

WOLA's New Study Separates Rhetoric from Reality on Security and Migration Along the Border

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The [Washington Office on Latin America](#) (WOLA) and Mexico's [College of the Northern Border](#) (COLEF) have released [Beyond the Border Buildup: Security and Migrants Along the U.S.-Mexico Border](#), a year-long study of the current security situation on the U.S.-Mexico border and the impact of both countries' security policies on the migrant population. With presidential elections looming in the United States and Mexico this year, the border and migration are bound to become wedge issues in both countries' political debates.

The WOLA and COLEF study finds a dramatic buildup of the U.S. security presence along the border with Mexico -- a fivefold increase in the size of the U.S. Border Patrol in the last decade, an unusual new role for U.S. soldiers on U.S. soil, drones and other high-tech surveillance, plus hundreds of miles of completed fencing -- without a clear impact on U.S. security. For instance, the study finds that despite the dramatic increase in security forces, more drugs are crossing than ever before.

"The security buildup has resulted in a confusing tangle of agencies whose mission is undermined by the lack of a clear strategy," according to Adam Isacson, WOLA's Senior Associate for Regional Security, and one of the study's leading authors. "The facts contradict the frequent call to escalate the massive buildup of U.S. border security forces, including the military."

Furthermore, the study finds that Mexico's very real crisis of violence is not spilling over the border. While a few notorious incidents get attention, the U.S. side of the border actually suffers less violent crime than the U.S. average, or even the averages of the four border states.

The study reveals that security policies that were designed to combat terrorism and drug trafficking are causing a humanitarian crisis and putting migrants in increasing danger, by exposing them to abuse by authorities and organized crime.

Contrary to common opinion, the report documents a sharp drop in migrants attempting to cross at the border. Since 2005, the number of migrants apprehended by the U.S. Border Patrol at the southern border has plummeted by 61 percent, to levels not seen since Richard Nixon was president. Today, 20 migrants are apprehended a year per every border patrol agent.

"We have reached a point where any further increase in the U.S. security presence will yield diminishing returns, and security policies in both countries are more than ever putting migrants in harm's way," said Maureen Meyer, WOLA's Senior Associate for Mexico, and co-author of the report. Migrants who attempt to enter the United States today face unprecedented abuses, extortions, and threats. In Mexico, approximately 20,000 migrants, mostly Central American, are kidnapped every year as they travel to the border region; countless others are subject to extortion, sexual assault and other abuses. On the U.S. side, migrants are often subject to abuse and mistreatment while in custody and face higher risks of death while crossing. In addition, certain U.S. deportation practices

do unnecessary harm, such as the deportation of migrants at night and/or to cities hundreds of miles away from where they were detained. At times, these repatriations send migrants to dangerous Mexican border cities where they can fall prey to -- or be recruited by -- criminal groups. "Decency demands more humanitarian measures along the border and policies that don't put migrants at risk," said Meyer.

"The whirlwind security buildup should stop now," said Isacson. "The U.S. and Mexican governments need to pause, reconsider, and take steps to make the world's busiest frontier more efficient, lawful, and humane for the rest of the 21st century."

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