



Current Border Militarization Operations Are a Wasteful Attempt at Deterrence

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There is little return to show on past border militarization investments. Beginning in 2021, the Governor launched a multi-year campaign called Operation Lone Star that, in part, allowed his Trusted Programs office to distribute billions of dollars in grants to once resource-starved border communities. SB 1 prepares to double down on this failed investment with billions more in border spending with \$2.9 billion requested by the Governor's office alone.

Now in its fourth year, Operation Lone Star (OLS) continues to be a wasteful, ineffective use of state resources that is diverting critical funding away from services Texans need. After ten billion dollars over the last two biennium, available data shows OLS has not significantly reduced the number migrants apprehended compared to Arizona. Texans deserve policies that harness the productive power of people seeking refuge and asylum in the United States, not the wasteful, destructive policies of Operation Lone Star.

Operation Lone Star is a Billion Dollar Black Hole

The \$10 billion allocated over the last two biennium to support Operation Lone Star efforts has been ineffective at deterring migration through Texas compared to other border states. Customs and Border Protection crackdowns at the border, together with U.S. diplomatic efforts, have resulted in fewer migrant encounters since the recent peak in December of 2023. Specifically, data analysis from the Washington Office on Latin American (WOLA) shows OLS and other state efforts in Texas are not deterring migrants any more than other states. (See Figure 1.) For example, in Arizona there was a 64% percent drop in apprehensions from May to July 2024 while in Texas the drop was 50%. Texans expect a return on the investments made in their name, but even [Senate supporters of Operation Lone Star](#) are beginning to question if current policy and spending is effective. Operation Lone Star should be heavily scrutinized by policymakers in the 89th Legislature because, like any other state action, it should be accountable to Texans.

Border Patrol Apprehensions	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24
Arizona	87,317	54,266	54,358	47,772	36,774	38,500	25,902	13,857
California	36,604	25,866	32,824	35,529	38,784	34,263	26,865	16,471
New Mexico	8,413	8,298	11,595	12,413	13,396	11,256	9,206	9,089
Texas	117,406	35,786	41,863	41,761	39,939	33,886	21,560	16,991
Total	249,740	124,216	140,640	137,475	128,893	117,905	83,533	56,408

Percentage Changes	December to July	January to July	May to July
Arizona	-84%	-74%	-64%
California	-55%	-36%	-52%
New Mexico	8%	10%	-19%
Texas	-86%	-53%	-50%
Total	-77%	-55%	-52%

Figure 1: [Border Patrol Apprehensions by State, Chart from WOLA](#)

Dehumanizing and Fear-Based Rhetoric Do Not Justify the Costs

Texans deserve productive solutions not fear-based horror stories about cartels and "aliens" intent on harming us that lack research-based data. Encounters and apprehensions are down in Texas. Data collected at the Legislature's direction shows how alarmist rhetoric including comparisons to "[cockroaches](#)" hides the reality that undocumented Texans are generally law-abiding members of society. A recent study published by the [National Institute of Justice](#) shows undocumented immigrants in Texas between 2012 and 2018 had lower overall offending rates and lower violent crime offending rates. Border Texans should not be the object of such highly militarized and costly action. Contrary to fear-based rhetoric, undocumented Texans contribute mightily to our state and communities.

Undocumented Texans Paid the Second Highest in Local & State Taxes

Texas is big enough, strong enough, and smart enough to embrace people who have one of the most Texan of qualities: the desire to work for a fair wage and provide for one's family. [Every Texan's analysis](#), in collaboration with the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP), shows that undocumented immigrants paid \$4.9 billion in state and local taxes in 2022. Undocumented Texans mean increased economic productivity because for every one half million undocumented immigrants living in Texas, our public services receive an additional \$1.3 billion in tax revenue. Nationally, [the Congressional](#)

[Budget Office](#) estimates the recent surge of immigrants to the United States will add \$1.2 trillion in federal revenues over the next decade.

Operation Lone Star Fails by Its Own Metrics

Since its inception, the governor's so-called border security project has used the very real horrors of transnational criminal organizations to justify extreme measures toward asylum seekers and people seeking refuge by any means necessary. The goal, Governor Abbott has said, is [to deter](#) people from attempting to migrate to Texas and arrest cartel members. The displays of force have [little to no effect](#) on people attempting to migrate through Texas, and instead of disrupting cartel business, the state is arresting naive young Texans looking for a [quick pay day](#) that have little to no connection to cartels. Texans deserve policies and investments that focus on real harm, but still reap the benefits migrants bring to our state. Many Texans - no matter our legal status - have contributed to safe, prosperous communities for generations and the Federal government should recognize that reality with true immigration reforms.

Legislative Oversight Critical to Giving Texans a Fair Deal

The political reality is that tough rhetoric and out of proportion spending sells well in Texas politics. At the very least, the Texas Legislature need provide oversight on the money and implement metrics for success to prevent a runaway train of overspending.