

We do not have a border:

A report from Del Rio, Texas

BY KYLE SHIDELER

SENIOR ANALYST FOR HOMELAND
SECURITY AND COUNTERTERRORISM



We do not have a border:

A report from Del Rio, Texas

BY KYLE SHIDELER

Del Rio is located within Val Verde County which consists of approximately 3,200 square miles of mostly ranch land surrounding the man-made Amistad Reservoir, and across from the Mexican city of Acuna.

I arrived in Del Rio on June 3rd, with a fact-finding delegation organized by the Texas Public Policy Foundation's Border Security Coalition of which the Center is a member. The Border Patrol's processing capacity is around 120 people – the day before 800 people were apprehended.

The total numbers are staggering.

119,000 illegal border-crossers have been apprehended this year alone, representing a dramatic 393% increase from last year. Internal government estimates project 1.1 million adults, 820,000 families and 200,000 by the end of September. The last time apprehensions broke 1 million was 2006. If the estimates are accurate, 2021 will be the first year apprehensions are over 2 million, the second highest year being 2000 with 1.6 million apprehensions.

'Processing' at the Border

Illegal crossers are made up of two types – those who want to get caught, and those who don't.

Those who want to be caught typically come from countries with temporary protected status, in family units, or are unaccompanied minors. While there are those who attempt to pose as fraudulent family groups, one Border Patrol agent told me they've gotten pretty good at identifying fakers.

While crossing, they set off sensors or video and wait for the Border Patrol to come and pick them up.

They are processed, a sponsor in the U.S. (usually family) is identified for them, and they are handed a "Notice to Report" form, which instructs them to contact Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) upon arrival at their final destination.

Then they are free to go.

Border Patrol used to hand out "Notice to Appear"

forms, which require the detained to appear for an immigration hearing on an identified future date. But the “Notice to Report” forms are faster. This allows more aliens to be processed and released on to Del Rio’s town streets more swiftly. Most will take one of the two Greyhound half buses –each carries 20 people maximum –which pass through Del Rio everyday.

The only non-profit in town has tried to make arrangements to help move more migrants out. But even with an additional chartered bus and an expansion of the local airport schedule from one to three flights a day there is still not nearly transportation enough to keep the people moving.

Who is crossing?

Contrary to the image people have of border-crossers however, most of these illegals are not poor.

Many of the travelers flew into Mexico City before paying thousands of dollars to smugglers to be brought up to the border to make the crossing. Most in the Del Rio sector are Venezuelans escaping Maduro’s narco-Marxist regime, along with some Cubans and Haitians.

Many of these aliens bring their passports to establish their identity and to help claim temporary protected status. But the corrupt Venezuelan government has long engaged in the practice of identity documents to dangerous characters.

In 2015, a scandal revealed that Venezuelan officials in the Iraqi embassy were engaged in illegally procuring Venezuelan passports for Syrians and Iraqis, including those with links to terrorism. In December 2019, the U.S. government sanctioned the director-general of the Venezuelan office of identification for his role in the corrupt practice of selling passports. Anti-Maduro figure Juan Guidó alleged that up to 17 Iranians

a day were being provided with Venezuelan travel documents, including suspected members of the terrorist group Hezbollah.

While the vast majority of these migrants are genuine Venezuelans fleeing socialism, Border Patrol and ICE cannot engage in sufficient scrutiny to confirm suspicious stories due to the massive numbers of migrants.

Others make the long journey up from South America on foot or by bus.

In Del Rio, many of these aliens are coming from West Africa, including terrorist hot-spots like Mali, which currently faces a significant jihadist insurgency. These travelers often fly into Brazil, work there for a few years, then pay smugglers to guide them across the U.S. border.

Some guides are more reliable than others.

There have already been 9 drownings on the river this year, including a Haitian woman pregnant with twins at term. Stories proliferate of guides throwing migrants into the water to force the Border Patrol to execute a water rescue instead of detaining those in mid-transit.

Most of these migrants will seek asylum.

Everyone we spoke to agreed that the migrants would not have come under the Trump Administration’s “Remain in Mexico” policy. But the Biden administration eliminated Trump border policies immediately and had nothing to replace them with.

“You have to have an administration that is engaged,” Val Verde County Sheriff Joe Frank Martinez, “and they are not engaged.”

Those Who Do Not Wish to be Caught

Then there are those who do not wish to be caught -- usually single adult males.

They are often from Mexico, El Salvador, or Guatemala, who if caught will be immediately returned to Mexico. This is done either under Title 42 authority, invoked by the Trump Administration during the COVID pandemic to prevent the spread of the virus, or under Title 8 of the Immigration and Naturalization Act.

These smaller groups cross the border in more rural

areas --mostly on privately owned ranch land. It is easier to avoid detection while Border Patrol struggles to process those who already turned themselves in.

Current and former Border Patrol agents said they don't know what will happen when Title 42 is withdrawn, but they expect the Biden Administration to eliminate that authority soon. *(See Figure 1)*

"You think we're scared now?" said Val Verde County Judge Lewis Owens, referring to the coming removal of Title 42. The numbers already unsustainable and will only increase drastically.



Figure 1: Members of the Border Security Coalition meet to review the unfinished wall section in Del Rio, Texas

Seemingly every rancher in the area had stories of houses and buildings being broken into, property burned, food and clothing stolen. Others told of game cameras catching videos of military-aged males, dressed head to toe in camouflage, crossing the border with backpacks. Back in April, Border Patrol found an abandoned black tactical pack loaded with rifle magazines and ammunition on the border in Eagle Pass, not far from Del Rio.

Often these groups will wait until the Border Patrol has been dispatched to pick up and process a large group of migrants, and then cross in the same location hours later while the agents are overwhelmed. Once across, the aliens link up with pre-arranged human smugglers to drive them past Border Patrol checkpoints.

Law Enforcement is Overwhelmed

Law enforcement is overwhelmed.

Val Verde Sheriff's office has only four deputies on duty at any one time for the entire county, although they are augmented by officers from Texas Department of Public Safety, and the Border Patrol. *(See Figure 2)*

Val Verde now has one of the highest rates of car chases or police pursuits in the entire country. Many of these smugglers are mere teenagers, deliberately recruited by the cartels as drivers, because federal prosecutors will not charge a 17-year-old federally for human trafficking.

For Sheriff Martinez, that means a county facility filled to the brim with smugglers facing state charges,



Figure 2: Center Senior Analyst for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, Kyle Shideler and Val Verde County Sheriff Joe Frank Martinez at the border fence

and increasingly no place to put them. The county has space for 170 state or locally charged individuals, and 200 spaces for those federally charged based on an agreement the county has with the U.S. Marshals Service. But realistically, there is only space for about 130 state prisoners, thanks to jail regulations which require separating males and females, the emotionally disturbed, rival gang members, and the like.

It was impossible to miss the concern in Martinez' voice when he talked about jail space, especially as Governor Greg Abbott has called for charging every illegal alien who crosses on criminal trespassing charges in an attempt to staunch the flow.

“I’m going to put 97 people in [the jail]?” Martinez asked referring to a single batch of people picked up that day, “I can’t put 10 people in there right now.”

There was supposed to be a 30-foot wall to replace a 14-foot-high border fence built during the Bush administration, but in Del Rio, it’s little more than abandoned construction site. Now they have neither fence nor wall. Sheriff Martinez points us to where a blanket has been used to pass under a piece of dilapidated chain link fence directly beside a massive gate securely shut with nearly half a dozen large padlocks. *(See Figures 3 and 4)*



Figure 3: Evidence of an illegal crossing beside the unfinished “border wall”

The irony is palpable.

Who is Responsible for the Crisis?

The crisis boils down to simple supply and demand.

Cartels are providing the supply of migrants flooding the border. These professional human traffickers have extensive networks capable of moving human cargo from South America all the way to the U.S. border and beyond. While usually separate from narco-trafficking organizations, they are equally ruthless and equally rich.

The average cost to cross the border is \$4,000-\$6,000, although it varies wildly based on distance, level of service, and location. Chinese, Russians, and Middle Easterners pay the most, Mexicans, Guatemalans and El Salvadorans pay least.

Sheriff Martinez said the cartel operating in Acuna border is pulling in around \$25 million a week from human smuggling, according to a Border Patrol intelligence report. It is not clear exactly which organization is operating there, however. There is little contact with, and no trust of, law enforcement on the Mexican side.

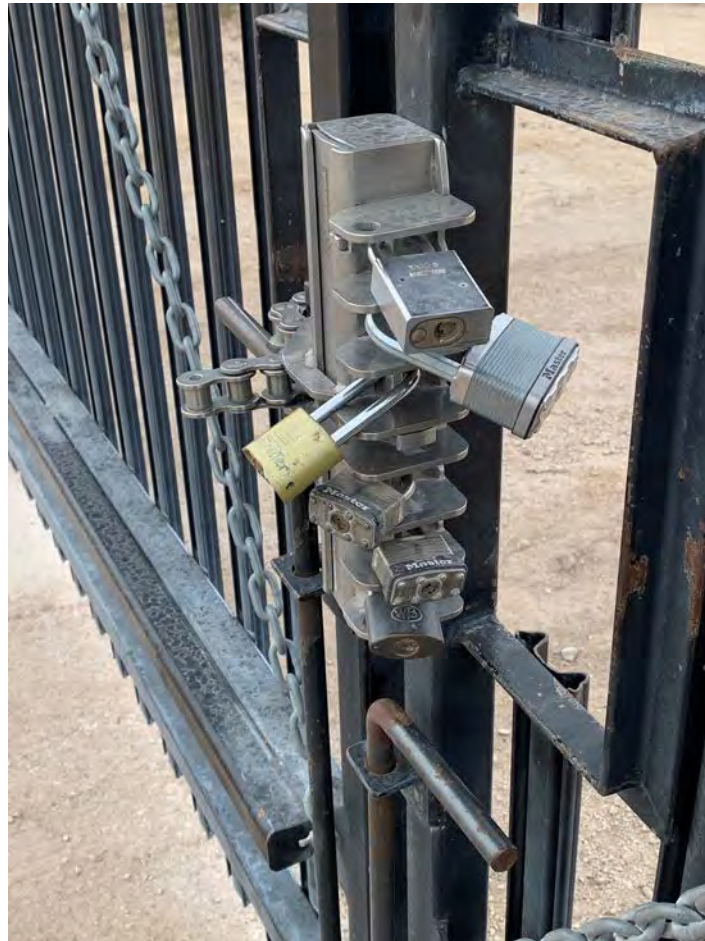


Figure 4: A heavily locked gate stands as an ironic symbol as illegal aliens simply walk around it

There is also no question where demand came from.

Ranchers, retired Border Patrol, and local politicians—both Republicans and Democrats—blame the Biden administration for sending the message that those who risked the journey would get to stay.

Guatemalan president Alejandro Giammattei agrees.

“The message changed too: ‘We’re going to reunite families, we’re going to reunite children,’” Giammattei said during a meeting with Vice President Kamala Harris on June 7th. “The very next day, the coyotes were here organizing groups of children to take them

to the United States.”

“Why are numbers up? I think these numbers are up because people knew they were going to be allowed in,” Sheriff Martinez, himself a Democrat, said. He lays at least some of the blame on the Biden Administration, “they came in without a plan and washed away what was in place.”

Del Rio residents feel that they are suffering for the willful blindness and the neglect of others. The problem was created in Washington D.C., but it’s the citizens of Val Verde County suffering the consequences. *(See Figure 5)*



Figure 5: Del Rio town residents and elected officials meet to discuss the crisis with the Border Security Coalition

“I don’t know why I was put in this position,” says Judge Owens in clear frustration.

At the same time, nearly every resident we met with issued the same warning.

Those overrunning Del Rio would be moving on soon, to communities around the country, many of them equally unprepared to deal with the consequences.

In December 2015, then candidate Donald Trump warned, “If you don’t have a border, you don’t have a country.”

The good people of Del Rio know we don’t have a border. And they are very worried for their country.



This report was produced by the Center for Security Policy, a nonprofit, nonpartisan 501(c)(3) institution focusing on national security policy issues.

It was made possible by generous contributions from the Center for Security Policy's supporters. All views, positions, and conclusions expressed in this publication should be understood to be solely those of the author(s).

© 2021 by the Center for Security Policy. All rights reserved