

# Immigration at the U.S.-Mexico Border

## From a physical wall to a virtual border

Intended audience: U.S. policymakers who focus on immigration policies

Emily Lopez

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**Hello US senators and representatives**, thank you for your time. Today I'll talk about a crisis that is widely disregarded as a human rights problem...immigration at the US Mexico Border.

Immigration in this region has progressively become more unethical and intrusive on migrants' basic human rights. Migrants endure deadly environments, are treated inhumanely, and often have petitions and applications for citizenship denied or delayed.

In recent years, immigration law enforcement agencies have moved from a physical border wall to a virtual border that relies on AI technology, massive data collection and stems from partnerships with tech startups and government agencies.

**We all deserve respect. I want to bring attention and awareness on the current climate at the border to inspire immigration reform. I'll do so by sharing a story.**

Video Recording:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WxeFWpRr6d90LTAbHozytHYj5LI2IWcQ/view?usp=sharing>

## Once upon a time...



Emily Lopez

Once upon a time in 1992 a group of high school students in El Paso, Texas changed the trajectory of what security at the US Mexican border looks like. Since their school was situated just 50 steps away from the US-Mexico border and immigration at this time heightened due to Mexico's economic crisis, US border patrol heavily surveilled the area.

<https://radiolab.org/podcast/border-trilogy-part-1/transcript>

Image credit:

<https://www.elpasotimes.com/restricted/?return=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.elpasotimes.com%2Fstory%2Fnews%2Fhistory%2F2023%2F09%2F30%2Fla-bowie-spirit-lives-on-and-once-a-bear-always-a-bear%2F70994964007%2F> (recolored to black and white)

# And every day...

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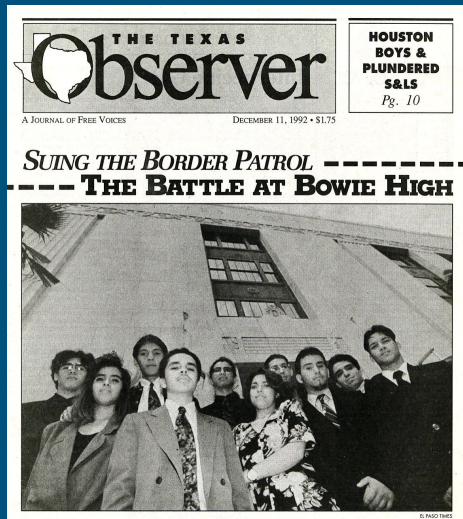
Emily Lopez

And every day students were stopped, searched, and questioned by Border Patrol in their neighborhood and at school...solely due to their appearance. Being stopped by these government officials was a customary part of their lives.

<https://radiolab.org/podcast/border-trilogy-part-1/transcript>

Image credit: <https://rethinkingschools.org/articles/civil-rights-101-tex-mex-style/>

# Until one day...



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Until one day they fought back...When Border Patrol agents would stop students and request to see their papers or go through backpacks, students responded no. I want to use my Fifth Amendment right to remain silent.

After continual harassment from Border Patrol, the students sued the Border Patrol agency, one of the largest law enforcement agencies in the United States, for violating their constitutional rights... and won the case!

<https://radiolab.org/podcast/border-trilogy-part-1/transcript>

Image credit:

[https://issues.texasobserver.org/pdf/usttxb\\_obs\\_1992\\_12\\_11\\_issue.pdf](https://issues.texasobserver.org/pdf/usttxb_obs_1992_12_11_issue.pdf)

## And because of this...



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And because of this, the Border Patrol agency developed Prevention through Deterrence to reduce immigration at the US-Mexico border. This method redirected hundreds-of-thousands of unauthorized migrants away from busy crossing areas along the border into the deadly terrain of the Sonoran Desert to discourage migrants from making the perilous journey across. Studies confirm that the Prevention through Deterrence method has been the primary structural cause of death of thousands of men, women and children from the Americas, many of whom journey to the US in search of better opportunities for themselves and their children.

However despite this deadly journey, more than 6 million people attempted to migrate through the Sonoran desert between 2000 and 2020.

[https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3040107](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3040107)

<https://hostileterrain94.wordpress.com/about/>

<https://www.kff.org/report-section/understanding-the-u-s-immigrant-experience-the-2023-kff-la-times-survey-of-immigrants-findings/#:~:text=Overall%2C%20a%20majority%20of%20immigrants,than%20the%20share%20of%20U.S.%2D>

Image credit:

<https://www.npr.org/2023/05/03/1169010633/desperate-migrants-are-choosing-to-cross-the-border-through-dangerous-u-s-desert>

## And because of this...



Emily Lopez

And because of this continual migration of Northern, Central and Southern Americans, many government officials have pursued more severe measures.

The Trump administration was notably hostile about immigration by preventing people from applying for asylum at the southwest border, separating children from their families, and building a border wall in environmentally sensitive areas. The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency also used hostile, unjust tactics to detain undocumented immigrants and kept individuals in overcrowded, unsanitary detention centers.

People who fled from their home country due to complex crises now found themselves facing inhumane treatment at the border. But still, people continued to cross in hopes of better futures, and these prevention through deterrence methods remained unsuccessful in their attempts to reduce immigration.

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/trumps-vow-to-deport-millions-is-undercut-by-history>

<https://www.kff.org/report-section/understanding-the-u-s-immigrant-experience-the-2023-kff-la-times-survey-of-immigrants-findings/#:~:text=Overall%2C%20a%20maj>



ority%20of%20immigrants,than%20the%20share%20of%20U.S.%2D

Image credit:

<https://www.npr.org/2020/02/13/805796618/trump-administration-diverts-3-8-billion-in-pentagon-funding-to-border-wall>

# Until finally...



Emily Lopez

Until finally, immigration law enforcement agencies moved from a physical border wall to a virtual border that relies on ubiquitous and massive data collection and covert technology that's developed and supported by tech companies, like Amazon, Anduril and Palantir.

In March 2018, US Congress approved \$400 million for a virtual border wall that would collect biometric data and span nearly 2 thousand miles.

And in 2019, the Trump administration funded the company Anduril to develop technology that could leverage Amazon Web Services, drones, and AI to capture immigrants crossing the border.

<https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520386075/data-borders>

Image credit:

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Ftheintercept.com%2F2023%2F03%2F20%2Fborder-surveillance-map%2F&psig=AOvVaw1nBEAwnGg9yJMHMrGfUR5O&ust=1710392326271000&source=images&cd=vfe&opi=89978449&ved=0CBUQjhxqFwoTCMDYnYq68IQDFQAAAAAdAAAAABAE>

## And ever since that day...



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And ever since that day, immigration law enforcement agencies and tech companies have scaled and benefited from this intrusive surveillance technology. Although these surveillance methods seem like a humane alternative to detention centers, unethical practices are still used. For example:

- Ice is given “unlimited rights to use, dispose of, or disclose” the data it receives.
- They have provided misleading information on what data is collected, used, and stored.
- And Migrants are forced to wear tracking devices like smartphone apps, ankle monitors and smartwatches at all times, without knowledge of the extent of biological and personal data that is collected from them and those around them.

Since the 90's Border Patrol's harmful behavior has been public, but by integrating this new tech and massive amounts of data into their methods, they have escalated and evolved into using covert tactics. Their presence is widespread and integrated into the commercial technologies that rely on immigrants' data.

Given Border Patrol's history of unethical behavior, more discussion and awareness

is needed for people to make informed decisions about what policies and policymakers to support regarding immigration processing. Moreso, immigration reform is critically needed so that US immigration enforcement agencies humanly enforce immigration laws and ensure non-citizens are treated fairly and justly in their petitions and applications for citizenship.

Thank you for your time

Image credit:

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/sep/26/revealed-ice-bi-inc-migrants-more-data-collection>

# References

## Main article:

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/sep/26/revealed-ice-bi-inc-migrants-more-data-collection>

## Supporting articles and resources:

<https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520386075/data-borders>

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