Governor Perry announced the next border mission: Operation Strong Safety. This operation began on September 15, 2013 and lasted three weeks.^{cxlix} It aimed to address crime in the Rio Grande Valley (Cameron, Hidalgo, Kenedy, Starr, and Willacy counties) stemming from drug and migrant smuggling.^{cl} The Texas Department of Public Safety listed three primary reasons behind the operation’s launch: 1) criminal activity; 2) a number of commercial vehicles on the roadways, and 3) unsafe driving practices.^{cli} Operation Strong Safety deployed Texas National Guard soldiers, Texas Department of Public Safety troopers, and other state law enforcement to the Rio Grande to patrol the area and stop illicit transit.^{clii} The Texas Department of Public Safety also conducted 12 traffic regulatory checkpoints across the Rio Grande Valley to address unsafe driving.^{cliii}

Figure 9: Counties Involved in Operation Strong Safety



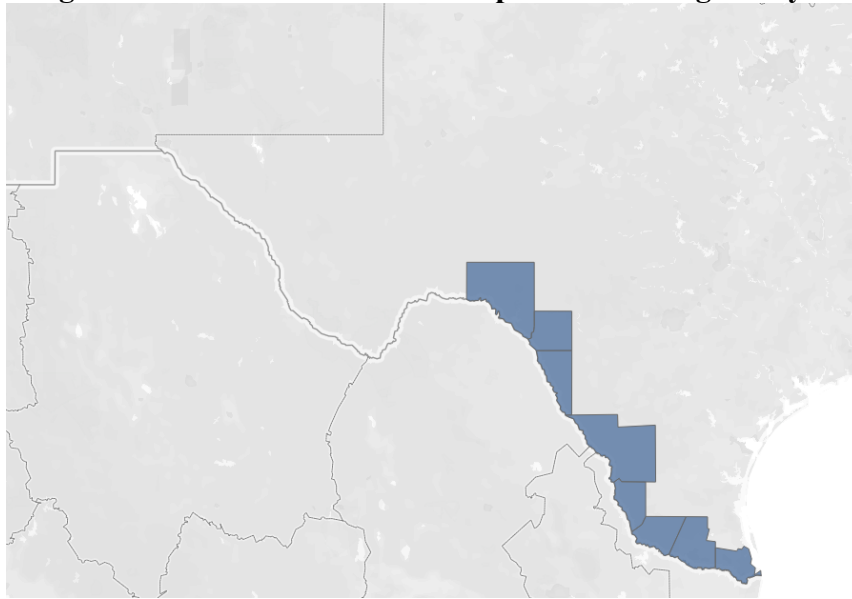
Source: Texas Department of Public Safety^{cliv}

In November 2013, some South Texas state legislators expressed concerns about the operation's legality and alleged discrimination toward immigrant communities.^{clv} One representative from the area reported receiving around 100 calls from local residents during a two-day period.^{clvi} These residents were concerned that “the checkpoints were targeting poor neighborhoods, especially *colonias*, where many undocumented immigrants live.”^{clvii}

Operation Strong Safety II (2014)

In June 2014, Governor Perry announced Operation Strong Safety II.^{clviii} At that time, there was an increase in the number of unaccompanied children arriving at the Texas-Mexico border, particularly from Central America.^{clix} Operation Strong Safety II sought to respond to the unaccompanied minors by mobilizing 1,000 Texas National Guard troops and hundreds of Texas Department of Public Safety troopers to the Rio Grande Valley.^{clx} These actors were stationed in observation posts along the Rio Grande and engaged in coordinated patrols in rural areas.^{clxi} The operation primarily focused on Starr and Hidalgo counties. However, additional support activities extended from Brownsville in Cameron County to Del Rio in Val Verde County. From June 2014 to January 2015, the Texas legislature authorized \$124.1 million for Operation Strong Safety II including around \$50 million for the Texas Military Department.^{clxii}

Figure 10: Counties Involved in Operation Strong Safety II



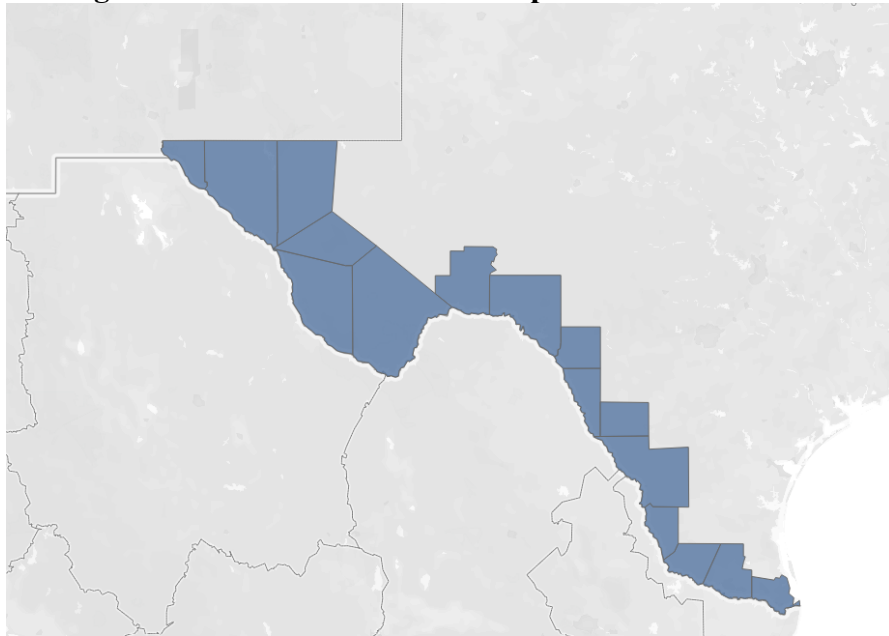
Source: Texas Department of Public Safety^{clxiii}

Operation Secure Texas (2015)

In January 2015, Governor Greg Abbott assumed office as the 48th Texas governor and continued the state's focus on border security. On September 1, 2015, Governor Abbott launched Operation Secure Texas.^{clxiv} According to the then-Texas Department of Public Safety director, the operation's objective was to "deny Mexican cartels and their associates unfettered entry into Texas, and their ability to commit border-related crimes, as well as reduce the power of these organizations."^{clxv}

Operation Secure Texas covered a broad set of enforcement and surveillance initiatives. These initiatives included permanently stationing 250 Texas Department of Public Safety troopers at the border, deploying a Texas Ranger Company, sending a high-altitude aircraft, and deploying tactical marine and ground vehicles.^{clxvi} The Texas National Guard supported Texas Department of Public Safety troopers and was initially tasked with an observation role along the Rio Grande.^{clxvii} From 2016 to 2017, the Texas Legislature appropriated approximately \$800 million for border security, with most of it dedicated to Operation Secure Texas.^{clxviii}

Figure 11: Counties Involved in Operation Secure Texas



Source: Texas Department of Public Safety^{clxix}

In July 2017, Operation Secure Texas ended its state active duty status for the National Guard soldiers and shifted to Title 32 status.^{clxx} The Texas Military Department described this as a shift to a “training mission” that would increase hands-on instruction for 30 different tasks and boost mission readiness.^{clxxi} The shift also meant that the federal government began providing funding for the deployed Texas National Guard troops, with the National Guard Bureau allocating \$19 million to the four border states.^{clxxii}

Chapter Two: The Role of The Texas National Guard in Operation Lone Star

In January 2021, the U.S. border and migration landscape was in transition. President Joe Biden had just assumed office and his administration was quickly rolling back some of the first Trump administration's migration programs and promising a more humanitarian and orderly U.S. immigration system.^{clxxiii} Overall migration numbers at the U.S.-Mexico border were relatively low due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the first Trump administration's restrictive approach to migration through programs such as Title 42.^{3clxxiv} At the time, public opinion was also neutral toward migrants. In June 2021, Gallup polling revealed that 33 percent of Americans supported increasing the number of immigrants in the country, 35 percent wanted to maintain the current level, and only 30 percent of Americans wanted immigration rates to decrease.^{clxxv}

In Texas, Governor Abbott was facing intense political pressure.^{clxxvi} In the lead-up to the 2022 gubernatorial primary, Governor Abbott faced intra-party challenges. Particularly, he faced attacks from conservative figures, who accused him of being insufficiently conservative on border security and Covid-19 restrictions.^{clxxvii} Further, he faced backlash over his handling of the February 2021 winter storm in Texas, which had decimated the state's electricity grid.^{clxxviii} In February 2021 state-wide polling, Texans reported that the most important issue facing their state was the Covid-19 pandemic (23 percent), followed by border security (14 percent) and immigration (11 percent).^{clxxix}

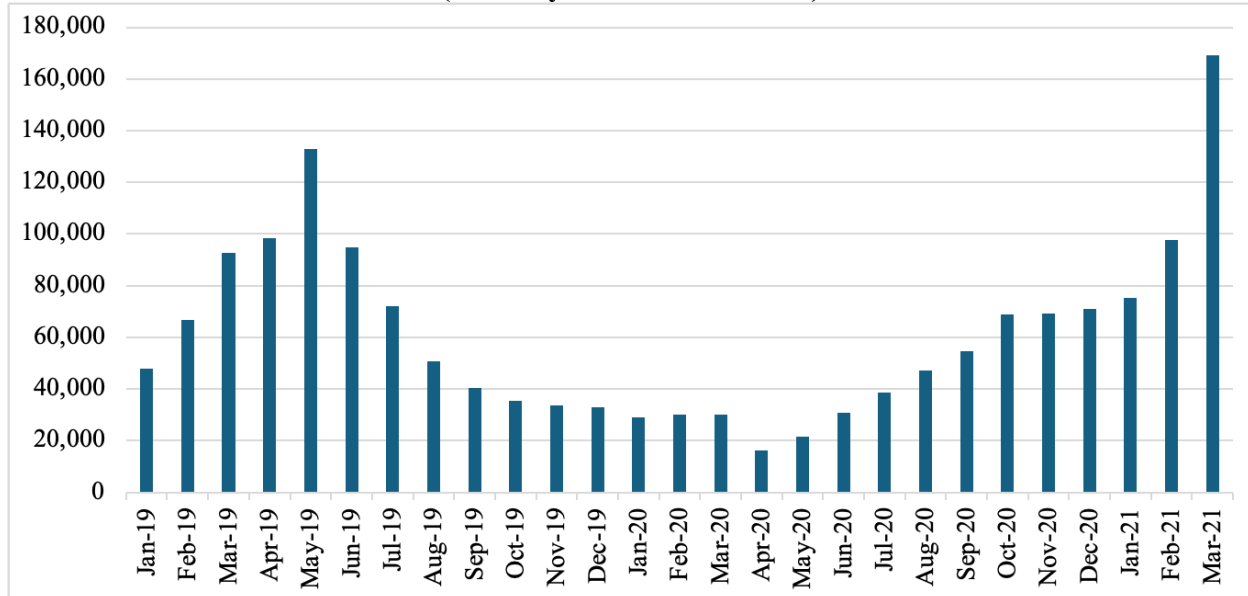
Launch of Operation Lone Star

On March 6, 2021, Governor Abbott launched Operation Lone Star.^{clxxx} At the time, Governor Abbott cited a crisis at the southern border that required the Texas National Guard and the Texas Department of Public Safety to deter and apprehend migrants, arrest human smugglers and cartel members, and stop drug trafficking into the United States.^{clxxxi} Governor Abbott declared that this new operation was principally designed to “deny Mexican cartels and other smugglers the ability to move drugs and people into Texas.”^{clxxxii} He blamed the Biden Administration for open border policies and for failing to manage a humanitarian crisis that “endanger[ed] the lives of Texans.”^{clxxxiii}

When Governor Abbott launched Operation Lone Star, the number of migrants apprehended along the border was just starting to increase. In February 2021, the Border Patrol apprehended approximately 100,000 migrants along the U.S.-Mexico border.^{clxxxiv} However, the following month, in March 2021, the Border Patrol apprehended around 173,000 migrants.^{clxxxv} The Border Patrol's increasing number of migrant apprehensions and the publicity surrounding Operation Lone Star quickly shifted Texans' public opinion. Between March 19, 2021 and March 26, 2021, several days after Operation Lone Star's launch, surveyed Texans listed border security and immigration as the state's two most pressing issues.^{clxxxvi}

³ During the COVID-19 pandemic, in March 2020, the Department of Health and Human Services invoked Title 42 under section 265 of U.S. public health law. This emergency measure authorized the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to “prohibit the...introduction” of individuals when the “existence of a quarantinable communicable disease in a foreign country... creates a serious danger of the introduction of such disease into the United States.” The CDC justified the order on public-health grounds, asserting the need to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Title 42 allowed U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials to expel migrants, including asylum seekers and, initially, unaccompanied children.

**Figure 12: Border Patrol Apprehensions at the U.S.-Mexico Border
(January 2019-March 2021)**

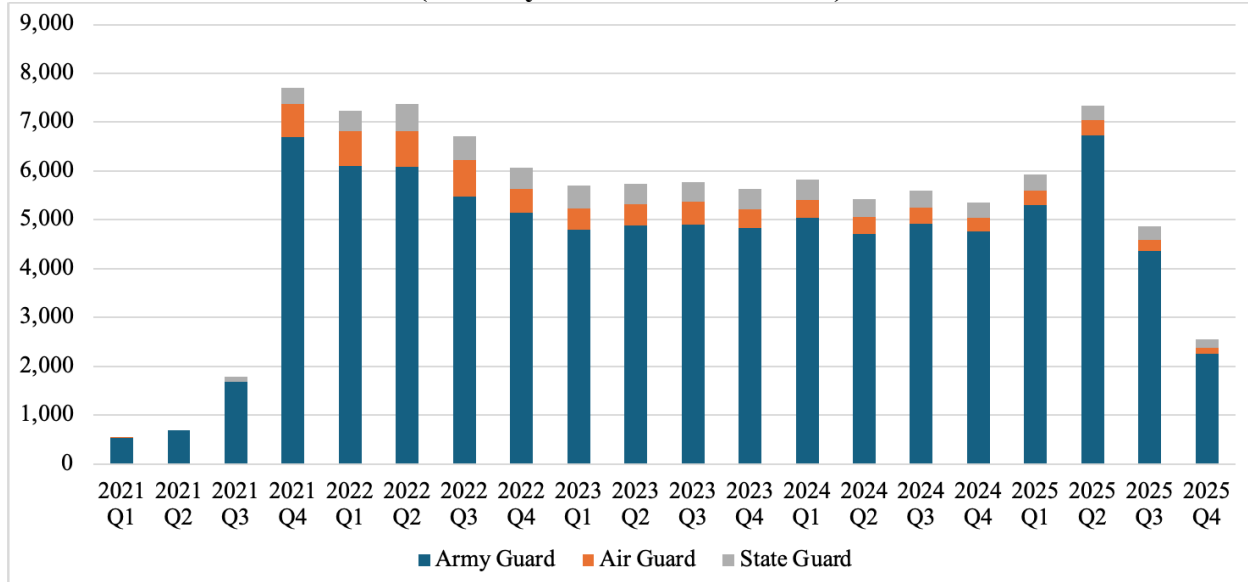


Source: U.S. Border Patrol^{clxxxvii}

The Texas National Guard's Deployment in Operation Lone Star

Since March 2021, the Texas National Guard has played a central role in Operation Lone Star.^{clxxxviii} As part of the operation, Governor Abbott immediately activated the National Guard under state active duty and deployed the first 545 Texas National Guard soldiers to the border.^{clxxxix} However, this dynamic changed in September 2021, when Haitian migrants began crossing the Rio Grande under the Del Rio international bridge. At one point, the number of Haitian migrants waiting for Border Patrol processing reached approximately 15,000 people.^{cx} Amid this highly visible migrant surge, Governor Abbott deployed more National Guard troops.^{cxci} Between the third and fourth quarters of 2021, the number of deployed troops jumped from 1,793 soldiers to 7,719 soldiers.^{cxcii} A November 2021 *Associated Press* article indicated that these soldiers were initially sent to the Del Rio and Rio Grande Valley Sectors.^{cxci}

**Figure 13: National Guard Deployments to the Border By Quarter
(January 2021-December 2025)**



Source: Texas Military Department, Open Records Request^{cxciiv}

During this initial deployment, Governor Abbott activated entire Texas National Guard units under state orders. The mission was not voluntary, and selected National Guard members were often given days to deploy—leaving behind their civilian lives, jobs, and families for an indefinite period of time.^{4cxcv} Media reports from March 2022 and the results from an internal Texas National Guard survey all described the early Operation Lone Star deployment process as being “rushed.”^{cx cvi}

The quick deployment affected soldiers’ lodging, equipment availability, and training. Initially, many National Guard soldiers were assigned lodging in local hotels, improvised camps, or trailers.^{cx cvii} For example, during the September 2021 Haitian migrant surge in Del Rio, National Guard members were housed in local motels and other temporary facilities because the rapid troop expansion exceeded military housing capacity in the region.^{cx cviii} Some National Guard members were quartered so far from their assigned work areas that they were forced to commute an hour or more each day.^{cx cix} At the beginning of Operation Lone Star, some National Guard members also stated that they were given limited instructions and inadequate training.^{cc} Additionally, on February 1, 2022, *The Texas Tribune* published an article where National Guard members indicated that they struggled with critical equipment shortages, such as medical equipment, cold weather gear, and ballistic vest plates.^{cci}

At this time, there was growing public and internal pressure to improve Texas National Guard soldiers’ conditions, pay, and communication with leadership.^{ccii} In response, the Texas Military Department began making changes. By July 2022, the Texas Military Department reported that it had undertaken a range of changes intended to address soldier complaints and improve overall morale.^{cciii} Specifically, the department began granting more hardship releases and by July 2022,

⁴ Texas did allow for some soldiers to volunteer if they faced challenges meeting their service obligations. Yet due to the deployment’s size, the majority of the troops were required to be called into service through involuntary activation.

had approved approximately 75 percent of requested releases from duty—letting hundreds of soldiers return home early due to family or financial hardships.^{cciv}

Throughout 2022, the number of deployed National Guard troops decreased slightly and then remained steady at around 5,000 soldiers during 2023 and 2024.^{ccv} The conditions for these soldiers were also evolving. By this point, the vast majority of troop deployments were voluntary and the Texas Military Department had addressed the initial logistical challenges.^{ccvi} Additionally, deployed soldiers' geographic distribution also shifted.^{ccvii} By March 2022, there were accounts that National Guard soldiers had been deployed in areas throughout the Texas interior, including on ranches around Border Patrol checkpoints.^{ccviii} Additionally, in December 2023, the National Guard expanded its operations into West Texas.^{ccix} As part of this shift, the National Guard repositioned personnel and vehicles to El Paso and deployed into other West Texas border areas, where migrant apprehensions were increasing.^{ccx}

In February 2024, the Governor's Office announced that the National Guard had plans to build a Forward Operating Base near Eagle Pass to house deployed soldiers.^{ccxi} Three months later, in May 2024, Governor Abbott toured the new base and welcomed the first 300 soldiers.^{ccxii} Governor Abbott highlighted that the base would have a 700-seat dining facility, a recreation center, laundry, and internet.^{ccxiii} Soldiers would have their own individual rooms, with access to medical and psychological health facilities.^{ccxiv} While the original goal was to house 1,800 troops at the base, this number later increased to 2,300 soldiers.^{ccxv}

In January 2025, President Trump assumed office for his second term and border dynamics shifted significantly. Amid a flurry of executive orders and stepped up enforcement measures, the number of migrants arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border immediately plummeted. During the first months of 2025, Governor Abbott deployed additional National Guard troops to mirror the Trump administration's stepped up enforcement efforts.^{ccxvi} However, by July 2025, the Texas National Guard began reducing the total number of soldiers stationed at the border. The National Guard also appears to have reduced its presence in some of its smaller forward operating bases, including a small base near the Laughlin Air Force Base in Del Rio.^{ccxvii}

Other States' National Guards

During Operation Lone Star, some Republican governors sent their state's National Guard troops to Texas. By July 2024, 12 states had deployed 921 National Guard members to assist Texas with the operation.^{ccxviii} The funding for these out-of-state deployments often came from the state's budgets or their emergency funds.^{ccxix} A July 15, 2024 article from *The Texas Tribune* suggested that critics view these state deployments as duplicate efforts, since the federal government continues to deploy National Guard troops to the border.^{ccxx} Yet, many Republican-led states were eager to send their National Guard troops to Texas for political reasons or because it allowed them to conduct activities and train in ways that were not possible in their home states.^{ccxxi}

The Texas National Guard's Primary Activities in Operation Lone Star

As part of Operation Lone Star, the Texas National Guard has engaged in three primary activities related to border enforcement: 1) river patrols, 2) observation and patrols on the Rio Grande

riverbank and in the Texas interior, and 3) barrier construction. Texas National Guard soldiers' specific activities depend upon the region where they are deployed, and other factors such as the area's migrant and drug smuggling dynamics, physical terrain, and Border Patrol agents' support needs. The following subsections explore each of the National Guard's central activities.

1) River Patrols

One of the National Guard's primary activities under Operation Lone Star is patrolling the Rio Grande on boats. These patrols aim to act as a deterrent for any migrants who may be considering crossing the river.^{ccxxii} As part of this report, the authors reviewed 14 publicly available videos that involved National Guard boats that were conducting patrols on the Rio Grande as part of Operation Lone Star. The review found that these boats are typically flat-bottom boats or air boats depending on the river's water level.^{ccxxiii} There were also generally two to four National Guard members on each boat, with the soldiers scanning the riverbanks for smuggling scouts or signs of migrants planning to cross into U.S. territory.

National Guard soldiers may not only spot migrants attempting to reach the United States but also encounter migrants at risk of drowning in the Rio Grande. Initially, deployed National Guard soldiers were not provided with sufficient water rescue equipment—such as water-rescue ropes and ring buoys—due to administrative delays.^{ccxxiv} In April 2022, the Texas Military Department stated that they had only received about 25 percent of their requested equipment because of vendor and global supply chain delays.^{ccxxv} The following month, in May 2022, soldiers were told to avoid jumping into the river for their personal safety, and instead throw a flotation device if they saw a migrant struggling in the water.^{ccxxvi} However, the threshold for struggling appears to be subjective. In December 2023, *Texas Public Radio* published a video of a migrant mother in the Rio Grande yelling for help with a baby crying in her arms.^{ccxxvii} A National Guard river patrol boat stopped near the woman but did not provide any assistance.

2) Riverbank Operations and Brush Patrols

National Guard soldiers also conduct patrols on foot along the Rio Grande's U.S. bank and throughout the Texas interior. In this role, soldiers provide observational support, walk through the brush to check for scouts or signs of migrants crossing in the area, and assist the Texas Department of Public Safety and Border Patrol in apprehending migrants.^{ccxxviii}

Riverbank Patrols. On the Rio Grande's U.S. riverbank, National Guard soldiers conduct patrols and assist Texas Department of Public Safety troopers and Border Patrol agents in various activities. At times, the Texas National Guard soldiers are stationed in specific areas along the river—often behind concertina wire—and seek to act as a deterrence to migrants who might be considering crossing the river. These National Guard soldiers also attempt to stop migrants from crossing through concertina wire once they reach the U.S. bank.^{ccxxix}

National Guard soldiers stationed on the Rio Grande's U.S. bank also conduct walking patrols. This report's authors reviewed seven publicly available videos of these riverbank patrols during Operation Lone Star. In these videos, there was no set number of National Guard troops in each patrol group, but the soldiers were never alone. In several videos, the National Guard soldiers were walking with at least one Border Patrol agent or a Texas Department of Public Safety trooper. At

times, the patrols were also aided by National Guard helicopters or reports that a migrant was attempting to cross and head to a specific location.^{ccxxx} At night, the National Guard soldiers used night vision goggles that can detect heat in the brush.

During these riverbank patrols, National Guard soldiers may use tracking skills to try and find clandestine migrants. To do so, they monitor an area for noise or look for footprints on the ground, flattened grass, or other signs of migrant activity, such as trash. However, clandestine migrants often change their tactics to avoid detection.^{ccxxxi} If clandestine migrants decide to cross and then take off running, National Guard soldiers may pursue the migrants.^{ccxxxii}

The Texas National Guard's role in these patrols has changed over time. Initially, the National Guard was constrained to a strict "observe and support" role for its activities.^{ccxxxiii} In these cases, the National Guard would not apprehend a migrant, but would instead call the Border Patrol.^{ccxxxiv} This chain of command continued even if a National Guard soldier discovered an injured migrant. For example, on March 27, 2022, a local citizen notified an Army National Guard soldier that an injured male was lying on the ground near the Tornillo Port of Entry.^{ccxxxv} The guardsman responded by radioing a Border Patrol agent, and the Border Patrol agent then radioed for emergency medical services.^{ccxxxvi}

However, on January 31, 2025, the Texas National Guard signed an agreement with U.S. Customs and Border Protection that allowed the Border Patrol to deputize National Guard soldiers.^{ccxxxvii} These deputized soldiers then have law enforcement authority and can make immigration arrests.^{ccxxxviii} As of March 2025, the Border Patrol had deputized around 300 Texas National Guard members.^{ccxxxix} These National Guard soldiers patrol alongside Border Patrol agents, and provide communication, observational support, transportation, and physical security assistance at the border.^{ccxl}

Interior Brush Patrols. National Guard soldiers also conduct brush patrols in the Texas interior. This includes ranches just beyond the Rio Grande or in areas around Border Patrol checkpoints, which are 10 to 70 miles away from the Texas-Mexico border.^{ccxli} These soldiers often conduct these interior patrols in groups of varying sizes, and use an array of technology, such as drones, and thermal and regular camera systems that can survey multiple miles at a time, depending on the terrain.^{ccxlii}

To operate on private ranches, National Guard soldiers need permission from landowners. However, some ranches have their own forms of security and do not provide permission to the National Guard to conduct patrols on their property.^{ccxliii} In March 2022, *The Texas Tribune* reported that the Texas National Guard stationed its soldiers on highways outside of ranches that did not provide patrol authorization, with the objective of spotting migrants who might cross into the properties.^{ccxliv} However, even if these National Guard soldiers spotted migrants entering the ranches, they would not be able to pursue them, given their lack of permission.^{ccxlv}

3) Barrier Construction

As part of Operation Lone Star, the Texas National Guard has also constructed barriers along the Texas-Mexico border. Specifically, the National Guard's Engineer Special Response Teams have

been in charge of clearing brush, laying and reinforcing concertina wire, and putting up chain-link fencing.^{cexlvi} These National Guard troops began to string concertina wire along stretches of the border at the end of 2021, and by December 2023, National Guard engineers had completed more than 82 miles of concertina wire.^{cexlviiiccxlvi} This number is now even higher. In February 2025, National Guard engineers had reportedly deployed 150 miles of concertina wire along the border and 72 miles of chain-link fencing.^{cexlix}

Notably, the Texas National Guard engineers did not just string concertina wire along the Rio Grande. In October 2023, National Guard soldiers also laid concertina wire along the Texas-New Mexico border.^{ccl} This concertina wire was located primarily in urban areas and along highways. It was constructed with the intent of stopping migrants who were crossing the border in New Mexico and then walking into Texas.^{ccli} The wire was not laid in collaboration with New Mexico's political leadership, and the state's governor referred to the fencing as a "political stunt."^{cclii}

The National Guard's Engineer Special Response Teams also build and repair other border barriers. These include shipping containers that were placed as a makeshift wall in Shelby Park and anti-climb barriers. Anti-climb barriers are 8 to 12 feet high chain-link fencing laced with concertina wire coils.^{ccliii} The anti-climb barriers are deployed to keep migrants from climbing the fences or using ladders to get over them.^{ccliv} By January 2025, the National Guard had installed 42 miles of combined shipping container wall and anti-climb barriers.^{cclv}

Operation Lone Star's Main Activities

While the previous sections outlined the Texas National Guard's deployment to the border, Operation Lone Star has also involved a range of other activities. First, the operation also deployed more than a thousand Texas Department of Public Safety troopers on rotation to the border, who often worked alongside National Guard soldiers. The operation also included four additional activities: 1) the use of disaster declarations, 2) trespassing charges against migrants, 3) constructing other physical barriers, and 4) the migrant busing program. The following subsections explore each of these central activities.

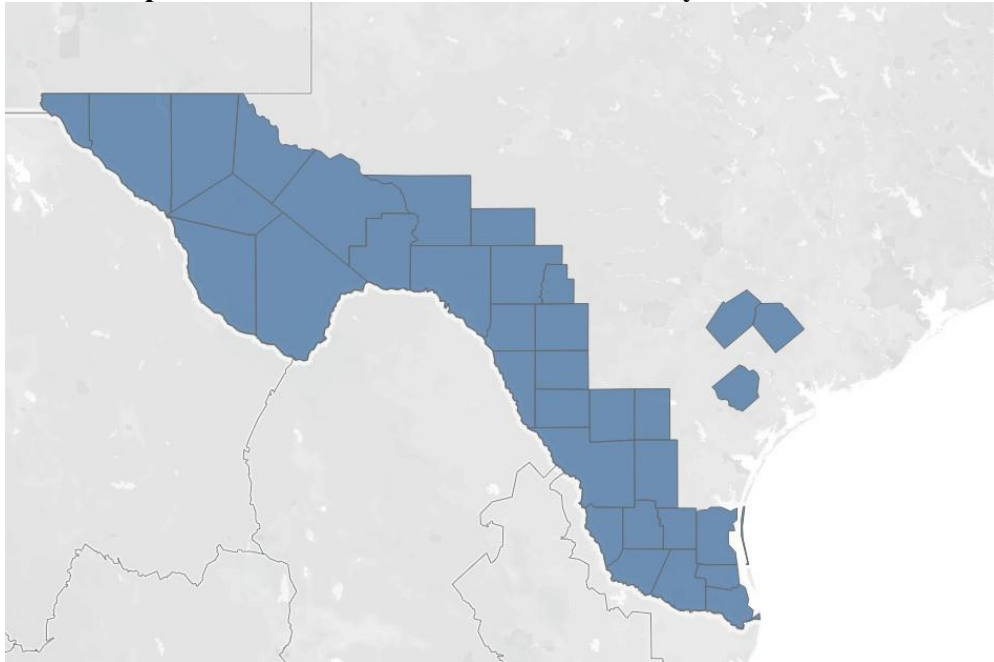
Disaster Declarations

One of Operation Lone Star's central pillars is the county-level disaster declarations that relate to migration and other illicit activities at the border. On May 31, 2021, Governor Abbott issued the first border security disaster declaration.^{5cclvi} In this declaration, he noted the rise in unauthorized migration and characterized the border situation as "an ongoing and imminent threat of widespread and severe damage, injury, and loss of life and property."^{6cclvii} The declaration called on Texas authorities to "authorize the use of all available resources" to address the disaster and allowed Governor Abbott to reallocate \$250 million in appropriated funds toward border enforcement.^{cclviii} The May 2021 disaster declaration covered 34 counties, which were mostly located along the border.^{cclix}

⁵ Under Texas statute, a "disaster" typically refers to "the occurrence or imminent threat of widespread or severe damage, injury, or loss of life or property resulting from any natural or man-made cause."

⁶ The move drew criticism from Democratic lawmakers and legal scholars, who argued that employing emergency executive powers for immigration enforcement stretched the intended scope of disaster law.

Figure 14: Map of Texas Counties Included in the May 2021 Disaster Declaration

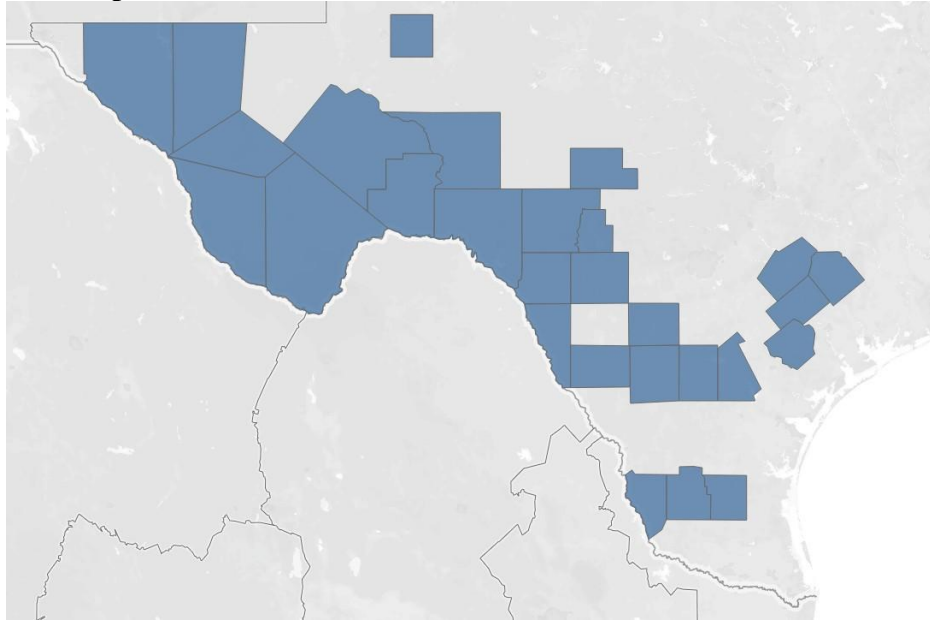


Source: Governor Greg Abbott's Disaster Proclamation on May 31, 2021^{cclx}

In the weeks following the May 2021 disaster declaration, Governor Abbott met with local officials from around the state. During the Border Security Summit on June 10, 2021, Governor Abbott presented Operation Lone Star, announced a new task force on Border and Homeland Security, and explored cooperation “between state government, local city and county officials, law enforcement, and landowners to secure the border communities.”^{cclxi} Additionally, Governor Abbott appealed to landowners who had experienced property damage from unauthorized migration, and noted that his new task force would help reimburse them for the damages.^{cclxii}

On June 25, 2021, the Governor’s Office released a revised disaster declaration that listed a new set of counties (see Figure 15).^{cclxiii} Of the 34 counties that were initially included in the May 2021 disaster declaration, only 28 were listed in the June 2021 revised disaster declaration.^{cclxiv} However, this new declaration also included an additional five counties.^{cclxv} Governor Abbott announced that the disaster declaration would only cover counties that 1) agreed to cooperate with the state of Texas in carrying out its border enforcement and 2) released their own disaster declaration.^{cclxvi} However, some counties did not issue disaster declarations since they did not feel like they were experiencing a disaster and others worried about what cooperation with state officials might mean for their limited county resources.^{cclxvii}

Figure 15: Map of Texas Counties Included in the June 2021 Disaster Declaration

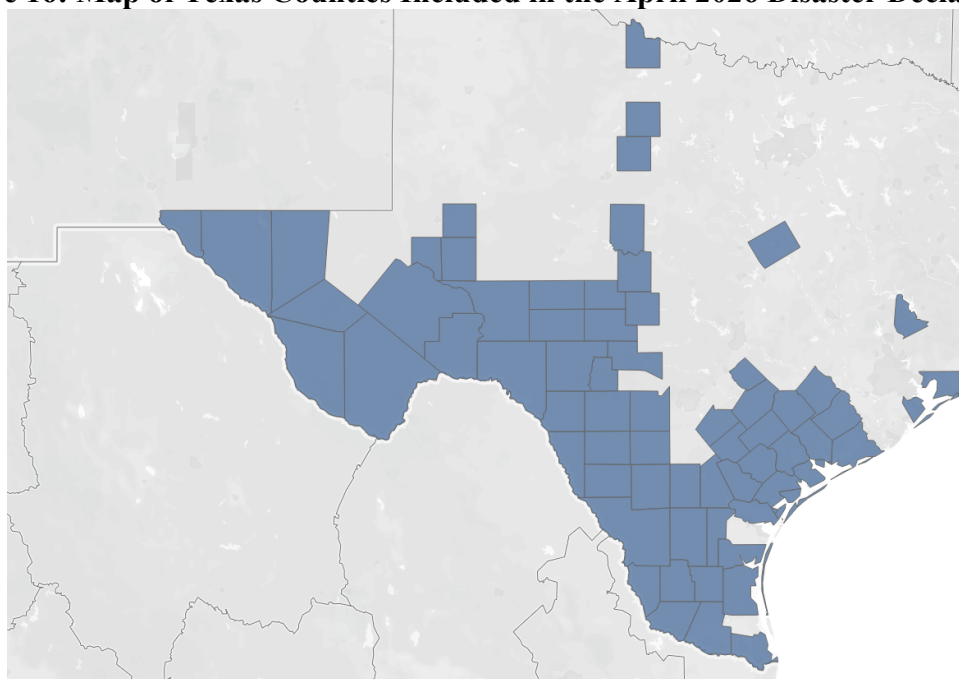


Source: Governor Greg Abbott's June 2021 Disaster Proclamation^{cclxviii}

However, counties had a financial incentive to declare a disaster and engage with Operation Lone Star. In September 2021, Governor Abbott announced the Operation Lone Star Grant Program, which provided access to \$100 million in grants for local counties.^{cclxix} Counties that issued their own disaster declaration were eligible to receive grants totaling up to \$5 million “to cover the costs of additional personnel, equipment, supplies, contractual support, travel, and training in support of the border security mission.”^{cclxx} For example, in July 2024, El Paso County signed a local disaster declaration when it needed to cover jail costs for migrants.^{cclxxi} Further, the Governor’s Office rolled back its Local Border Security Program grants for fiscal year 2026, which put renewed pressure on counties to declare disasters and gain access to the Operation Lone Star grants.^{cclxxii} In February 2025, Starr County signed a local disaster declaration after the Local Border Security Program grants were eliminated, noting that not signing would mean losing between \$5 million to \$8 million in county revenues.^{cclxxiii}

Since June 2021, Governor Abbott has renewed its border-related disaster declaration each month. As of April 2026, there were 69 counties covered under this disaster declaration.^{cclxxiv} These counties included all Texas border counties and many interior counties that also claimed a disaster. These interior counties run along major highways like U.S. Route 283 and U.S. Route 277 where there may be cases of human smuggling.^{cclxxv}

Figure 16: Map of Texas Counties Included in the April 2026 Disaster Declaration



Source: Governor Greg Abbott's April 2026 Disaster Proclamation^{cclxxvi}

Trespassing Charges

Operation Lone Star's second pillar includes the state's use of trespassing charges against migrants entering Texas and crossing onto private property. In the May 2021 disaster declaration, Governor Abbott set the stage for these charges by calling for an increase in "punishments available for certain criminal offenses," including criminal trespassing.^{cclxxvii} Then, on June 10, 2021, Governor Abbott announced that Texas Department of Public Safety troopers would begin arresting migrants crossing the border "on suspicion of trespassing on private property."^{cclxxviii} On July 27, 2021, Governor Abbott ordered the Texas National Guard to assist the Texas Department of Public Safety in "enforcing Texas law."^{cclxxix}

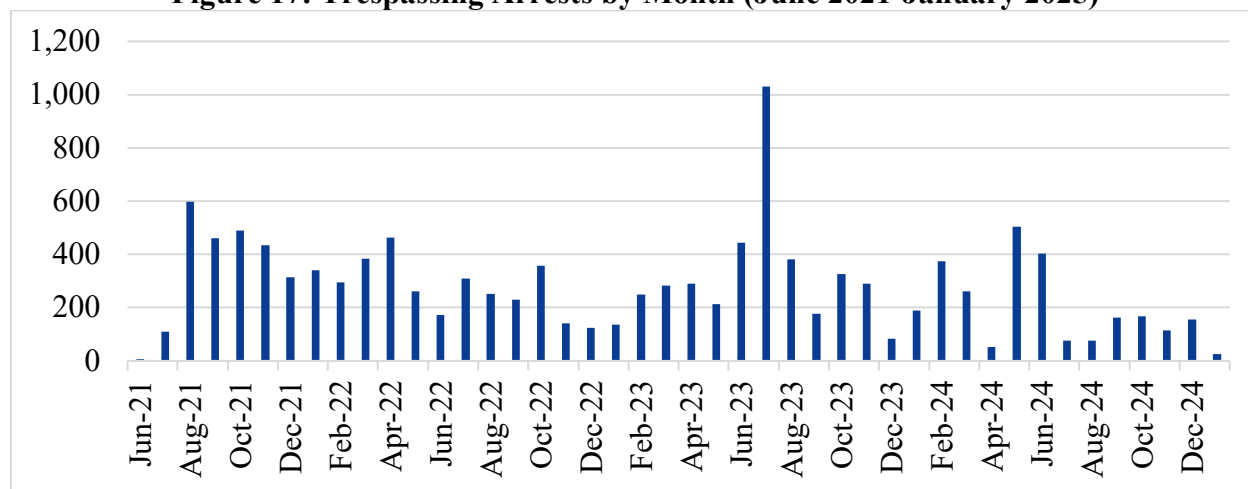
Around this time, Texas Department of Public Safety troopers began arresting migrants at railyards and on private property in collaboration with landowners.^{cclxxx} This approach allowed Texas Department of Public Safety troopers to arrest migrants while circumventing legal restrictions on state actors enforcing federal immigration policy.^{cclxxxi} However, Texas Department of Public Safety troopers could only arrest people if they had the landowner's permission to be on the property. In October 2023, Maverick County prosecutors dropped 150 trespassing charges because a ranch owner stated that he did not give permission for Texas Department of Public Safety troopers to conduct arrests on his property.^{cclxxxii}

Once arrested, migrants enter a complex legal system. Texas Department of Public Safety troopers took migrants to one of two Operation Lone Star jail booking facilities.^{cclxxxiii} Then, detained migrants were moved to state jails, where they awaited their virtual hearings.^{cclxxxiv} In September 2021, *The Texas Tribune* reported that migrants were being imprisoned for weeks without any charges filed against them.^{cclxxxv} The arrested migrants also spent weeks to months with little or no

legal assistance, despite Texas law requiring criminal defendants to have access to an attorney typically within three days of their request.^{cclxxxvi} Also, judges in these counties could decide whether or not to hear the trespassing cases. If local judicial authorities dropped the cases, migrants were typically released to Customs and Border Protection for processing.^{cclxxxvii} For Kinney County, the large number of arrests overwhelmed its court system, which previously only dealt with “a few dozen” misdemeanor cases per year.^{cclxxxviii}

From June 10, 2021 through February 3, 2025, Texas authorities arrested and charged more than 12,200 migrants with criminal trespassing.^{cclxxxix} As seen in the chart below, these criminal trespassing arrests generally hovered between 200 to 400 cases per month.^{ccxc} However, in July 2023, there was a spike in arrests. This coincided with a shift in June 2023, when the Eagle Pass mayor signed a “Criminal Trespass Affidavit” that deemed Shelby Park—a city park along the Rio Grande—as private property.^{ccxci} This move allowed the Texas Department of Public Safety to begin arresting migrants entering Shelby Park and prosecuting them for criminal trespassing. However, in August 2023, the Eagle Pass City Council rescinded the affidavit that declared Shelby Park to be “private property.”^{ccxcii}

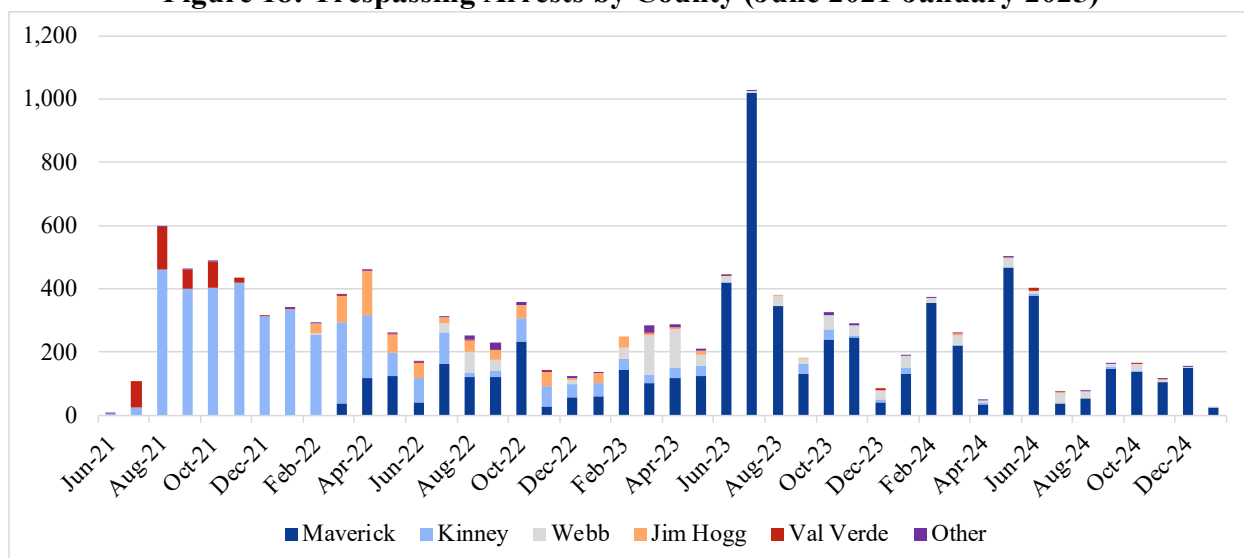
Figure 17: Trespassing Arrests by Month (June 2021-January 2025)



Source: Texas Department of Public Safety Public Records Request

The geographic scope of the criminal trespassing arrests varied over time. During the first few months of arrests, Texas Department of Public Safety troopers concentrated their efforts in Kinney County and Val Verde County.^{ccxciii} However, in March 2022, they began arresting people in nearby Maverick County, which soon became the primary location for criminal trespassing charges. According to Governor Abbott’s spokesperson, criminal trespassing arrests only occurred in counties where there were local prosecutors who were willing to prosecute the cases.^{ccxciv}

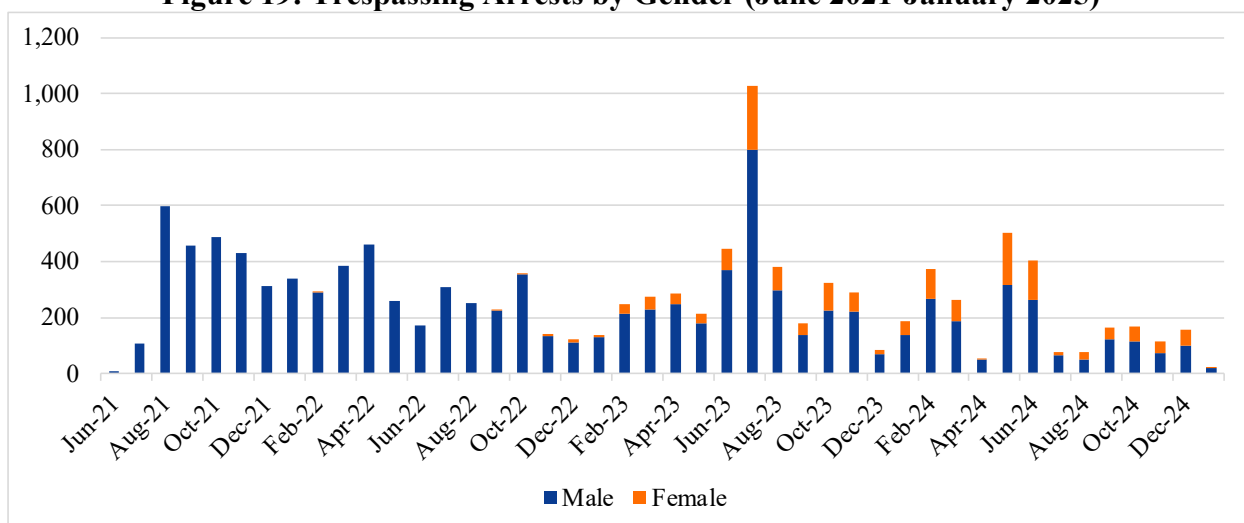
Figure 18: Trespassing Arrests by County (June 2021-January 2025)



Source: Texas Department of Public Safety Public Records Request

The arrested migrants' demographics also shifted over time. Initially, Texas Department of Public Safety troopers were told to detain and refer only single men for prosecution. By contrast, they were instructed to refer women, families, minors, and individuals over 65 years old directly to the Border Patrol.^{ccxcv} However, in September 2022, a Texas judge threw out trespassing charges against six men in Zapata County and alleged that the Texas Department of Public Safety engaged in sex discrimination by only arresting men.^{ccxcvi} In the following months, troopers also began arresting single women.^{ccxcvii} However, from September 2022 to January 2025, females never constituted more than 29 percent of monthly arrests.^{ccxcviii}

Figure 19: Trespassing Arrests by Gender (June 2021-January 2025)



Data Source: Texas Department of Public Safety Public Records Request

In summer 2023, there were initial reports that Texas Department of Public Safety troopers were separating families.^{ccxcix} Previously, if Texas Department of Public Safety troopers encountered a

family, they would refer all members to the Border Patrol.^{ccc} However, in mid-2023, Texas Department of Public Safety officers began to separate families by charging fathers with trespassing and referring mothers and children to the Border Patrol.^{ccci} Between July 10, 2023 and August 2, 2023, Texas Department of Public Safety personnel separated at least 26 families.^{cccii}

Physical Barrier Construction: Concertina Wire, Buoys, and the Border Wall

A third pillar of Operation Lone Star includes the construction of physical barriers along the Texas-Mexico border. These barriers involve concertina wire and chain-link fencing, buoys in the Rio Grande, and a state-funded border wall, which all aim to make it more difficult for migrants to cross into Texas.^{ccciii} The buoys attempt to stop migrants from crossing the Rio Grande—which is the dividing line between Texas and Mexico—and the concertina wire, fencing, and border wall attempt to block migrants from entering Texas once they are on the U.S. riverbank.

Concertina Wire. As mentioned previously, when Governor Abbott deployed the Texas National Guard to the border under Operation Lone Star, certain teams began to lay concertina wire along the Rio Grande. The National Guard engineers concentrated this wire in the areas experiencing high levels of cross-border migration.^{ccciv} According to a December 2023 National Guard press release, the concertina wire was designed to “funnel illegal migrants to staging areas where they are turned back to Mexico.”^{cccv} Similarly, in April 2024, Governor Abbott stated that the concertina wire aimed to “secure the border, [and] stop the smuggling of drugs, weapons, and people.”^{cccvi}

Texas’ use of concertina wire generated a legal battle with the Biden Administration. On October 24, 2023, Texas sued the Biden administration to stop Border Patrol agents from cutting concertina wire to reach migrants who were waiting on the U.S. riverbank.^{cccvii} In November 2023, a U.S. District Judge held that the Border Patrol could cut the wire in emergency cases to prevent injury or deaths.^{cccviii} However, over the following year, the courts went back and forth. First, in December 2023, a federal appeals court temporarily blocked Border Patrol agents from cutting concertina wire along the U.S.-Mexico border.^{cccix} Then, in January 2024, the Supreme Court issued a temporary ruling in favor of the Biden administration, stating that Border Patrol agents could cut the concertina wire when necessary.^{cccx} On November 27, 2024, a federal appeals court ruled that Border Patrol agents could not cut the concertina wire near Eagle Pass.^{cccxi}

Rio Grande Buoys. In early July 2023, Governor Abbott announced that officials were installing 1,000 feet of buoys on the Rio Grande near Eagle Pass.^{cccxi} The buoy chain consists of bright orange globes separated by saw blades and supported by a submerged net. Texas authorities placed these buoys in the middle of the Rio Grande, and anchored them to the ground via thick cables and concrete bases.^{cccxi} Sometimes, the buoys are marked with signs that say “do not cross” in Spanish (“no cruzar”).^{cccxi}

On July 24, 2023, the U.S. Department of Justice filed a complaint against Texas over the buoys.^{cccxi} The Department of Justice argued that the barrier lacked federal authorization, created navigational safety hazards, went against international treaties, and dampened relations with Mexico.^{cccxi} Mexico also filed a diplomatic note to the U.S. government stating their concern that the buoys could violate the binational 1944 Water Treaty and 1970 Boundary Treaty.^{cccxi}

In November 2024 and January 2025, the Texas Governor's Office announced it was expanding the buoys near Eagle Pass.^{cccxxviii} However, in February 2025, Texas announced that the federal government, under the second Trump administration, had taken over the buoys.^{cccxxix} In October 2025, the Trump administration announced that not only had it taken over the buoys near Eagle Pass but that it would be placing an additional 80 miles of buoys in the Rio Grande, including near Brownsville, Eagle Pass, and Del Rio.^{cccxxx} As of March 23, 2026, the Trump administration had announced plans to install 536 miles of buoys through Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, Zapata, Webb, Maverick, and Val Verde counties.^{cccxxxi}

State-Funded Border Wall. In June 2021, Governor Abbott announced Texas' plan to build a state-funded border wall.^{cccxxii} In the announcement, Governor Abbott directed the Texas Facilities Commission to hire a program manager to lead the wall's construction and authorized \$250 million as a down payment to begin the project.^{cccxxiii} Around the same time, Governor Abbott created a fundraising website that allowed the public to make donations for the border wall.^{cccxxiv} By August 31, 2021, private citizens had donated \$54 million through the website.^{cccxxv} In December 2021, builders broke ground on the Texas-funded border wall in Rio Grande City.^{cccxxvi} Six months later, in June 2022, the builders had completed the first 1.7 miles of border wall.^{cccxxvii}

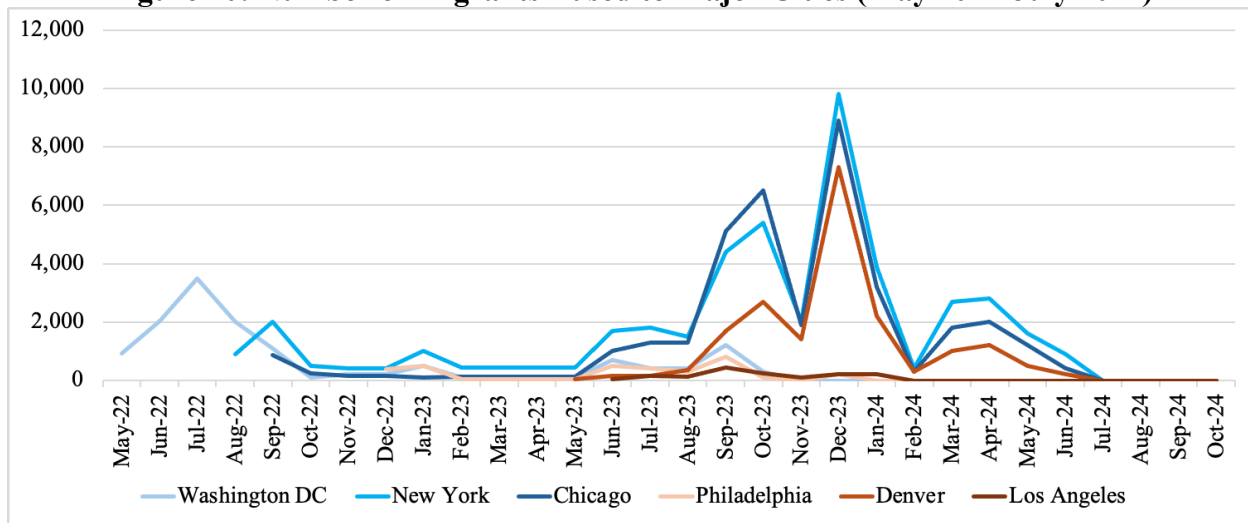
However, construction of the Texas border wall soon ran into obstacles. First, to build the wall on private property, Texas officials needed to obtain landowners' permission. As of December 2024, a third of landowners on the border had stated that they were not interested in Texas authorities building the border wall on their property.^{cccxxviii} Second, for landowners that did not consent to the wall, Texas authorities could not seize the land because the Texas legislature prohibited the use of eminent domain for the wall's construction.^{cccxxix} As a result, the Texas border wall is not contiguous, with some portions being 70 miles apart.^{cccxxx} In June 2025, the Texas Legislature discontinued further funding for the border wall, stating that it was now a federal responsibility.^{cccxxxi} As of February 19, 2026, Texas authorities had completed 82.2 miles of border wall, and were winding down construction.^{cccxxxii}

Migrant Busing Program

Operation Lone Star's fourth pillar involves the state's migrant busing program. On April 6, 2022, Governor Abbott announced a busing initiative and authorized the Texas Department of Emergency Management "to begin coordinating voluntary transportation" of migrants to major Democratic-governed cities.^{cccxxxiii} This program was for migrants who the federal government had processed and released into Texas communities. To board a bus, migrants had to both voluntarily enter the bus and show documentation of their release from federal custody.^{cccxxxiv}

On April 13, 2022, Texas authorities bused the first group of migrants to Washington D.C.^{cccxxxv} The buses then began regularly transporting migrants from different border cities across Texas to a range of self-declared "sanctuary cities," including not only Washington D.C. but also New York, Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia.^{cccxxxvi} From April 2022 to June 2024, the Texas busing initiative transported more than 119,400 migrants to interior U.S. cities.^{cccxxxvii} In June 2024, Texas ended the busing due to the low number of migrants arriving at the border.

Figure 20: Number of Migrants Bused to Major Cities (May 2022-July 2024)



Source: Office of the Texas Governor

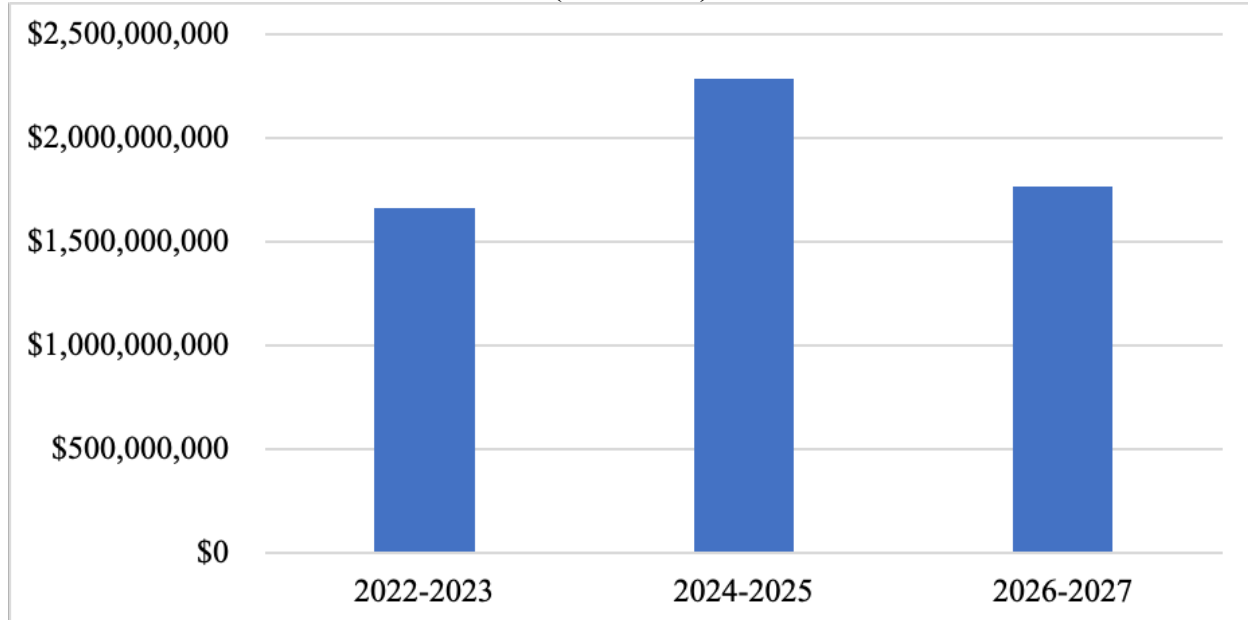
Initially, Texas’ buses arrived in the U.S. cities during daytime hours. This timing allowed civil society organizations to meet the migrants and provide them with services. Specifically, local NGOs, mutual aid groups, and individual volunteers would welcome the migrants and take them to local shelters.^{cccxxxviii} However, by October 2022, there were reports of buses arriving in the middle of the night, when organizations were closed.^{cccxxxix}

Cost of Operation Lone Star Activities

Overall, Operation Lone Star has constituted a significant cost for Texas. The Texas Legislature allocates funding in two year increments, called a biennium. From March 2021 through the 2026-2027 biennium, Texas spent nearly \$14.4 billion on the operation. Of this total, nearly \$5.4 billion has gone to the Texas Military Department for border security (which is the umbrella department for the National Guard, Air Guard, and the Texas State Guard).^{7cccxli} In the most recent 2026-2027 biennium budget, the Texas Legislature allocated \$1.7 billion to the Texas Military Department to continue supporting Operation Lone Star “by maintaining security points, conducting mobile land and river patrols, and constructing temporary fencing and barriers along the Texas–Mexico border.”^{cccxlii}

⁷ There is no budget or public record that provides an exact breakdown of the cost appropriated for and utilized by the Texas National Guard in support of Operation Lone Star. The cost of activities can generally be tracked by examining funds appropriated to or transferred to the Texas Military Department. The Texas Military Department's purpose is “to provide administrative and financial resources for state activities conducted by the three branches of the Texas military forces: the Texas Army National Guard, the Texas Air National Guard, and the Texas State Guard,”

Figure 21: Total Texas Military Department Appropriations for Border Security (2022-2027)



Source: Texas Legislative Budget Board

Operation Lone Star has also encompassed a range of costs beyond the National Guard's deployment. The Texas Legislature has allocated nearly \$3.7 billion to the Texas Department of Public Safety troopers' deployment to the border.^{cccxlvi} Further, the Legislature has earmarked billions of dollars in Operation Lone Star funding for a range of other activities. These activities include grants awarded to local governments, costs associated with prosecuting criminal trespassing charges, the construction and maintenance of physical barriers along the border, and the migrant busing initiative.

Figure 22: Operation Lone Star Expenditures

Category	Activity	Expenditures
Operation Lone Star grants	Border security grants awarded to local governments	\$177 million ^{cccxlili}
Trespassing charges	Court cost for prosecution at criminal processing centers	\$77.3 million ^{cccxliv}
	Health and safety related services at criminal processing centers	\$32.8 million ^{cccxliv}
Physical barrier construction	Border wall	\$3 billion ^{cccxlvi}
	Concertina wire	\$58 million ^{cccxlvi}
	Buoys	\$1 million ^{cccxlvi}
Migrant busing program	Transportation of migrants to other U.S. cities	\$230 million ^{cccxliv}

On July 7, 2025, President Trump signed the One Big Beautiful Bill into law, which set aside \$13.5 billion in grants to reimburse border states for security operations during the Biden Administration.^{cccl} This would cover the \$11 billion that Texas spent during this period. On November 14, 2025, members of the Texas congressional delegation wrote to the Attorney General and Secretary of Homeland Security to request that Texas be prioritized when dispersing the allocated funds.^{cccli} However, as of April 2026, the funds have yet to be disbursed.

Chapter Three: Effects from the Texas National Guard's Involvement in Operation Lone Star

Since March 2021, Operation Lone Star and the Texas National Guard's deployment along the border have generated a range of effects. Some of these effects were concentrated in the National Guard itself and the deployed soldiers, given changes in funding, infrastructure, and soldier experiences. However, the operation and deployment have generated other consequences for migration dynamics, migrant safety, border communities, border county agencies, non-border counties, the state of Texas, federal migration policy, and relations with Mexico. The following sections explore each of these wide ranging effects.

Achievement of Operation Lone Star's Stated Objectives

In March 2021, Governor Abbott launched Operation Lone Star with the primary objective of preventing the smuggling of people and drugs into Texas.^{ccclii} At the time, Governor Abbott cited a “crisis at the Southern border” that required the combined enforcement efforts of the Texas National Guard and the Texas Department of Public Safety.^{cccliii} He framed the operation primarily through a security and public safety lens, portraying the federal government under the Biden Administration as failing to manage a “humanitarian crisis” that “endanger[ed] the lives of Texans.”^{cccliv}

To achieve the operation's objectives, Governor Abbott launched various activities. First, he deployed Texas National Guard soldiers and Texas Department of Public Safety troopers to the border, where they patrolled the Rio Grande and highways, participated in brush patrols, and conducted surveillance operations. Second, Governor Abbott issued a broad disaster declaration and incentivized other counties to issue their own declarations by offering grant money. Third, he directed Texas Department of Public Safety troopers to arrest and prosecute migrants for the state crime of trespassing on private property. Fourth, Governor Abbott constructed various physical border barriers, including a state-funded wall, concertina wire, and buoys in the Rio Grande. Finally, to bring national attention to migration numbers on the border, Governor Abbott directed the Texas Department of Emergency Management to begin busing migrants to Democratic Party-governed cities across the U.S. interior.

Each month, the Office of the Texas Governor reported various indicators to measure the operation's efficacy in achieving its goals. These metrics have included the number of criminal arrests, migrant apprehensions, drug seizures, and firearm confiscations attributed to Operation Lone Star.^{ccclv} For example, in June 2025—the latest press release on Operation Lone Star that listed these indicators—the Governor's Office claimed that Texas authorities had apprehended 533,800 migrants, conducted more than 54,300 criminal arrests, with more than 45,800 felony charges, and seized more than 735 million doses of fentanyl, which it claimed was “enough to kill every man, woman, and child in the United States, Mexico, and Canada.”^{ccclvi}

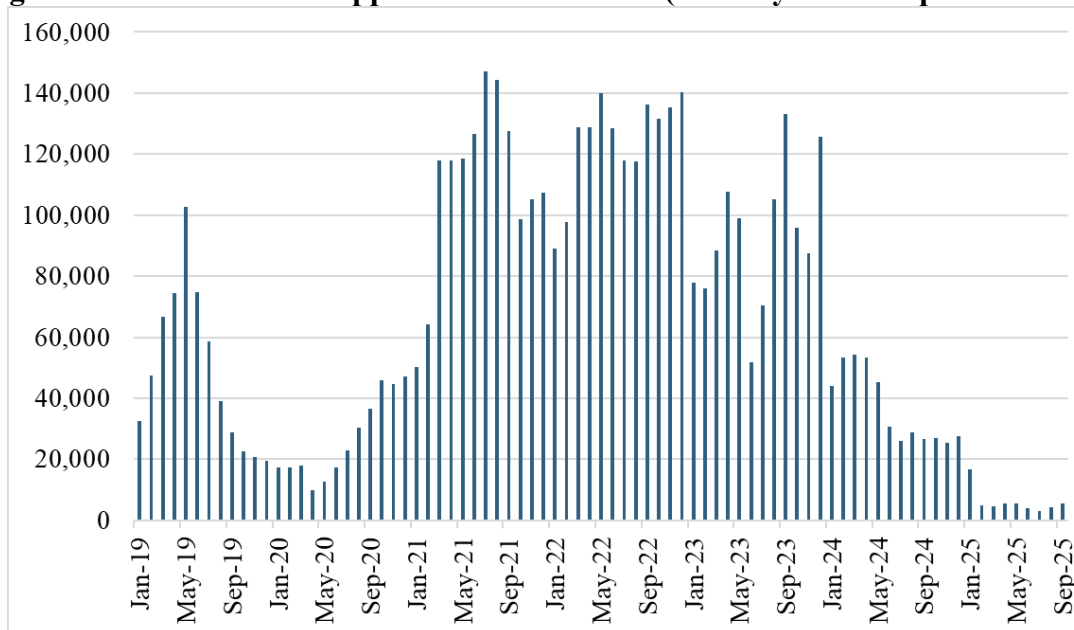
Over the years, outside sources have raised doubts around these numbers.^{ccclvii} For example, April 2022 reporting by *ProPublica*, *The Texas Tribune*, and The Marshall Project have pointed out that many of the arrests and seizures attributed to Operation Lone Star came from routine law enforcement activities and was not directly attributable to Operation Lone Star.^{ccclviii} Additionally,

the reporters found that migrant apprehension numbers may be inflated, as Texas Department of Public Safety troopers, Texas National Guard soldiers, and the Border Patrol agents often work alongside one another and may all count the same group of people crossing the border in each of their agency tallies.^{ccclix} Similarly, analysts have questioned the ‘lethal doses’ metric used for drug apprehensions, given the lack of transparency on the amount of fentanyl needed for a fatal dose.^{ccclx}

Changes in Migration Dynamics

One of Operation Lone Star’s primary objectives was to reduce migration numbers. However, the operation’s effect on migration dynamics is not straightforward. When Governor Abbott launched Operation Lone Star, migrant apprehensions in Texas were rapidly increasing. From February 2021 to June 2021, total Border Patrol apprehensions in Texas increased from 64,260 migrants to 126,560 migrants.^{ccclxi} These numbers remained high for years, despite Operation Lone Star’s various activities and billions of dollars in funding.^{ccclxii}

Figure 23: Border Patrol Apprehensions in Texas (January 2019 - September 2025)



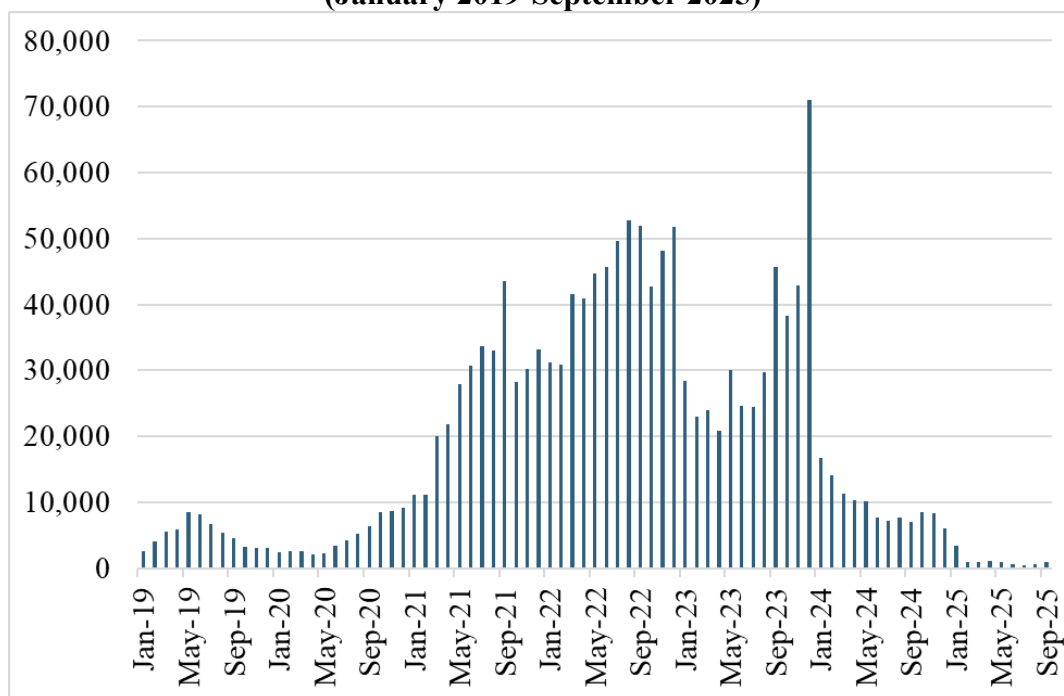
Data source: Border Patrol

While it is impossible to know the counterfactual scenario of what apprehensions might have looked like without Operation Lone Star, the operation does not appear to be associated with the sharpest drops in migration. Instead, the drops in January 2024 and June 2024 appear to be associated with enforcement efforts in Mexico and policy changes at the federal level. Further, when President Trump assumed office in January 2025, the numbers decreased again and remained around 5,000 apprehensions per month throughout the year—suggesting that federal policy shifts mattered more than state-level activities.^{ccclxiii} The following sections detail the two periods with the sharpest drops in apprehension numbers.

Mexico’s Migration Enforcement and Shelby Park. From December 2023 to January 2024, the number of Border Patrol apprehensions in Texas fell significantly.^{ccclxiv} This drop was largely

concentrated in the state’s Del Rio Sector, where migration numbers had been the highest. The Del Rio Sector begins north of Laredo and stretches through Eagle Pass and Del Rio to reach Lake Amistad. In this area of the border, Border Patrol apprehensions dropped by 76 percent from December 2023 to January 2024.^{ccclxv}

**Figure 24: Border Patrol Apprehensions in the Del Rio Sector
(January 2019-September 2025)**



Data source: Border Patrol

The activities that led to the drop began the month prior. At this time, migrants were arriving in large numbers to Eagle Pass, which is across the Rio Grande from the Mexican city of Piedras Negras. On November 27, 2023, CBP shut down the pedestrian lanes on International Bridge 1 in Eagle Pass and limited vehicle crossings, to “redeploy enforcement resources elsewhere in response to large numbers of migrants.”^{ccclxvi} Residents of Piedras Negras and Eagle Pass residents who were crossing back and forth now faced longer wait times to enter the United States.

On December 20, 2023, Mexican authorities in the Piedras Negras region took a series of actions. At this time, officials—including the mayors of Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila’s governor, representatives from the National Institute of Migration (*Instituto Nacional de Migración*, INM), and the Mexican military—agreed on a multi-pronged strategy to reduce migrant crossings near Eagle Pass.^{ccclxvii} These efforts included reinforcing the Coahuila border with 50 INM personnel and establishing checkpoints both on the border and in nearby cities like Frontera, Monclova, and Torreón. It also included expanding INM’s removals of migrants from the area, with 20 airplanes and 10 buses allocated to transport migrants to southern Mexico.^{ccclxviii} Over the following days, the number of daily crossings near Eagle Pass dropped from 4,000 migrants a day to around 450 migrants.^{ccclxix} On January 4, 2024, as the number of migrants arriving in Eagle Pass decreased, CBP reopened the closed international bridge.^{ccclxx}

Around the same time, Mexico also launched a nationwide migration enforcement strategy. In early 2024, the Mexican government began placing hundreds of thousands of migrants on planes and buses and transporting them to the southern border cities of Villahermosa, Tabasco and Tapachula, Chiapas.^{ccclxxi} Mexico's National Migration Institute also set up checkpoints along the country's train system to remove migrants riding atop train cars, and began apprehending an increasing number of migrants.^{ccclxxii} In March 2024, Mexico's National Migration Institute apprehended 280,000 migrants at the country's southern border with Guatemala and across its interior, more than double the previous year's monthly average. By comparison, in March 2024, U.S. authorities apprehended 189,000 migrants along the U.S.-Mexico border.^{ccclxxiii}

Yet, as the number of migrant apprehensions decreased in the Del Rio Sector, Governor Abbott and Texas authorities pointed to Operation Lone Star as deserving credit.^{ccclxxiv} These state authorities highlighted the Texas National Guard's January 11, 2024 takeover of Shelby Park as playing a role in the lower number of migrants crossing the border. On this date, the National Guard had taken over the park, and cordoned off the area with concertina wire, fencing, vehicles, and armed forces—blocking both the public and Border Patrol agents from accessing the park.^{ccclxxv} In April 2024, the Texas Department of Public Safety spokesman claimed that the decrease in crossings at Shelby Park and in Eagle Pass was due to the presence of Texas Department of Public Safety troopers and National Guard soldiers.^{ccclxxvi} However, the National Guard soldiers' takeover of Shelby Park occurred seven days after CBP had reopened the international bridge in the city amid reduced apprehensions.

“Securing the Border” Interim Final Rule. In June 2024, there was another significant drop in migration apprehensions. From May 2024 to June 2024, the number of apprehensions border wide dropped by 32 percent, from 45,150 migrants to 26,070 migrants.^{ccclxxvii} This decline coincided with a significant federal policy shift. On June 5, 2024, President Biden signed Presidential Proclamation 10773 and the related “Securing the Border” Interim Final Rule, which removed access to asylum for migrants who crossed between ports of entry.^{ccclxxviii} This interim final rule declared an emergency situation when the Border Patrol's daily apprehensions surpassed an average of 2,500 encounters per day over a seven day period.^{ccclxxix} During these emergencies, the border would temporarily “close” and only reopen after seven consecutive days of an average daily apprehension level of below 1,500 crossings.^{ccclxxx}

For migrants, this interim final rule went into immediate effect and quickly changed migration dynamics. Before this policy, migrants were released continuously into the U.S. interior, as the Department of Homeland Security could not keep up with the number of migrants requesting credible fear interviews.^{ccclxxxi} However, under the new Securing the Border Interim Final Rule, DHS officers no longer had to offer credible fear interviews, which allowed them to move quickly toward removal proceedings.^{ccclxxxii} Individuals could still be eligible for other forms of protection, such as withholding of removal or protection under the Convention Against Torture. However, they would have to vocalize a fear of persecution and pass a reasonable probability interview, which entails a higher standard than a credible fear interview.^{ccclxxxiii} This shift created an immediate impact on migrants' processing dynamics as many stopped being released, and likely deterred people from crossing the border.

In June 2024, as the number of apprehensions along the border dropped, Governor Abbott claimed that the drop was due to Operation Lone Star. On June 14, 2024, the Governor’s Office published a press release noting that Operation Lone Star had reduced crossings by 74 percent.^{ccclxxxiv} The following month, on July 26, 2024, the Governor’s Office claimed that the operation had decreased migrant crossings by 85 percent.^{ccclxxxv} Neither press release included the time period that the percentage was measuring. Yet, more importantly, while the new interim final rule was fundamentally changing processing dynamics at the border, there were no significant changes to Operation Lone Star.

Effects on the Texas National Guard

Operation Lone Star has produced a set of effects for the Texas National Guard and for individual National Guard soldiers. The Texas National Guard has been a primary actor in the border operation, with thousands of deployed troops and billions of dollars in targeted funding. These dynamics have generated a wide range of effects, including for the Texas Military Department’s budget, National Guard infrastructure at the border, overall military readiness, and troop morale and safety. The following subsections dive into each of these topics.

Agency Budget

To fund Operation Lone Star, Governor Abbott and the Texas Legislature have allocated nearly \$14.4 billion.^{ccclxxxvi} Of this total, approximately \$5.4 billion went directly to the Texas Military Department for border security.^{ccclxxxvii} This marked a shift from previous periods, when the Texas Department of Public Safety received the state’s border security funding and reimbursed the Texas Military Department for any role that it played at the border. The higher funding levels also allowed the agency to boost its compensation to deployed soldiers and expand infrastructure and soldier services along the border.

For deployed soldiers, the increased funding has meant a pay bump. In 2024, the Texas Military Department requested “\$73 million in General Revenue for a daily pay increase of \$8.33 in fiscal year 2024 and \$16.67 in fiscal year 2025” for soldiers activated under state authority.^{ccclxxxviii} In January 2025, the Texas Military Department reported that the “pay increase helped stabilize the force” and “fewer service members” left Operation Lone Star for financial reasons.^{ccclxxxix} The Texas Military Department also provides National Guard members with a per diem for food.

The funding also went toward building Camp Eagle, the Forward Operating Base in Eagle Pass. Before Operation Lone Star, the Texas National Guard did not have a strong presence in this border area.^{cccxc} However, in May 2024, the Texas National Guard opened the new base to house up to 2,300 soldiers.^{cccxcxi} At this time, the Texas Military Department claimed that the Forward Operating Base was saving the state \$11.5 million a month from no longer needing to rent hotel rooms or pay for gas on long commutes.^{cccxcii} However, with fewer migrants arriving at the border and fewer National Guard troops on the ground, interviews suggest that the base may no longer be saving money for the state.^{cccxciii}

Finally, the Texas Military Department’s increased funding has also meant more mental health services for soldiers.^{cccxciv} In 2023, the Texas Military Department secured \$1.2 million for four

additional Licensed Clinical Social Workers for troops as part of a “high risk mental health intervention initiative.”^{cccxcv} These social workers assist soldiers in transitioning from or to state active-duty missions, such as Operation Lone Star.^{cccxcvi} The funding also reduced existing caseloads for social workers assisting service members, shifting from 70 cases per social worker to 35 cases.^{cccxcvii}

Mission Readiness

The Texas National Guard can be called up for federal combat service to become a force multiplier within the U.S. military. Since National Guard soldiers can be called on at any point, they must maintain a high level of readiness. During non-deployment times, this means spending one weekend a month undergoing training. Since March 2021, thousands of Texas National Guard soldiers have deployed as part of Operation Lone Star for months or years. The National Guard has suggested that these deployments increase troop readiness. For example, in March 2026, the National Guard suggested that Operation Lone Star gives soldiers experience with specific activities and equipment, such as flying drones, that they could use in combat.^{cccxcviii}

However, there have been high-profile critics of how Operation Lone Star deployments may affect soldiers’ ability to maintain mission readiness. In June 2024, the retiring chief of the National Guard Bureau noted his belief that the National Guard’s role in border missions is purely law enforcement in nature and does not have any military value.^{cccxcix} This specific quote was in reference to troops deployed under federal Title 32 authorization and not under state active duty, but extends to all National Guard activities at the border. Similarly, in February 2025, the Texas Public Policy Foundation published a report that noted how a focus on state missions may degrade National Guard readiness, as domestic operations do not prepare soldiers for fighting global adversaries.^{cd}

Troop Morale

Operation Lone Star has affected deployed National Guard soldiers’ morale. In the operation’s initial months, the quick deployment created a number of logistical and personal challenges for involved soldiers.^{cdi} These challenges included inadequate housing, late salary payments, and equipment shortages, with some soldiers having to rearrange their lives, education, and businesses in just a few days.^{cdii} Further, amid these sacrifices and early upheavals, National Guard soldiers were, at times, unclear about the mission or their contributions.^{cdiii} In February 2022, an investigation by *The Texas Tribune* and *Army Times* revealed that National Guard members felt uncertain of Operation Lone Star’s overall effectiveness and underutilized in their role.^{cdiv}

During these early months, official surveys suggested low soldier morale. From January 5, 2022 to January 10, 2022, the Texas Military Department conducted an internal morale survey of deployed troops.^{8cdv} The following month, *The Texas Tribune* analyzed the findings and revealed that more than 50 percent of respondents expressed frustration with Operation Lone Star’s logistics.^{cdvi} Additionally, nearly 30 percent of soldiers were frustrated with the mobilization’s length, haste, or involuntary nature, and about 30 percent said that the most difficult part of the

⁸ Respondents included 250 soldiers in Task Force South, mostly comprising Texas Air National Guard members.

deployment was the impact on their civilian lives, including lost wages, disrupted families (strained marriages and childcare costs), and interrupted careers and education trajectories.^{cdvii}

However, by July 2022, the Texas National Guard was engaging with the soldiers' complaints, making changes, and pointing to increased morale among troops.^{cdviii} At the time, Texas National Guard leadership discussed positive developments, including dorm-style rooms for soldiers and improvements to the payroll system.^{cdix} The Texas Military Department also released a policy memo easing restrictions on curfews, alcohol consumption, and travel, and mentioned days for personal time and a four-day pass provided on a monthly basis.^{cdx} In July 2022, the Texas Military Department reported that 2,800 troops out of 5,400 indicated their willingness to continue voluntary deployment for an additional year.^{cdxi}

By September 2024, the National Guard troop deployments were no longer hasty and involuntary. In fact, on September 19, 2024, *Fox News* reported that from the “3,000 military members assigned to the operation, about 125 of them were involuntary.”^{cdxii} In a legislative hearing that month, the Texas Military Department highlighted better morale among soldiers.^{cdxiii} In 2025, the Texas National Guard also published videos and articles where soldiers deployed under Operation Lone Star talked about their high morale. In one January 2025 video, a soldier described a sense of patriotism, stating “I do feel that I have made a difference being here [at the border].”^{cdxiv} Similarly, a February 2025 article quoted an engineer sergeant as saying, “I’m proud to be doing this for my state.”^{cdxv} Deployed soldiers under state active duty can earn six figures, and this financial incentive can factor into higher morale.^{cdxvi}

Deaths Among Deployed Texas National Guard Soldiers

The National Guard deployment outcome has also resulted in soldier deaths. In December 2024, the American Homefront Project reported that 17 Texas National Guard members have died during Operation Lone Star.^{cdxvii} The deaths were due to various causes, including suicides, drownings, motor vehicle incidents, and accidental shootings.^{cdxviii} Out of the 17 deaths, the Texas Military Department considered only four of these deaths to be “in the line of military duty.”^{cdxix}

The most prominent form of death appears to be soldier suicide. In August 2024, the Texas Military Department testified in a legislative hearing that there have been seven suicides during Operation Lone Star.^{cdxx} This included four suspected and confirmed suicides from October 2021 to December 2021, corresponding with the initial period of hasty deployments and low morale.^{cdxxi} At this time, there were anecdotes that at least some of the deaths occurred after hardship denials.^{cdxxii} For example, in one November 2021 case, a soldier received a civilian job offer while deployed for Operation Lone Star.^{cdxxiii} The soldier submitted a hardship release request and gained approval by his company commander.^{cdxxiv} However, his brigade commander denied the request, and 36 hours later, the soldier died of suicide in San Antonio.^{cdxxv} Overall, these individuals had ranks including private first class, specialist, sergeant, and lieutenant.

Soldiers also died from other causes during Operation Lone Star. This included the April 22, 2022 high-profile drowning of a 22-year-old Texas National Guard soldier.^{cdxxvi} This soldier drowned in the Rio Grande while trying to rescue migrants that were struggling in the water.^{cdxxvii} The migrants were ultimately saved, but the soldier was not, and his body was discovered four days

later.^{cdxxviii} The Texas Military Department confirmed that he did not have a flotation device when he jumped into the river.^{cdxxix}

Effects on Migrant Health and Safety

Operation Lone Star also created a range of consequences for migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. Some effects occurred during the initial crossing period, such as when migrants traversed the Rio Grande and clambered onto the U.S. riverbank. Other effects occurred when migrants traversed the Texas interior, including being charged with the state crime of trespassing on private property, becoming involved in vehicle pursuits, or participating in the state busing initiative. Yet, Operation Lone Star's effects were not uniform for all migrants, and depended on where and when the individual crossed the border and whether the migrant was an asylum seeker or a clandestine migrant trying to evade detection. The following subsections cover the effects for migrants along the Rio Grande and in the Texas interior.

Effects for Migrants Along the Rio Grande

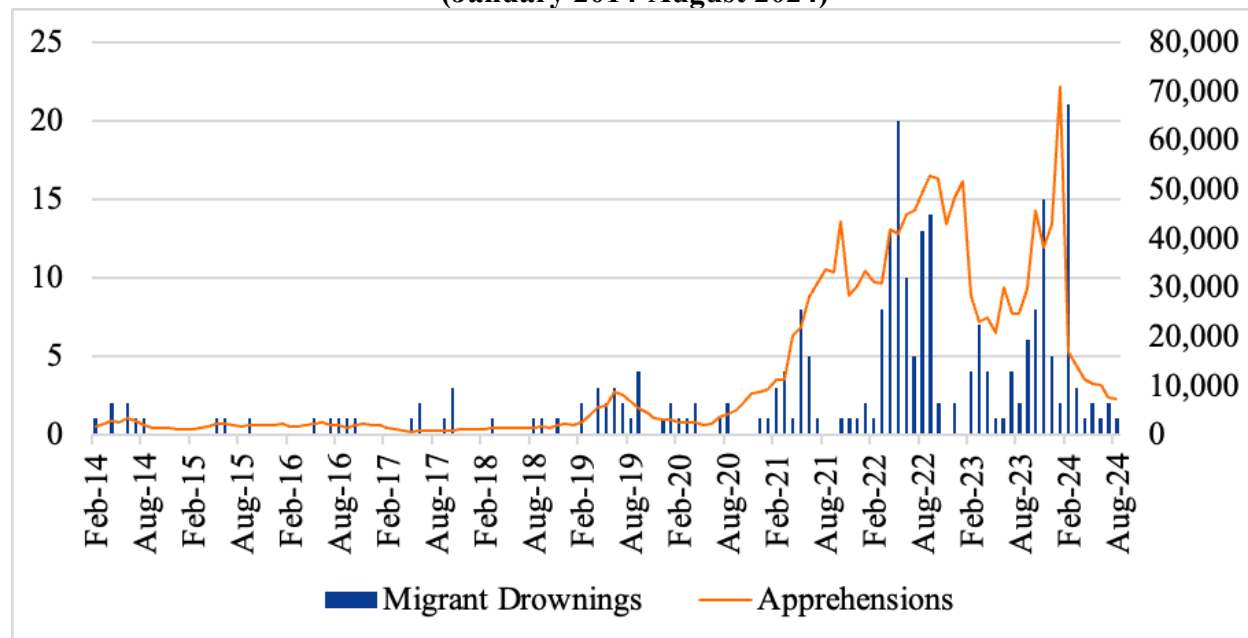
The Texas–Mexico border is defined by the Rio Grande, and all migrants entering the state between ports of entry must cross the river. As part of Operation Lone Star, Texas authorities have focused on constructing of physical barriers in or next to the Rio Grande, including buoys, concertina wire and chain-link fencing, and a Texas-funded wall. The operation also deployed DPS troopers and Texas National Guard soldiers on boats and on foot patrols, and are often the first contact with migrants once they reach U.S. territory. The following subsections explore these specific activities and their effects for migrants

Buoys and Drownings. In July 2023, Texas authorities installed 1,000 feet of floating buoy barriers in the middle of the Rio Grande near Eagle Pass.^{cdxxx} Migrants crossing the river in this specific area cannot go over or under the buoys, and they must go around them. Different actors suggest varying effects for migrants. Specifically, a July 2023 leaked email from a Texas Department of Public Safety medic and a December 2024 investigative article both suggested that the buoys redirect migrants toward more dangerous sections of the river, resulting in increased drownings.^{cdxxxii} However, on July 24, 2023, Governor Abbott argued that the buoys would actually increase migrant safety by deterring crossings in between ports of entry.^{cdxxxiii} Similarly, in July 2023, a Texas Department of Public Safety Lieutenant stated that the buoys would “deter unlawful crossings and prevent drownings.”^{cdxxxiiii}

Overall, drownings along the Texas-Mexico border increased during Operation Lone Star's early years. This was particularly the case in the Del Rio Sector, where the buoys are located. Using the Border Patrol's person-level migrant death data, it is possible to track drownings over time.^{cdxxxv} In 2021, drowning deaths in the Del Rio Sector were sparse, with mostly zero deaths per month, and occasional small spikes. In February 2024, the drownings peaked, with 21 deaths in one month. However, the number of migrants crossing in this area also simultaneously increased. When tracking the total number of drownings compared to the total number of apprehensions (as a proxy for the number of migrants crossing), the total rate of death for the Del Rio Sector remained steady. This suggests that the link between migrant drownings and the buoys has been inconclusive.

However, the lack of conclusive effects may also be related to the small buoy length, which left many possible crossing locations, and could change as more buoys are placed in the Rio Grande.

**Figure 25: Apprehensions and Drownings in the Del Rio Sector
(January 2014-August 2024)**



Source: No More Deaths and Border Patrol Data^{cdxxxv}

Concertina Wire and State Funded Border Wall. Since the beginning of Operation Lone Star, the National Guard has laid more than 150 miles of concertina wire along the border.^{cdxxxvi} Migrants crossing the Rio Grande and arriving in U.S. territory generally have three options once they reach the concertina wire. They can either attempt to climb through it, go around the wire, or wait until the Border Patrol cuts it. Migrants may also attempt to cut through the razor wire themselves or knock it down. However, if they are caught destroying the wire, they could be charged with damage to state property.^{cdxxxvii}

Some migrants have attempted to navigate the rows of concertina wire on the Rio Grande riverbank by climbing through the coils. These migrants may wrap clothes or blankets around the sharp metal spikes and hold the wire back as they attempt to crawl through or pass children underneath the coils.^{cdxxxviii} At times, the concertina wire injures the migrants. From June 2023 to February 2025, a Texas Department of Public Safety public records request documented that the agency had treated 310 people suffering trauma from the concertina wire.^{cdxxxix} Clínica Hope, a binational healthcare clinic, also documented injuries from concertina wire that included cuts and infections. The clinic also reported family separations when family members became trapped on opposite sides of the wire.^{cdxl}

Other migrants do not attempt to pass through the concertina wire but rather walk along the wire—in the Rio Grande or on the U.S. riverbank—until they find an opening. As migrants walk in these areas, they face increased exposure to extreme temperatures, dehydration, and exhaustion. If they are walking in the Rio Grande, they also risk stepping on concertina wire that has fallen into the

river. For instance, in July 2023, a Venezuelan migrant reported that while crossing the Rio Grande, he felt a sharp pain and blood began to flow from one of his tennis shoes.^{cdxli} It was only then that he realized he had stepped on a stretch of concertina wire that was hidden under the water.^{cdxlii}

In some locations, migrants are unable to climb over the concertina wire or walk around it, and, instead, stand and wait in the space between the Rio Grande and the wire. In late 2022, migrants would cross the Rio Grande near a migrant camp in Matamoros, Mexico, and wait on the U.S. bank in Brownsville.^{cdxlili} When there was a group of migrants waiting in this area, Texas National Guard soldiers would alert the Border Patrol to their presence. Border Patrol agents would then wait until a migrant in the group had a medical emergency, which could take days, before cutting through the wire and processing the migrants.^{cdxliv}

Texas has also constructed 82.2 miles of a state-funded border barrier along the Rio Grande.^{cdxlv} Yet this wall is not contiguous and does not appear to have had a significant impact on migration flows. Migrants circumvent the barrier by crossing in areas without fencing, walking around the wall until they get to an opening, or climbing over sections of the wall.

National Guard and Texas Department of Public Safety Excessive Use of Force. As part of Operation Lone Star, Governor Abbott deployed thousands of Texas National Guard troops and more than 1,000 Texas Department of Public Safety troopers to the border. Some of these individuals were stationed on the Rio Grande's U.S. bank and were the first line of contact for migrants crossing the border. Over time, Texas Department of Public Safety troopers and Texas National Guard soldiers have faced accusations of using excessive force against migrants. These accusations include pushing migrants back into the river and telling them to return to Mexico, firing pepper spray balls and rubber bullets at crossing migrants, and physically and verbally accosting migrants.^{cdxlvi}

The first category of accusations center on Texas Department of Public Safety troopers and National Guard soldiers pushing migrants back into the Rio Grande. For example, in a June 2023 case, a Texas Department of Public Safety trooper reported to his supervisors that he and his group had been ordered to deny a group of migrants assistance, including children, and push them back into the river near Eagle Pass.^{cdxlvii} The trooper also claimed to have witnessed "a four-year-old girl faint from exhaustion in 100-degree heat after attempting to pass through the razor wire but being pushed back by Texas National Guard soldiers."^{cdxlviii} At the time, a Texas Department of Public Safety spokesperson said that there was no official policy directing officers to push migrants back into the river, and a subsequent internal investigation concluded that there was no evidence of systematic misconduct.^{cdxlxi}

The second category of allegations centers on National Guard soldiers' use of various non-lethal weapons against migrants. These weapons include rubber bullets and pepper balls that contain chemicals to irritate migrants' eyes and throats.^{cdl} On May 3, 2024, *Telemundo* published a video that showed Texas National Guardsmen in El Paso shooting pepper balls toward migrants.^{cdli} Later that month, a migrant attempting to cross the border told migrant advocates that National Guard soldiers had fired so many pepper balls at his group that they could not see and had to turn back to Mexico.^{cdlii} According to a June 2024 article in *The Texas Tribune*, National Guard soldiers are

authorized to shoot pepper balls in migrants' general direction to break up groups or deter them, but are trained to hit inanimate objects and not people.^{cdliii} However, a National Guard major general testified that soldiers can use force to defend themselves, and noted that "there's already been an illegal crossing, people are now crawling through the concertina wire field and we are saying go back and they are not doing it...Now there's non-compliance."^{cdliv} From May 2024 to June 2024, Clínica Hope recorded at least 25 projectile-related injuries among migrants near El Paso.^{cdlv}

The third category of allegations includes National Guard soldiers and Texas Department of Public Safety troopers' physical and verbal altercations with migrants. For example, from May 2024 to June 2024, Clínica Hope documented two cases where National Guard soldiers pushed migrants against concertina wire.^{cdlvi} In another case, documented by the Border Network for Human Rights, a National Guard soldier allegedly struck a girl who was holding on to the border wall and grabbed and choked an adult with a bag strap.^{cdlvii}

Effects for Migrants in the Texas Interior

Migrants also face Operation Lone Star's effects in the Texas interior. These effects may occur soon after the migrants emerge from the Rio Grande, on rangeland far from the border, on interior highways, or after being released from CBP custody. The following subsections explore how Operation Lone Star activities—such as charging migrants with the state crime of trespassing on private property, vehicle pursuits, and the migrant busing program—all create a range of effects for migrants.

Criminal Trespassing Charges. On June 10, 2021, Governor Abbott announced that Texas Department of Public Safety troopers would begin arresting migrants who entered Texas and stepped foot on private property.^{cdlviii} According to a Texas Department of Public Safety dataset, from June 12, 2021 to February 20, 2025, Texas Department of Public Safety troopers arrested and charged more than 12,200 people with trespassing. These arrests had significant impacts for the arrested migrants, including a lack of due process, family separations, and prolonged detention in poor conditions.^{cdlix}

First, the migrants arrested and charged with criminal trespassing did not always receive immediate due process. Legal filings and media reports show that county justice systems were initially overwhelmed, resulting in many detainees being held past statutory deadlines.^{cdlx} In September 2021, *The Texas Tribune* reported that hundreds of migrants sat in detention centers for weeks with no charges filed against them.^{cdlxi} This stands in violation of Texas Code, which states that a defendant must be released on a personal bond or by reducing bail if the state is not ready for trial of the charged offense within a certain time period after the state of detention.^{cdlxii} For trespassing, that deadline is generally set at 15 or 30 days, depending on the misdemeanor offense's charge level.^{cdlxiii}

During these initial days, migrants were also not being assigned an attorney for weeks or months.^{cdlxiv} According to Texas Code, criminal defendants must be assigned an attorney within three working days of asking for one in counties with a population of less than 250,000 or one working day in counties with a population of more than 250,000.^{cdlxv} In July 2021, the Lubbock

Private Defenders Office (which changed its name to the Lone Star Defenders Office in 2023) was assigned by the state to appoint attorneys for detained migrants.^{cdlxvi} In August 2021, the Texas Supreme Court directed the Texas Indigent Defense Commission to develop procedures for appointing counsel for arrested migrants.^{cdlxvii} However, the appointed lawyers often had hundreds of cases and struggled to locate or communicate with their clients due to the detention facilities' disorganized management.^{cdlxviii} The Lone Star Defenders Office reports appointing counsel for Operation Lone Star cases in nine Texas counties.^{cdlxix}

Second, the trespassing arrests and charges also resulted in cases of family separation. Initially, Texas Department of Public Safety troopers would refer entire families to the Border Patrol for processing. However, in summer 2023, these troopers began to arrest some fathers and send the mother and children to Border Patrol. These steps divided families between state criminal detention and federal immigration custody. In August 2023, the chief defender for the Lone Star Defenders Office reported that this practice caused deep anguish for the fathers.^{cdlxx} In August 2023, a Texas Department of Public Safety spokesperson acknowledged that fathers were being arrested, but emphasized that mothers were not being separated from their children.^{cdlxxi}

Third, the migrants were often detained in poor conditions. Migrants reported that they were not given an adequate amount of food or clothing, were rarely allowed to go outside, could not contact their family members, suffered from extreme temperatures, and received insufficient access to medical care during their detention.^{cdlxxii} They also reported experiencing insults from guards, being woken up at 3:00 am, and receiving little to no information about their legal case.^{cdlxxiii} Many migrants were incarcerated in these conditions for months before receiving any due process, and then, at times, even after their charges were dismissed or their sentences had been served.^{cdlxxiv}

Vehicle Pursuits. Asylum seekers often turn themselves in immediately after crossing the Rio Grande in order to make a protection claim. However, clandestine migrants try to evade detection and generally rely on smugglers to move them from the U.S. border to cities throughout the United States. Drivers may pick up clandestine migrants at the border, drive them through Border Patrol checkpoints, or pick them up after they hike around a checkpoint. With more Texas Department of Public Safety troopers patrolling in certain areas along the border, there are more chances that these troopers detect migrant smugglers' vehicles.

If Texas Department of Public Safety troopers attempt to stop a vehicle and it fails to comply, the situation kicks off a vehicle pursuit. Since Operation Lone Star began, the number of vehicle pursuits has risen sharply. A November 27, 2023 Human Rights Watch report analyzed Texas Department of Public Safety data for Kinney County, and reported that the agency's vehicle pursuits increased from 22 pursuits in the 12 months prior to Operation Lone Star to 227 vehicle pursuits over the following 26 months.^{cdlxxv} El Paso County reported a similarly dramatic increase in vehicle pursuits. In 2024, the county reported 825 vehicle pursuits, with Texas Department of Public Safety troopers involved in 97 percent of these cases.^{cdlxxvi} By comparison, the county reported between 20 to 66 vehicle pursuits a year from 2018 to 2022.^{cdlxxvii}

These pursuits can be dangerous or even deadly for migrants. In July 2022, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the Texas Civil Rights Project reported that, during Operation Lone Star's first 16 months, they had counted 30 deaths and more than 70 injuries in high-speed pursuit

chases involving Texas Department of Public Safety troopers.^{cdlxxviii} Similarly, a 2023 Human Rights Watch analysis found that, between March 2021 to July 2023, vehicle pursuits in Operation Lone Star counties—involving Texas Department of Public Safety troopers, Border Patrol agents, and local law enforcement agencies—resulted in at least 74 deaths and 189 injuries.^{cdlxxix} A February 2025 Human Rights Watch update raised the death toll to more than 100 people with more than 300 injuries.^{cdlxxx} Migrants constituted the vast majority of the individuals who died or were injured in these pursuits.

Busing Program. On April 6, 2022, Governor Abbott directed the Texas Division of Emergency Management to charter buses and provide migrants with bus transportation to Democratic-led interior cities.^{cdlxxxi} From April 2022 to June 2024, Texas bused more than 119,400 migrants to Washington, D.C., New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, Denver, and Los Angeles.^{cdlxxxii} These migrants had all been released from federal custody and boarded the buses voluntarily.

During the busing program, migrants were often enthusiastic about the free transportation to a major U.S. city.^{cdlxxxiii} Bus tickets from border cities to interior cities generally cost hundreds of dollars per person and flights could be similar in price or even more expensive, depending on the time of year and final destination. For families with multiple members, the free bus ride often saved them hundreds if not thousands of dollars in transportation costs. In April 2022, a Venezuelan migrant explained that the bus ride positively changed his life, allowing him to save money, find work, and build stability after arriving in Maryland.^{cdlxxxiv} In August 2022, the executive director of the Central American Resource Center in Washington, D.C. noted that, “A lot of the immigrants are very thankful.”^{cdlxxxv}

Yet, the conditions on the buses were not always comfortable. In October 2023, a retired security contractor who was hired to ride on the buses reported that migrants endured “disgusting and inhuman” conditions during long trips.^{cdlxxxvi} In his report, he noted that migrants were not let off the bus for bathroom breaks, and, on one bus, the onboard bathroom overflowed with urine and leaked down the aisle.^{cdlxxxvii}

Consequences for Texas

The Texas National Guard’s deployment to the border and Operation Lone Star more broadly have produced a wide range of consequences across the state. These effects have shaped conditions for border residents, border agencies, non-border counties, and at the state level. The effects have generated both benefits and challenges, and stem from the increased law enforcement presence in certain areas, an influx of grant funding to Texas counties, and public opinion surrounding the operation. The following subsections examine these Texas-centered impacts in greater detail.

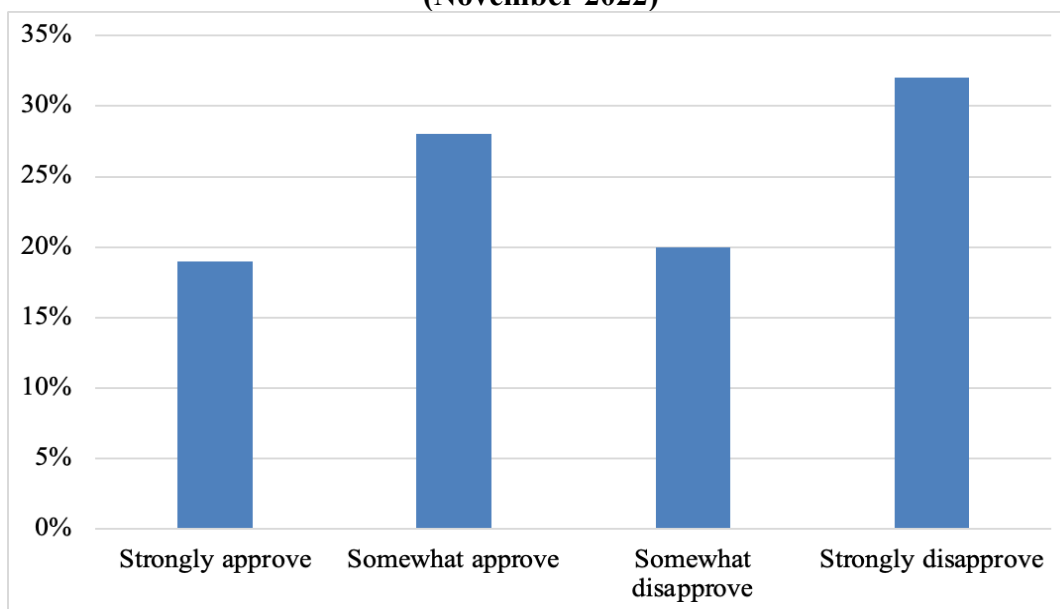
Effects for Texas Border Residents

Operation Lone Star’s activities have been concentrated in border counties, and residents in these counties have faced many of the most immediate effects. Overall, reactions among border residents have been mixed. Some community members have criticized the operation’s scale and visibility, along with daily disruptions, such as helicopter noise, road congestion, and restrictions on accessing certain public areas.^{cdlxxxviii} Other community members have supported the increased

National Guard and Texas Department of Public Safety presence. These residents argue that additional enforcement resources help address smuggling activity and demonstrate that the state is responding to border security concerns.^{cdlxxxix}

Public opinion surveys on border and migration issues in border counties are scarce. However, the limited polls indicate that border residents in South Texas were split in their views of Texas border enforcement efforts after Operation Lone Star's launch. For instance, in November 2022, polling from the University of Texas Latino Politics and Policy Initiative surveyed 1,640 voters in the Rio Grande Valley.^{cdxc} The survey found that the majority of respondents disapproved of how Governor Abbott was handling border enforcement issues. However, the breakdown was close, with 45 percent reporting that they strongly approved or somewhat approved of the measures and 52 percent reporting that they strongly disapproved or somewhat disapproved.^{cdxci}

Figure 26: Rio Grande Valley Residents' Attitudes Toward Texas' Border Enforcement (November 2022)



Source: University of Texas, Latino Policy and Politics Initiative^{cdxcii}

Benefits and Disadvantages to Local Industries and Resources. Operation Lone Star sent thousands of National Guard soldiers and more than 1,000 Texas Department of Public Safety troopers to the border. These troopers and soldiers often needed places to stay and ate at local restaurants. As a result, some residents benefited from the increased demand for lodging and dining in many border communities.^{cdxciii} For example, during the operation's peak in Eagle Pass, hotel parking lots filled with Texas Department of Public Safety vehicles, room prices rose sharply due to demand, and local restaurants and coffee shops were frequently crowded with state troopers and National Guard soldiers.^{cdxciv}

However, some businesses and activities were negatively impacted. For example, one high profile case involved a kayaking company in Eagle Pass, where the owner alleged that the floating river buoys had blocked river access and destroyed the business.^{cdxcv} Additionally, a nearby pecan farmer in Eagle Pass claimed that Texas officials cleared vegetation, ran heavy vehicles along the

Rio Grande, and installed fencing on the property, which all left the orchard barren.^{cdxcvi} Border residents also lost access to certain parks that lined the Rio Grande. For example, the National Guard took over part of Anzalduas Park in the Rio Grande Valley as a staging area with an observation post.^{cdxcvii} Residents in Eagle Pass also lost access to Shelby Park, when the Texas National Guard and Texas Department of Public Safety used the space for their operations and installed concertina wire and a cargo container border wall.^{cdxcviii}

Traffic Citations and Pursuits. As Governor Abbott deployed Texas Department of Public Safety troopers to border counties as part of Operation Lone Star, there was also an increase in overall traffic stops and citations.^{cdxcix} These citations were not only for migrant smuggling but more frequently involved minor traffic violations, such as failing to signal lane changes, driving with an expired registration, and speeding.^d For example, from January 2021 to June 2021, in Starr County, the number of citations skyrocketed. These included a 1,060 percent increase in the number of Texas Department of Public Safety citations linked to having anything on a vehicle’s windshield.^{di}

Amidst this proliferation of Texas Department of Public Safety traffic stops and citations, various civil liberties groups complained that troopers were racially profiling drivers. In August 2022, the Texas Civil Rights Project and the ACLU of Texas filed a complaint alleging that Texas Department of Public Safety troopers had engaged in racial profiling in their traffic stops, and were disproportionately targeting Latinos.^{dii} A November 2023 report by Human Rights Watch also chronicled the Texas Department of Public Safety’s use of racial profiling and reasons for traffic stops, such as having license plates from other cities, passengers’ eating a sandwich in a car, or the vehicle smelling like migrants.^{diii}

Property Damage. As more Texas Department of Public Safety troopers arrived in border counties, the number of vehicle pursuits also increased. While the pursuits most directly affected migrant safety, border residents also experienced increased property damage. A November 2023 Human Rights Watch report found that property damage from vehicle pursuits rose dramatically under Operation Lone Star. Between March 2021 and July 2023, residents in counties participating in the operation reported an average of \$177,000 in monthly property damages.^{div} This amount represented an increase of 142 percent compared to the pre-Operation Lone Star period of January 2018 through February 2021.^{dv}

In May 2024, Texas launched a program to compensate landowners and local governments for vehicle-pursuit-related damages along the border.^{dvi} This program aimed to provide reimbursements for damages such as broken fences, destroyed gates, broken ranch equipment, and other infrastructure losses.^{dvii} The Texas Legislature appropriated \$18 million a year for the program.^{dviii} However, an October 2024 investigation by *The Houston Chronicle* reported that, as of late 2024, the state had approved fewer than 50 property damage claims—totaling less than \$150,000.^{dix}

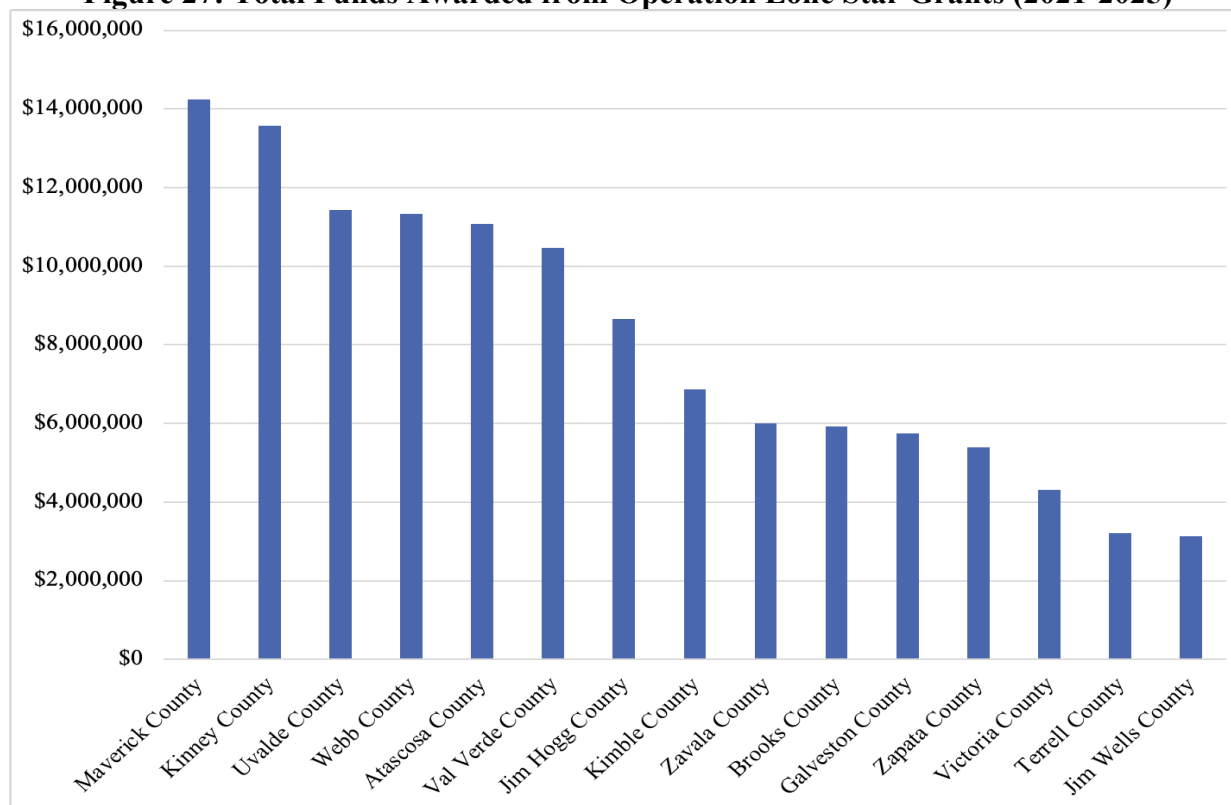
Effects for Texas Border County Agencies

Operation Lone Star has not only affected border residents but also government agencies within Texas border counties. Some of these effects have been beneficial to these agencies, such as an influx of funding to support law enforcement operations. However, other Operation Lone Star

activities have strained border county agencies, such as when Texas Department of Public Safety troopers began arresting hundreds of migrants each month and charging them with criminal trespassing. The following subsections outline these effects.

Increased Funding From Operation Lone Star Grants. In September 2021, Governor Abbott announced the availability of Operation Lone Star grants.^{dx} These grants were designated for counties that issued a disaster declaration and collaborated with state officials on border enforcement.^{dx} The grants aimed to support “jail operations and other supporting functions associated with increased criminal activity due to surges in illegal migration.”^{dxii} From October 2021 through January 2025, the Operation Lone Star grant program awarded approximately \$177 million to 115 Texas counties and cities, totaling an average of \$1.5 million per jurisdiction.^{dxiii} However, some counties and cities received higher amounts of funding. For example, as of January 2025, Maverick County, which is home to Eagle Pass, had received more than \$14 million.^{dxiv}

Figure 27: Total Funds Awarded from Operation Lone Star Grants (2021-2025)



Source: *The Houston Chronicle*^{dxv}

The Operation Lone Star grant funding went toward various activities. An August 2025 investigation in *The Houston Chronicle* noted that \$36 million was for supporting law enforcement officers, \$35.2 million went to other personnel, and \$33.9 million was used for vehicles and other equipment.^{dxvi} Counties also spent millions on office renovations, detention centers, technology upgrades, and general software—including cameras, field supplies, computers, and office supplies—that were loosely related to border security.^{dxvii} The counties receiving Operation Lone Star grants were also not confined to the border and included counties such as Galveston County, near Houston, which received \$5.7 million.^{dxviii}

Over the past several years, Operation Lone Star grants have become an integral funding source for Texas counties. For example, in Maverick County, the Operation Lone Star funding accounted for about 8 percent of the county’s operating budget in 2023.^{dxix} Similarly, in August 2025, an Eagle Pass city councilman said that losing access to funds would cripple Maverick County and might lead to layoffs or the inability to maintain essential services.^{dxx} Other counties have relied on Operation Lone Star funding for ongoing law-enforcement costs. For example, Zapata County reported receiving more than \$500,000 in Operation Lone Star grants in a recent funding cycle to pay overtime for sheriff’s deputies and related patrol expenses.^{dxxi}

Effects on Border Counties’ Law Enforcement and Justice Systems. Operation Lone Star has also generated effects for local law enforcement agencies and justice systems. Some of these effects have been beneficial. For example, in September 2023, a National Guard soldier stated how local law enforcement described the National Guard’s border presence as a “force multiplier.”^{dxxii} However, the deployments can also strain border law enforcement and judicial systems. For example, in fiscal year 2022, law enforcement in Kinney County arrested 3,045 people on felony smuggling charges, compared to 67 people during the previous fiscal year.^{dxxiii} Kinney County did not have sufficient jail space for all of these individuals and had to transport detainees to Val Verde County and Jim Hogg County, which cost more than \$100,000.^{dxxiv} These counties have also lacked sufficient physical space and judicial infrastructure to manage the number of Operation Lone Star cases. For example, in January 2024, the extra Operation Lone Star personnel in Kinney County took up so much space that only the district courtroom was available to hold court.^{dxxv}

Additionally, border law enforcement agencies have expressed concerns regarding losing officers to the Texas Department of Public Safety amid pay differentials. Texas Department of Public Safety troopers work a 50 hour work week, and, therefore, already rely heavily on overtime.^{dxxvi} However, they exceed that number when stationed at the border, as they often work every day of their rotation for at least 12 hours a day.^{dxxvii} This overtime has become costly to the Texas Department of Public Safety but profitable to troopers. As of June 2025, one in ten Texas Department of Public Safety troopers was on track to double their annual salary through overtime pay.^{dxxviii} Further, 124 Texas Department of Public Safety troopers had pulled in at least one \$10,000 monthly overtime payment.^{dxxix} As a result, some local agencies report losing experienced officers to the Texas Department of Public Safety, creating additional strain on already limited personnel.^{dxxx}

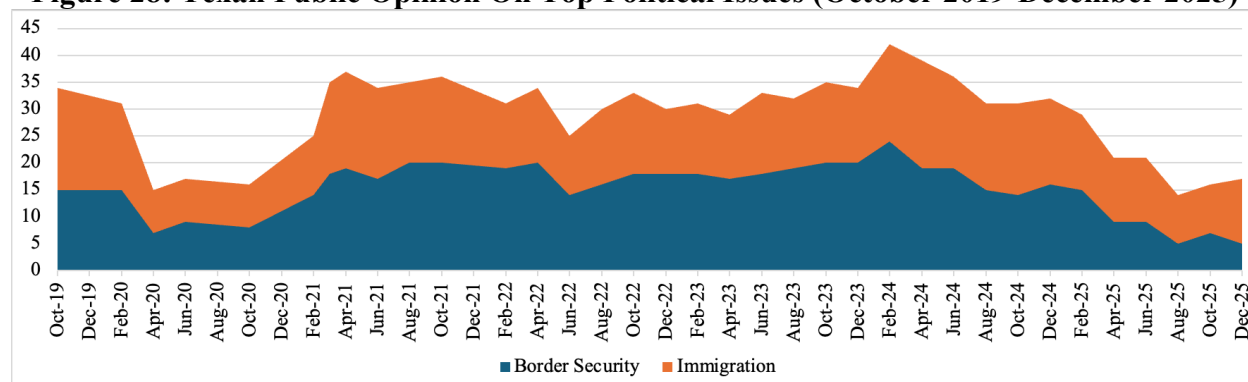
Statewide Issues

Operation Lone Star has also produced a range of statewide effects that extend beyond border enforcement. As Texas’s largest state-led border operation, Operation Lone Star has aligned with public opinion within the state, influenced budget priorities, and generated tensions between state and federal authorities over immigration enforcement. The following subsections examine these political, fiscal, federal-state, and international dynamics in greater detail.

Supportive Public Opinion. Throughout Operation Lone Star, Texas voters have voiced concern about border issues. According to polling by the Texas Politics Project, between March 2021 and December 2024, polled Texans consistently ranked “immigration” and “border security” as the two most important problems facing the state.^{dxxxi} Between 20 and 40 percent of Texas residents

selected these answers during each monthly survey, surpassing other listed concerns such as political corruption, inflation, and abortion.^{dxxxii}

Figure 28: Texan Public Opinion On Top Political Issues (October 2019-December 2025)



Source: *The Texas Politics Project*

Texas voters also supported efforts to address these two perceived top issues. Specifically, when asked whether they approved or disapproved of how Governor Abbott has handled immigration and border security, Texas residents tended to approve of the approach.^{dxxxiii} Further, while the percentages shifted over time, a majority of Texas residents approved of certain enforcement activities. For example, proposals such as deploying Texas National Guard personnel and Texas Department of Public Safety troopers to the border and constructing physical barriers along the Rio Grande continuously received roughly 50 to 70 percent of respondents' support.^{dxxxiv}

Financial Effects. Operation Lone Star has constituted a significant cost for Texas. Since its launch in March 2021, the Texas Legislature has allocated nearly \$14.4 billion to support the operation, including approximately \$3.4 billion for the 2026-2027 biennium.^{dxxxv} To maintain sufficient funding, Texas state leadership has repeatedly redirected funds from various agencies to border security efforts. First, in May 2022, Texas authorities shifted approximately \$480 million in federal COVID-19 relief funds to the governor's disaster fund, which helped finance Operation Lone Star.^{dxxxvi} Then, in October 2022, officials diverted an additional \$359.6 million from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to pay Texas National Guard troops and support other agencies at the border.^{dxxxvii} An October 2022 article in *The Texas Tribune* reported that a TDCJ spokesperson claimed that the transfer would not negatively impact the department's operations.^{dxxxviii}

Operation Lone Star Litigation. Texas has been involved in several high-profile lawsuits stemming from Operation Lone Star. These lawsuits include the July 2023 case, where the federal government sued Texas over its buoy installations in the Rio Grande.^{dxxxix} It also includes the October 2023 case where Texas sued the federal government over Border Patrol agents cutting through state-placed concertina wire.^{dxl} This litigation has required significant legal and administrative resources, with repeated injunctions, emergency appeals, and Supreme Court rulings.^{dxli}

These complex lawsuits also often involve a range of outside experts and consultants working alongside the Texas Attorney General's Office. In April 2024, the *Texas Observer* reported that

Texas had spent nearly \$1 million on experts just for the Rio Grande buoy lawsuit.^{dxlii} Notably, these contracts were more expensive than the \$850,000 that the state paid to install the first 1,000 feet of buoys.^{dxliii} Beyond direct legal fees, these disputes also consume staff time within Texas agencies due to the need to coordinate evidence, prepare filings, and respond to federal court proceedings.

National Effects of Operation Lone Star

Operation Lone Star's effects have not been confined to Texas. As the United States geared up for the 2024 presidential election, Operation Lone Star elevated border security as a defining political issue on the national stage. Similarly, the operation's specific activities drove a wedge between state and federal Democrats at a moment when they hoped to project unity and served as a blueprint for the second Trump administration's migration policy. The following sections examine these national effects in greater detail.

The 2024 Presidential Election

Operation Lone Star influenced politics well beyond the Texas state boundaries. As the United States got ready for the November 2024 presidential election, Operation Lone Star kept migration and the border in the national news. Texas officials held frequent press events and border visits and released regular updates on migrant apprehensions, smuggler arrests, and drug seizures. These activities ensured that the topics remained in state and national news cycles. In September 2024, Pew Research noted that 60 percent of U.S. voters reported that immigration was playing a role in their voting decisions.^{dxliv}

Operation Lone Star's migrant busing program was particularly effective in generating political pressure. The contracted buses brought more than 119,400 migrants to cities around the country.^{dxlv} Many of the migrants arrived in these cities without housing, stable employment, or even reliable access to work authorization, and often entered the cities' shelter systems or relied on organizations for food, medical care, and legal-immigration support.^{dxlvi} Receiving cities' shelters quickly became overwhelmed by the number of arriving migrants, and they responded by setting up tent camps and other temporary facilities and stretching their budgets.^{dxlvii}

The busing program's pressure on cities began to pit city and state Democratic party officials against the Biden administration.^{dxlviii} Politicians from migrant-receiving-cities began to increasingly call on the Biden administration to increase funding for cities supporting the newly arrived migrants, alongside other measures.^{dxlix} In September 2023, then-New York City mayor Eric Adams stated, "this issue will destroy New York City."^{dl} While in December 2023, Chicago's mayor began feuding with other Democrats at the state level and in city council over where to house migrants for the winter.^{dli} Ultimately, this infighting created divisions as Democrats were attempting to show unity before the presidential election. By contrast, Operation Lone Star generated support from other Republican-led states and further unified the party.^{dlii}

Blueprint for the Trump Administration

When Governor Abbott announced Operation Lone Star, he stated that Texas was filling a gap left by the Biden Administration. However, during the operation's first four years, it did not visibly lead to any direct shifts in federal immigration policy. In fact, in July 2023, federal government officials claimed that Operation Lone Star was interfering with U.S. immigration policy enforcement, and "adversely affecting CBP's ability to interdict individuals crossing between ports of entry."^{dliv}

However, when Donald Trump won the November 2024 presidential election, Texas had an opening to influence federal policy. In November 2024, Trump's border czar, Tom Homan, stated that Texas's Operation Lone Star model is one the incoming administration can implement "across the country."^{dlv} On December 6, 2024, the Texas Governor's Office presented Operation Lone Star as a "border security blueprint for the nation."^{dlv} In January 2025, the Trump administration assumed office and implemented a series of hardline migration and border actions that mirrored Operation Lone Star. The Trump administration also immediately hired Texas' first border czar, Michael Banks, who had led activities under Operation Lone Star to become the head of the Border Patrol.^{dlvi}

International Relations Effects of Operation Lone Star

Operation Lone Star also generated tensions between Texas and Mexico's federal government. These tensions have primarily centered over the operation's border barriers, such as floating buoys and concertina wire. In July 2023, Mexico filed a formal diplomatic complaint with the United States over the concertina wire and buoys in the Rio Grande, arguing that Texas had violated the 1944 Water Treaty and had installed structures in a shared international waterway.^{dlvii} Around this time, officials from the International Boundary and Water Commission surveyed the buoys and found that roughly 79 percent were in Mexico.^{dlviii}

Operation Lone Star has also had more limited effects on relations with Mexico's border states: Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Coahuila, and Chihuahua. On April 6, 2022, Texas began inspecting all commercial vehicles crossing the border.^{dlx} Immediately, Mexico's Foreign Ministry (*Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores*) pushed back and stated that the efforts disrupted trade between Texas and Mexico, causing both parties to lose competitiveness and revenue.^{dlx} Mexican border governors also voiced concerns about how this tactic could generate delays that would impact Mexican businesses and lead to economic disruption.^{dlxi} Ultimately on April 15, 2022, Governor Abbott agreed to end port-of-entry inspections.^{dlxii} In return, Mexican governors committed to boosting security on their side of the border.^{dlxiii}

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