



**THE HARMS OF
BORDER PATROL
ON DAILY LIFE
ALONG THE
TEXAS BORDER**

SUMMARY

Across the Rio Grande Valley (RGV), Border Patrol agents are a common sight. Over 3,000 Border Patrol agents operate in the RGV – the second-highest total of any sector nationally and the most of any sector in Texas.

From September 2021 through May 2022, the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas (ACLU of Texas) conducted interviews documenting border communities' interactions with Border Patrol.

We found that for many people in the RGV, including citizens as well as immigrants of all statuses, Border Patrol negatively affects their daily life in the following key ways:

- Fear of Border Patrol limits residents' access to essential locations and erodes border community members' ability to meet fundamental needs. 61% of respondents said they avoided going to essential locations, such as public parks, schools, or grocery stores, as a result of Border Patrol presence.
- Border Patrol is a barrier to key services. One-third of interviewees said they avoided going to the hospital out of fear of encountering Border Patrol.
- Border Patrol makes often-baseless traffic stops, causing some residents to fear driving in their own communities. Several respondents noted they were stopped by Border Patrol for looking suspicious or for driving with their headlights off during the day.

METHODOLOGY

We conducted 152 interviews with residents from across the RGV, the majority from the Brownsville area beginning in September 2021.

We conducted interviews at community events and by reaching out directly to people who live in the region. We also asked interviewees to refer other people from among their networks who have had encounters with Border Patrol.

Interviewees represent a diverse range of immigration statuses – U.S. citizens, the largest group, represent 34%, followed by those who preferred not to say at 28%, and people with resident status at 22%. In this report, “encounter” refers to direct interactions with Border Patrol, seeing Border Patrol agents or other indirect experiences with agents.

FINDING 1: BORDER PATROL LIMITS ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL LOCATIONS AND NEGATIVELY IMPACTS QUALITY OF LIFE

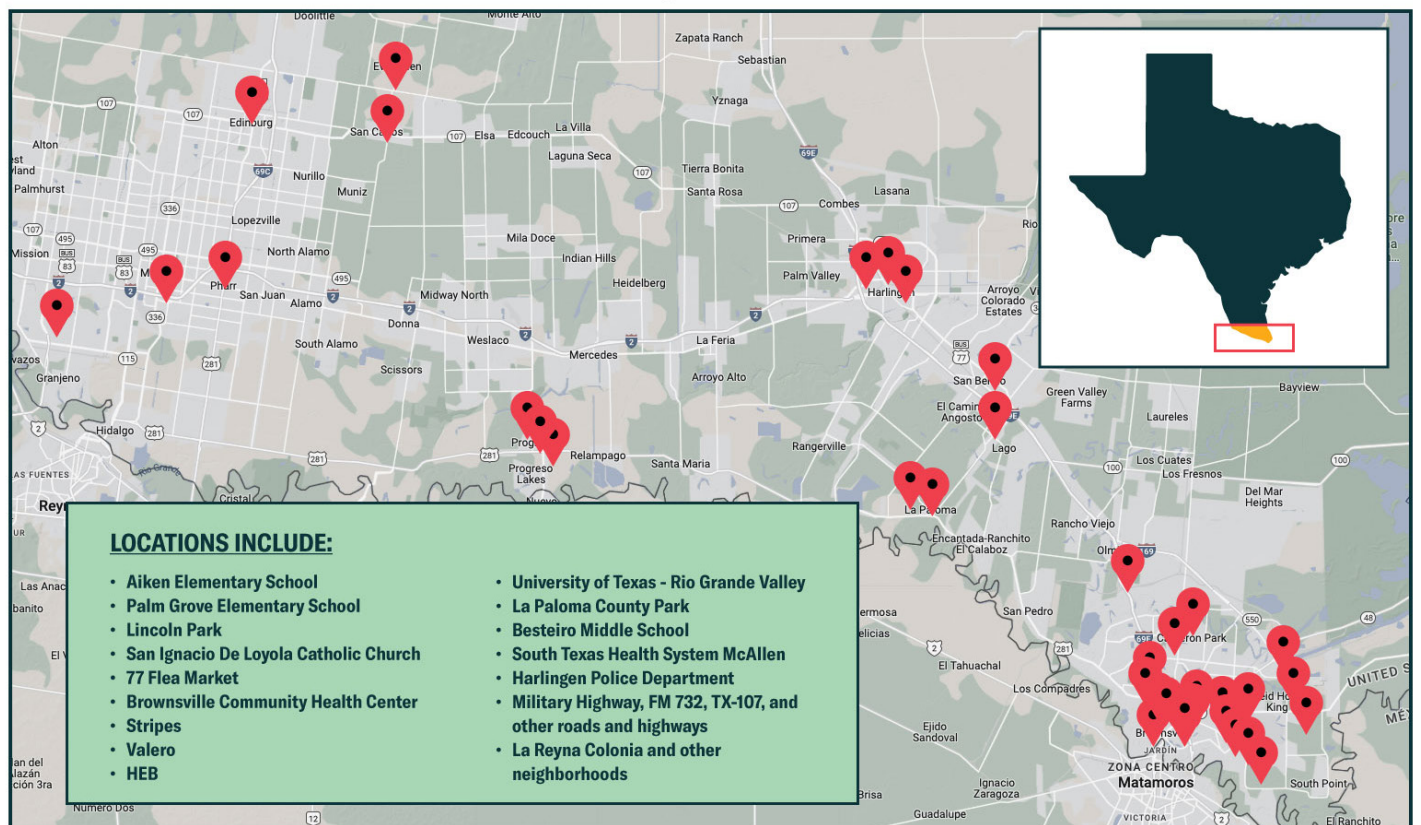
Border Patrol is present at a wide range of locations throughout the community: schools, hospitals, grocery stores, community centers, polling places, and outdoor public spaces like parks. One parent saw them following their child’s school bus. About 82% of interviewees reported they had seen Border Patrol in at least one of those places, and 69% had seen them at more than one.

When Border Patrol agents are present, many people, including U.S. citizens, avoid the area. In fact, 61% of interviewees stated that they avoided going to one or more of these essential locations due to a fear of Border Patrol presence. The proximity of Border Patrol can threaten

interviewees’ feelings of safety, level of independence, and ability to maintain personal relationships. When Border Patrol is known to be in the vicinity of residential communities, it can erode a person’s ability to care for themselves or their families. About 39% of interviewees said that an encounter with Border Patrol interrupted or impeded their daily routines, and 83% of interviewees said it affected their mental health. Another 17% of interviewees said an encounter with Border Patrol affected their ability to provide financially for themselves or their family.¹

¹ The findings in this paragraph represent the responses of 47 individuals to a question that was added to the survey in February 2022.

REPORTED LOCATIONS OF FREQUENT BORDER PATROL PRESENCE



ILLUSTRATIVE ENCOUNTERS

- One woman, an organizer who works to educate locals about resources available at a community center in Brownsville, said people here often avoid the community center out of fear, even though they offer free medical services. Border Patrol agents patrol the area just outside and often follow people in. People ask her to deliver food from the center's pantry program to their houses because they need the assistance but are unable to risk encountering Border Patrol agents.
- According to a parent, Border Patrol agents sometimes follow behind their children's school bus. This scares many of the children, either because they themselves are undocumented or because they worry about their undocumented parents, who wait for them at the bus stop.
- One interviewee shared how her nephew's encounter with Border Patrol was financially and emotionally difficult for the family. Though he was in the process of adjusting his immigration status, Border Patrol stopped him at a gas station and he was detained for three months. During this time, his wife had to sell plates of food to pay for a lawyer and support the family.
- For one RGV resident, an encounter with Border Patrol caused her to avoid places where agents are often found, like grocery stores. Border Patrol agents stopped her car because her headlights were off – even though it was during the day – and asked her for her documents. One agent grabbed her shoulder and refused to let go until her U.S. citizen husband showed his documents. The encounter changed the way she went about her daily life. For example, she avoided driving for a length of time and decided to only do her grocery shopping late at night when it was less likely that she would encounter Border Patrol agents. This individual said, “I have friends in that situation, and they avoid going to any place if immigration [agents] are there.”

FINDING 2: THE PRESENCE OF BORDER PATROL IS A BARRIER TO ACCESSING MEDICAL, SOCIAL, AND PUBLIC SAFETY SERVICES, INCLUDING HOSPITALS AND POLICE, NO MATTER ONE'S STATUS

Border Patrol limits access to essential services for many residents because they either fear that using these services may attract Border Patrol or they face explicit threats from service providers that they will call Border Patrol. Some 34% of interviewees said they have avoided going to the hospital due to fear of encountering Border Patrol. This concern is not unfounded; more than 90 interviewees reported seeing Border Patrol agents in hospitals.

34%

of interviewees said they have **avoided going to the hospital** due to fear of encountering Border Patrol.



About 55% of interviewees reported that they did not reach out to local police to report a crime due to concerns that the police would call Border Patrol agents to the scene. Of the persons interviewed for this report, nine of the 14 reported encounters with local police also involved Border Patrol. The entanglement between the two law enforcement bodies contributes to distrust of local police.

55%

of interviewees reported that they **did not reach out to local police** to report a crime due to concerns that the police would call Border Patrol agents to the scene.



ILLUSTRATIVE ENCOUNTERS

- For many women in the area, fear of Border Patrol stops them from reaching out to local police for help in domestic violence situations. Four interviewees who either work with survivors of domestic abuse or are survivors themselves noted a trend that people in this situation do not seek help from police because they are terrified that Border Patrol will show up alongside the police. One woman reported: “I was scared to call the police in my past situation of domestic violence. I lived many years in that situation.”
- One interviewee reported that an employee at a local Social Security office threatened to call Border Patrol when her son tried to get a Social Security card for his U.S. citizen daughter. After the interviewee’s son presented an expired work permit as a form of ID, the employee told him that undocumented people do not belong in the U.S.



CBP agents detain a person in the Rio Grande Valley.

FINDING 3: ON THE ROAD, BORDER PATROL AGENTS STOP PEOPLE WITHOUT CAUSE

Traffic stops by Border Patrol agents are common; 21 individuals reported being stopped while driving. Four interviewees reported being stopped because the agent said they looked suspicious. Another supposed justification reported for a stop includes having headlights off during the day. The sense in the

community, one person said, is that Border Patrol will find any reason to stop people in order to ask them about their immigration status. After traffic stop encounters, 22% of interviewees reported that they were less likely to drive.

ILLUSTRATIVE ENCOUNTERS

- One woman said that Border Patrol stopped her, stated that her car looked suspicious, and asked her for her documents. When she asked them for the reason she was being stopped, the agents apologized and let her leave. She said the encounter made her feel at risk because she is undocumented.
- One woman witnessed a car being pursued at high speeds by five or six Border Patrol and other law enforcement vehicles. She said the pursuit was so aggressive, she was worried they would cause an accident. The witness said that a law enforcement officer at the gas station where the chase ended told her that the car was followed because it had paper license plates. After agents questioned the vehicle occupants for a lengthy period, the family was allowed to leave.
- Near a college campus, Border Patrol agents stopped one driver because it was nighttime, which they said made him look suspicious. They asked him for personal information like his name, phone number, and address, all of which he refused to give. They let him leave but told him not to come to that area again.



Despite opposition from local activists, CBP has a heavy presence at the annual Mexican-American heritage celebration known as Charro Days. Snipers from local police were placed on rooftops in the Rio Grande Valley during the 2022 Charro Days parade.

LOOKING AHEAD

For residents of the Rio Grande Valley, the presence of Border Patrol causes fear and upends daily life. This is so for citizens as well as immigrants of all statuses. To avoid encountering agents, some residents are less willing to visit essential locations, access the services they need, or get on the road. When they do encounter agents, it affects their mental health and ability to provide financially.

Border residents need policy interventions to reduce these harmful encounters. We thus call on federal, state, and local policymakers to reduce the presence of Border Patrol in border communities, and to limit their interference with residents' daily lives.

At the **federal level**, government officials should:

- Reduce the number of Border Patrol agents in the region and across the border.
- Ensure the agency complies with constitutional protections against unreasonable search and seizure.
- Ensure accountability and transparency for Border Patrol operations.
- Ensure the Border Patrol's compliance with DHS' guidelines limiting enforcement actions in or near schools, hospitals, and other areas requiring specific protection, and consider expanding the guidelines to cover other essential locations.

At the **state level**, the Texas Legislature should:

- Reject proposals to expand Border Patrol authority under state criminal law.
- Consider implementing state-specific measures to ensure accountability and transparency regarding any entanglement between state law enforcement officials and Border Patrol.
- Invest state resources in programs and infrastructure that meet border community needs.
- Reject further funding of state and federal law enforcement in border communities and emphasize the detrimental effect this militarization has on existing communities, long-term communities, and people of all status.

At the **local level**, officials should:

- Relay the message from constituents to federal and state policymakers that Border Patrol is disrupting daily life for border communities in a serious way that can undermine safety and independence for residents.
- Reject further funding of state and federal law enforcement in border communities and emphasize the detrimental effect this militarization has on existing communities, long-term communities, and people of all status.