

**U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION (CBP)  
OVERVIEW OF THE SOUTHWEST BORDER**

**(U) Top Line Points:**

- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to increase the number of irregular migrants, including family unit migrants (FMUA) and unaccompanied alien children (UACs) arriving at the U.S. Southwest Border (SWB) through the spring of 2021. ~~(b) (5)~~
- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ ~~(b) (5)~~
- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ While the United States Government continues to work with Mexico to address migration challenges at the U.S. southern border, large numbers of Central Americans, continue to enter Mexico. As travel routes limited by COVID-19 reopen, increases in other nationalities may be expected.
- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ In 2019, Mexico recorded the highest number of homicides since the federal government began keeping records. The number of homicides remained at or near record levels in 2020 despite COVID-19 restrictions.
- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ Citizens of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador continue to be challenged by lack of economic opportunity and institutional corruption. This is acute in regions of these countries containing high proportions of indigenous persons, particularly the Western Highlands of Guatemala. COVID-19 and two devastating hurricanes over the last year have only exacerbated the situation.
- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ In addition to the above push factors in the region, the view of economic opportunity in the United States creates an inflexible pull factor. The lack of security and threat of violence in these Central American countries limits their ability to attract investment and create economic opportunity.
- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ Large swaths of the region exist where government control is limited or nonexistent due to transnational criminal organizations (TCO); notably the northern border regions of Guatemala, eastern Honduras and several rural regions across Mexico, some of which have created militias for self defense.

**(U) Drivers of Migration:**

- ~~(U//LES)~~ Migrants continue to cite standard push/pull factors as their reasons for migrating; however, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound negative impact on the economies of migrant source countries, and recovery may take years. The relatively stronger US economy may drive increased flows of migrants from these countries to the United States. Irregular

migration flows to the United States, in part but not solely enabled by transnational organized crime networks and actors, have and will likely increase in fiscal year (FY) 2021 as economic opportunities emerge and migrant perceptions of U.S. immigration policies shift.

- (U//FOUO) The primary push/pull factors cited by migrants are:

- (U) Economic opportunities,
- (U) Regional and political instability,
- (U) Fear of violence,
- (U) Educational opportunities
- (U) Desire for family reunification
- (U) Perceptions of favorable U.S. immigration policies
- (U) Religious and sexual orientation persecution

- (U//LES) [REDACTED] (b) (5)

[REDACTED] In November 2020, two Category 4 (CAT 4) hurricanes, Eta and Iota, made landfall in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, and other neighboring Central American countries. The full impact of the damage from these hurricanes remains unknown; however, flooding, mudslides, and scores of fatalities, compounded by a surge in COVID-19 infections, have left Central American countries facing large-scale humanitarian disasters. The humanitarian and economic crises that Central American nations are now confronting, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, will continue to be major push factors for migration to the SWB.

- (U//LES) [REDACTED] (b) (5)

#### Nature of the Migration Flow:

- (U//FOUO) [REDACTED] (b) (7)(E), (b) (5)

[REDACTED] In FY 2020, migrants from these four countries accounted for 88 percent (404,473) of all migrants (458,088) encountered at and in between POE along the SWB. However, CBP has also seen an increase in migrants from other Latin American countries and the Caribbean, as well Eastern Hemisphere countries such as Bangladesh, Cameroon, China, Eritrea, and India.

- (U//FOUO) The mobilization of caravans has become a method for migrants to successfully traverse through Mexico without facing significant resistance from the Government of Mexico or TCOs. While caravans provide safety in numbers and the allow migrants to avoid

paying smugglers, migrants encountered by CBP are generally not associated with caravans. These migrants often rely on smugglers to facilitate their travels to the United States.

- ~~(U//LES)~~ Not all migrants encountered by CBP reference the use of smuggling organizations; however, we assess that smuggling networks are very active in promoting the flow of migrants through Mexico as drug trafficking organizations maintain control of the primary trafficking corridors into the United States. The drug trafficking organizations' control of these corridors allows them to regulate the flow of migrants as well as charge migrants a "tax," or "piso," for the right to pass through the corridors.

**(U) Composition of the Migration Flow:**

- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ In FY 2020, U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) encountered 400,651 people on the SWB between the POEs. Of those 400,651, 13 percent were FMUAs, 79 percent were single adults, and 8 percent were UACs. In the first three months of FY 2021, USBP encountered over 207,000 people along the SWB, 104 percent more people than in the first quarter of FY 2020. Single adults comprised the majority of encounters at 87 percent, followed by FMUAs at 6 percent, and UACs at 7 percent.
- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ Office of Field Operations (OFO) encountered 57,437 people along the SWB in FY 2020 at POE; 33 percent were FMUAs, 61 percent were single adults, and 5 percent were UACs. For the first three months of FY 2021, OFO encountered over 8,700 individuals, a decrease of 67 percent compared to the first three months of FY 2020 – a direct result of CBP's enforcement of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Order and the introduction of travel restrictions to the United States to prevent the spread of COVID-19. These individuals consist of 88 percent single adults, 4.5 percent as FMUAs, 4.5 percent as UACs and 3 percent as accompanied minors.
- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ For FY 2021 to date (through December), Mexican Nationals have comprised 59 percent of CBP encounters, Central Americans have comprised 32 percent of CBP encounters (Guatemala 15 percent, Honduras 12 percent, El Salvador 5 percent) and all other nationalities have comprised 9 percent of CBP encounters.

**(U) Worst Case Scenarios:**

- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ The CDC Order, pursuant to Title 42 authorities, is a public health order that CBP is assisting in enforcing and not an immigration enforcement measure. The CDC Order allows for the expulsion of "covered migrants" as defined in the Order. This effort is intended to protect migrants, the CBP workforce, and the American public from the spread of COVID-19.

- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ [REDACTED] (b) (5)

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- (U//LES) (b) (5), (b) (7)(E)

- (U//FOUO) USBP notes that total encounters have reached 264,513 in FY 2021 through December, an increase of 113 percent compared to FY 2020. At the current rate, USBP will encounter between 800,000 and 1,000,000 individuals this fiscal year – comparable to FY 2019 numbers (977,509).

- (U//FOUO) (b) (5), (b) (7)(E)
- (U//FOUO) The pause in the use of removal pathways such as the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), Asylum Cooperation Agreements, and Prompt Asylum Claim Review, and a new Mexican law limiting Mexican acceptance of returns, further impacts USBP’s ability to expel subjects pursuant to the CDC Order and expeditiously process/remove those encountered.
- (U//FOUO) Holding capacity at USBP stations has decreased by 75%, due to COVID-19, limiting overall capacity further.
- (U//FOUO) (b) (5), (b) (7)(E)
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- (U//FOUO) TCOs will exploit migration flows and entrench themselves in the smuggling cycle. TCOs endanger vulnerable individuals, amass illicit profits that feed cartel violence in Mexico and along the border, and create a volatile border environment.
- (U//FOUO) [REDACTED] (b) (5), (b) (7)(E)  
[REDACTED]
- (U//FOUO) For CBP Office of Field Operations (OFO), defining mass migration or surge triggers has been a challenging science for SWB Field Offices, specifically with Field Offices balancing operational challenges presented by COVID-19, [REDACTED] (b) (7)(E)  
(b) (7)(E)
  - (U//FOUO) If OFO is unable to continue to suspend the introduction of covered migrants to the United States pursuant to the CDC Order (Title 42) there are significant safety implications.
    - (U//FOUO) The introduction of covered migrants into congregate settings presents a health and safety risk to OFO personnel and non-citizens in CBP custody.
    - (U//FOUO) [REDACTED] (b) (7)(E)  
[REDACTED] (b) (7)(E)
- (U//FOUO) Further convoluting challenges to POE operations are:
  - (U) Need for public health screening and restrictions on COVID-19.
  - (U) Threats of other communicable diseases.
  - (U) Potential loss of the ability to rely upon the CDC Order and queue management due to ongoing litigation or other legal challenges.
    - (U//FOUO) [REDACTED] (b) (5), (b) (7)(E)  
[REDACTED] (b) (5), (b) (7)(E)
  - (U//FOUO) Size, scope and capabilities of POE operations.
    - (U//FOUO) The impact of policy changes on OFO operations are intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic and safety protocols in place for personnel, persons in custody, and the traveling public.
    - (U//FOUO) [REDACTED] (b) (5), (b) (7)(E)  
[REDACTED] (b) (5), (b) (7)(E)
    - (U//FOUO) [REDACTED] (b) (5), (b) (7)(E)  
[REDACTED] (b) (5), (b) (7)(E)

(b) (5), (b) (7)(E)

- (U) Undeterred access to POE's.
  - (U//FOUO) International bridges are either privately or publicly owned, which can be a limiting factor to the types of infrastructure CBP may add to the bridges.
- (U//FOUO) The ability to process and hold inadmissible migrants at POE is directly linked to the composition of detainees (age, sex, family status, etc.), and the ability to transfer custody to ERO and HHS/ORR.
- (U//FOUO) The demand for additional resources to address another mass migratory surge will draw considerable resources away from CBP's other core responsibilities.

- (U//FOUO) (b) (5), (b) (7)(E)

**(U) Current Border Plan:**

- (U//FOUO) The USBP "Border Plan" focuses on CBP's Enduring Mission Priorities. Specifically, the Plan focuses on 'Strategic Border Enforcement' that focuses on understanding the operating environment across all domains at and between the POEs, to prevent, impede, and disrupt cross-border criminal activity through intelligence-driven, threat-based operations.
  - (U//FOUO) USBP also focuses on 'Extending the Zone of Security' through International Engagement –applying diplomatic, capacity building, and information sharing solutions that enhance our foreign partners' ability to disrupt and deny illicit activity in the source and transit zones.
  - (U//FOUO) Additionally, USBP focuses on 'Improving Intelligence Integration' by maturing the integration and effectiveness of the CBP Intelligence Enterprise that provides decision makers at every level with complete, timely, and actionable information to inform border security operations.
  - (U//FOUO) USBP's goal is to achieve Operational Control (OPCON) of the international border between POEs by deploying resources to the border to detect, identify, classify, impede, and interdict prioritized threats to National Security, Border Security, and Public Safety.
    - (U//FOUO) USBP lines of effort also include maintaining safe, legal and orderly processing of migrants, including those who may express a fear of return.
    - (U//FOUO) (b) (7)(E)

- (U//FOUO) The Department of Defense (DoD) has continued to support the CBP SWB security mission since April 2018. Currently, DoD is supporting two DHS SWB requests for assistance (RFA). Interagency RFA are approved at the Cabinet level, and subject to reassessment during the administration transition.
  - (U//FOUO) On February 3, 2020, DHS formally requested DoD support for FY 2021. For aviation support, DHS requested a total of 25,300 flight hours (16,100 light rotary-wing, 2,800 medium rotary-wing, 100 heavy rotary-wing, 4,800 fixed-wing, and 1,500 unmanned aircraft). On the ground, DHS requested 3,661 military personnel to provide infrastructure, operational, and detection and monitoring support.
  - (U//FOUO) On June 23, 2020, then-Secretary Esper approved up to 4,000 personnel and an air component identified by the Joint Staff to support the DHS/CBP SWB security mission through September 30, 2021. National Guard personnel were mobilized for this mission based on the authority provided to DoD within the February 15, 2019 Presidential Declaration of a National Emergency Concerning the Southern Border of the U.S.
  - (U//FOUO) When the COVID-19 public health threat became apparent, DHS requested that DoD provide staffing for an additional 60 (MSC) sites to increase situational awareness in the Rio Grande Valley and Laredo sectors.
- (U//FOUO) USBP has initiated plans to install soft sided facilities (SSF) within RGV to address the loss of processing and short term holding capacity sustained by the temporary closure/retrofitting of its Central Processing Center. The SSF will add (b) (7)(E) short term holding capacity for (b) (7)(E) persons, with COVID-19 restrictions, and be funded through the Cares Act.
  - (U//FOUO) USBP has also initiated contingency planning in anticipation of a potential surge of illegal migration. These additional lines of effort focus on high capacity transportation needs, contract medical personnel at USBP facilities, holding capacity, processing capability, and on the transfer of processed migrants to partner agencies (HHS-ORR and ICE-ERO).
- (U//FOUO) For OFO, in addition to the national level concept of operations (CONOPS), the four SWB Field Offices have developed port specific CONOPS to identify local operational procedures to respond to increased irregular migration with possible changes in law and policy limiting certain processing capabilities.
  - (U//FOUO) OFO Headquarters continues to hold regular planning meetings with the SWB Field Offices in regards to policy changes, security measures, and measures to keep workforce and the public safe.
  - (U//FOUO) Since the implementation of travel restrictions in March 2020, SWB Field Offices have seen a slow but steady increase in encounters of migrants processed for removal or expulsion Title 42 and Title 8, inadmissibility under the Immigration and Nationality Act.

- (~~U//FOUO~~) As a result of the suspension of new enrollments in the MPP, migrants determined to be inadmissible to the United States may be processed by OFO for Expedited Removal (ER) or referred to an Immigration Judge for INA Section 240 proceedings, in accordance with the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) Section 235(b)(2)(B), or any other appropriate processing disposition (e.g., withdrawal, parole). Migrants processed for ER will be appropriately referred to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for Credible Fear interview when a migrant indicates a fear of persecution or torture or expresses an intent to apply for asylum.
- (~~U//FOUO~~) OFO will refer all migrants processed for ER, ER/CF, or NTA to ICE ERO for detention.
- (~~U//FOUO~~) AMO is posturing/preparing for a possible increase in migrant activity due to an increase in large group activity. AMO continually maintains trained agents and crews so that they are readily available to execute requested missions, incorporating best practices learned from Operation Secure Line. AMO conducts routine function checks of operational equipment, to include the Airborne Data Video Link systems along the SWB and incorporates COVID-19 mitigation into all operational plans as assigned.