

Operation Gatekeeper's Deadly and Harmful Legacy

September 2019



While the worst border policies we see today have gained notoriety under the Trump administration — deadly walls, abusive agents, interior checkpoints, troops at the border, detention and family separation — all of them have their roots in Operation Gatekeeper, an enforcement-only policy that began 25 years ago on October 1, 1994. Gatekeeper led to the militarization of the southern border and to the policies that disregard human life and human rights at our nation's borders. Here's a snapshot of its legacy.

- **Hundreds of miles of walls:** Since Gatekeeper, more than 700 miles of wall have been built,¹ increasing flooding, harming endangered and protected species, and robbing private landowners of their lands through “eminent domain.” Trump wants 450 miles of more border wall by 2020.
- **Billions wasted on enforcement:** The annual [budget](#) of the U.S. Border Patrol has increased more than ten-fold, from \$363 million in 1993 to more than \$4.7 billion in 2019.²
- **Thousands dead and disappeared:** More than 8,000^{3,4} human remains have been found, while more than 5,500 people have disappeared in the mountains and deserts of the southern border.⁵



- **Abusive border agents:** The number of Border Patrol agents increased nearly five-fold, from 4,028 in 1993 to 19,555 in 2018⁶. Via executive action, Trump ordered 5,000 new agents.⁷ Their culture of abuse is well documented.⁸
- **Intrusive and ineffective checkpoints:** There are 34 Border Patrol checkpoints up-to-100 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border in California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas,⁹ resulting in racial and religious profiling.
- **Troops deployed at the U.S.-Mexico border:** Gatekeeper's legacy of militarization extends to deploying soldiers at our border: there are roughly 3,000 active duty troops and 2,600 National Guard at the southern border, a huge taxpayer expense.^{10,11,12}
- **Abuse of asylum-seekers (as of Sept. 30, 2019):** Gatekeeper's disregard for human life and human rights is a foundation for the way we treat asylum-seekers today. Currently, there are more than 20,000¹³ asylum-seekers on waiting lists at U.S. ports of entry and between 38,000¹⁴ to 42,000¹⁵ who have been returned to wait in Mexico as part of the so-called Migrant Protection Protocols.
- **Dehumanization of Migrants.** Humans have migrated since the beginning of time to flee life-threatening situations and put food on the table for their families. While the statutes of improper entry (8 U.S. Code §1325) and improper reentry (8 U.S. Code §1326) have existed on the books for more than 100 years, the government began to ramp up the enforcement of these charges as the result of Operation Gatekeeper. Since 1994, tens of thousands of people have been charged and sent to federal prison prior to being deported.¹⁶ These prosecutions have also resulted in the separation of thousands of children from their parents.¹⁷

We need a #NewBorderVision that expands public safety, upholds human rights, and welcomes all people to our borders. Learn more at southernborder.org.

-
- ¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office. "SOUTHWEST BORDER SECURITY: Additional Actions Needed to Better Assess Fencing's Contributions to Operations and Provide Guidance for Identifying Capability Gaps," (February 2017). Available at: <https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:Ao17PAxwmYkJ:https://www.gao.gov/assets/690/682838.pdf+&cd=5&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=firefox-b-1-d>
- ² American Immigration Council. "Factsheet: The Cost of Immigration Enforcement and Border Security," (May 17, 2019). Available at: <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/the-cost-of-immigration-enforcement-and-border-security>
- ³ CBP.gov. "U.S. Border Patrol Southwest Border Sectors Deaths by Fiscal Year" Available here: <https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2019-Mar/bp-southwest-border-sector-deaths-fy1998-fy2018.pdf>
- ⁴ Lennard, Natasha. "With Record Numbers of Displaced People, Deterrence Policies to Stop Their Movement Are Mass Murder." The Intercept (July 6, 2019) Available here: <https://theintercept.com/2019/07/06/migration-open-borders-deterrence-mass-murder/>
- ⁵ Patiño-Houle, Christina and Torres, John Michael. "Thousands Have Disappeared Crossing the U.S.-Mexico Border. They Deserve to be Remembered." The Texas Observer (Aug. 29, 2019). Available at: <https://www.texasobserver.org/thousands-have-disappeared-crossing-the-u-s-mexico-border-they-deserve-to-be-remembered/>
- ⁶ CBP.gov. "U.S. Border Patrol Border Patrol Agent Nationwide Staffing by Fiscal Year, (through Fiscal Year 2018). Available at: <https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2019-Mar/Staffing%20FY1992-FY2018.pdf>
- ⁷ White House. Executive Order: Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements (Jan. 25, 2017). Available here: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-border-security-immigration-enforcement-improvements/>
- ⁸ The Intercept. "The Border Patrol Has Been a Cult of Brutality Since 1924" (January 2019). Available at: <https://theintercept.com/2019/01/12/border-patrol-history/>
- ⁹ Westervelt, Eric. "As Migrants Stream In At The Border, Inland Checkpoints Feel The Strain," National Public Radio (June 12, 2019). Available at: <https://www.npr.org/2019/06/12/731797754/as-migrants-stream-in-at-the-border-inland-checkpoints-feel-the-strain>
- ¹⁰ Morgan, Wesley. "2,100 more troops headed to the U.S.-Mexico border, Pentagon says," Politico (July 17, 2019), Available at: <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/07/17/2-100-more-troops-headed-to-the-us-mexico-border-pentagon-says-1418838>
- ¹¹ Congressional letter to U.S. Secretary of Defense General James Mattis (Nov. 1, 2018). Available at: https://armedservices.house.gov/cache/files/d/0/d0c9e2f4-b9d2-4043-80ca-06ef79a80916/75C185C1A2D4447FF59A8EEB36313BAE_dem-southwest-border-deployment-letter.pdf
- ¹² Mitchell, Ellen. "Trump administration to award service medals to troops deployed at border," The Hill (Aug. 22, 2019). Available at: <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/458463-trump-administration-to-award-medals-to-troops-deployed-at-border>
- ¹³ Arvey, Savitri and Leutert, Steph. "Thousands of asylum-seekers left waiting at the US-Mexico border," Public Radio International (June 17, 2019). Available at: <https://www.pri.org/stories/2019-06-17/thousands-asylum-seekers-left-waiting-us-mexico-border>
- ¹⁴ Caldwell, Alicia A. "Trump's Return-to-Mexico Policy Overwhelms Immigration Courts: Some 38,000 migrants wait in Mexico for their asylum cases to be decided; a 16-year-old waits for her hearing," The Wall Street Journal (Sept. 5, 2019). Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/trumps-return-to-mexico-policy-overwhelms-immigration-courts-11567684800>
- ¹⁵ Nathan, Debbie. "An Asylum Officer Speaks Out Against the Trump Administration's "Supervillain" Attacks on Immigrants," The Intercept, (Sept. 13, 2019). Available at: <https://theintercept.com/2019/09/13/asylum-interview-immigration-trump/>
- ¹⁶ Human Rights Watch. "Turning Migrants Into Families." (May 22, 2013). Available here: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/05/22/us-prosecuting-migrants-hurting-families>
- ¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, U.S.: Prosecuting Migrants is Hurting Families (May 22, 2013). Available here: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/05/22/us-prosecuting-migrants-hurting-families>
-