

**BORDER COMMUNITY SECURITY POLL**  
**Border residents say they feel safe living**  
**on the U.S. Border**

*Report*

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## **About the Border Network for Human Rights**

The Border Network for Human Rights (BNHR) is one of the leading immigration reform and human rights advocacy organizations in the United States. Based in El Paso, Texas, the BNHR has a membership of more than 700 families, or close to 4,000 individuals, in West Texas and Southern New Mexico.

The BNHR's mission is to organize border communities through human rights education and to mobilize our members to ignite change in policy and practice, in particular when it comes to responsible border policy, the respect of human rights and civil rights on the border and law enforcement practices on the border. The strength of the BNHR lies in its grassroots organizing and its willingness to work within the system to bring about change.

*More information about BNHR can be found at [www.bnhr.org](http://www.bnhr.org).*

## **About the Reuel Group**

The El Paso, Texas,-based Reuel Group is a technology company specializing in the development of products for public school districts, municipalities and the campaign and elections industry. The company conducts public opinion polls for candidates as well as news outlets, among other services.

*More information about Reuel Group can be found at [www.reuelgroup.com](http://www.reuelgroup.com). To contact pollster Russell Autry, please call (915) 833-1234 or email [r.autry@reuelgroup.com](mailto:r.autry@reuelgroup.com).*

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## Executive Summary

If you were to believe the political rhetoric about the security situation at the U.S.-Mexico border, you would probably never want to live there. It is regularly described as a lawless war zone, not a place where regular people go to work and raise families. Recently, Arizona Governor Jan Brewer spoke of “murder, terror and mayhem<sup>i</sup>” on the border and U.S. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., wanted to send more National Guard troops to “secure our border and allow (our citizens) to lead lives where they not live in fear.<sup>ii</sup>”

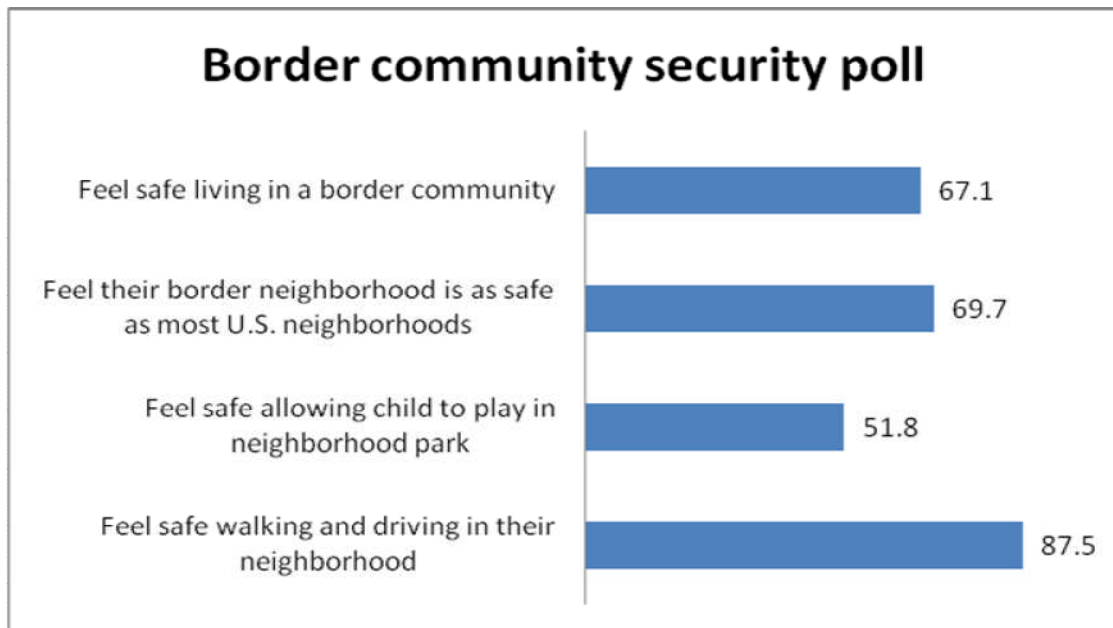
This negative and fearful vision of the border has led to punitive policies of strict enforcement and militarization that do not reflect the reality of border life

and the needs of its inhabitants. Statistics clearly show the border to be one of the safest areas in the nation, one without an increase in crime for several years<sup>iii</sup>.

But what do people who live there think? The Border Network for Human Rights decided to find out by commissioning *the first opinion poll of border residents from San Diego to Brownsville, asking them: Do you feel safe living on the border?*

The results of the poll, conducted by the independent Reuel Group, Inc., show that people who live on the U.S. side of the U.S.-Mexico border feel safe in their communities.

Border-wide results are as follows:



These results carried over to all the border cities polled. Residents of San Diego and El Centro, Calif., Yuma, Nogales and Douglas, Ariz., Las Cruces,

N.M., El Paso, Laredo, McAllen and Brownsville, Texas, feel their border communities are as safe as most communities in the nation.

In view of these results, we encourage legislators and government officials to review and reform their enforcement-only policies which overwhelm communities and to create new practices that are more in tune with the relatively peaceful nature of border life. Rather than focusing more Border Patrol agents, the National Guard, and other resources on the border at a time when the border has never been more secure, border communities need more accountable enforcement that takes communities into

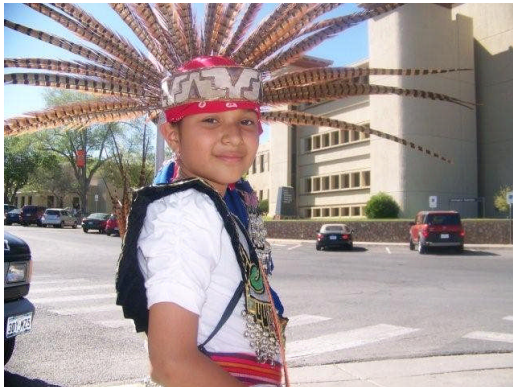
account. Among other needs, border communities need better-trained agents; a standardized complaint process that allows for meaningful feedback to the Border Patrol; and a central role in government decisions related to immigration enforcement, the environment, and other issues that affect the quality of their lives.

In brief, we need to rethink border enforcement as a question of *quality*, not *quantity*.

## The Big Picture

In the past few months, a series of national polls regarding border security have been released by various sources. In June, a FOX News/Opinion Dynamics poll of 900 registered voters nationwide found that 60 percent of respondents thought the federal government ought to secure the border first, before taking on immigration reform. Also in June, an ABC News/Washington Post poll of 1,400 adults nationwide found that 83 percent of respondents supported using the National Guard to patrol the border.

The results of these polls and many more are consistent with the conventional wisdom of the border as a lawless and dangerous area.



### The rhetoric of border violence

This view has been spread by politicians and the media. Arizona Governor Jan Brewer recently spoke of “murder, terror and mayhem<sup>iv</sup>” on the border and U.S. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., wanted to send more National Guard troops to “secure our border and allow (our citizens) to lead lives where they not live in fear.”<sup>v</sup>

However, evidence shows that the idea of the border as a war zone is a myth.

### Border violence in statistics

The border region has a highly-functioning economy, and a vibrant and unique culture. It is also one of the safest areas in the nation<sup>vi vii viii</sup>. In San Diego, violent crime has dropped 8 percent in the last three years. In Nogales, Ariz., there hasn’t been a killing in three years. Laredo, Texas, has had two homicides this year. Along the 2000-mile border, there hasn’t been an increase in crime for several years<sup>ix</sup>. While they may be cause for concern, claims of spillover violence from Mexico have also been overstated. For instance, El Paso, Texas, a city of 700,000 people just across the Rio Grande from Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, is the second safest city with a population of 500,000 or more in the nation<sup>x</sup>. It has recorded only one homicide in the first six months of this year<sup>xi</sup>.

U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano and other officials on the front lines on the border say that today, the border is more secure than ever<sup>xii</sup>.

### The policies of fear

Over the years, national politicians have established benchmarks for border security, surpassed them, and then heightened those benchmarks to justify increases in border enforcement funding and resources. In 2006, the government ordered the ranks of the Border Patrol increased by 6,000 new officers over only two years, started building a border wall and invested heavily in surveillance technology.

This was done without meaningful consultation of or accountability to the community. The construction of the

border wall, for instance involved waiving more than 30 environmental laws<sup>xiii</sup> and has had deleterious effects on fragile ecosystems<sup>xiv</sup>.

The success of these cumulative efforts to secure the border has been mixed at best. The Department of Homeland Security has abandoned its failed multi-million dollar initiative, SBInet, to create a “virtual” wall between ports-of-entry<sup>xv</sup>. And yet, only four years later, politicians are once again calling for more boots on the ground, more walls and more technology without regard to the expense to the taxpayers or the damage done to border communities.

### **Looking at the cost**

These policies are not without cost for all those involved, starting with the American taxpayer who foots the bill for the effort. The border wall for instance costs \$4 million to \$12 million per mile, depending on the terrain. A recent U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) study found that maintenance of the wall would cost \$6.5 billion over the next 20 years<sup>xvi</sup>.

The U.S. economy is also suffering as impractical border security measures make trade and tourism unnecessarily cumbersome. At any southern border ports of entry, lines of motorists and pedestrians, many waiting to go shopping in U.S. stores, idle for more than three hours at a time.

Finally, the massive build-up in immigration enforcement resources has undermined the human and civil rights of border residents. Border residents live in an increasingly militarized environment, one in which many constitutional protections don’t apply.

On the border, most stops and searches are exempt from “unreasonable search and seizure” rules.

And tragically for so many, the number of migrant deaths is increasing, even while apprehensions are declining, indicating that the close-the-border strategy is only pushing migrants to more treacherous crossing routes<sup>xvii</sup>.



### **Why a poll?**

The Border Network for Human Rights, a non-profit organization with 12 years of experience organizing communities on the U.S.-Mexico border, believes that it is time to revisit the assumption on which these programs have been built: that the border is not safe. Toward that end, it decided to commission an independent opinion poll of border communities to find out what no one had asked before:

***Do you feel safe living on the border?***

## The Poll

### Methodology

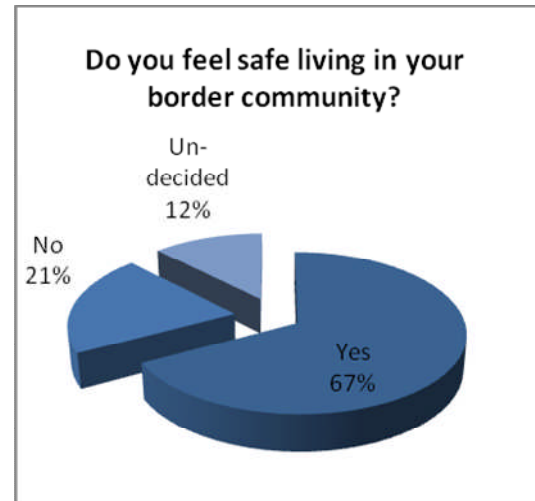
The Border Network for Human Rights poll, conducted by the independent polling firm Reuel Group, was carried out via an automated phone system during the week of July 12, 2010. Pollsters used standard statistical methods to select a sample of border residents. They estimated that 70 percent of the households polled were voter households.

The automated poll received 1,222 responses, proportionally spread between the chosen cities to reflect their respective populations. In the end, the group polled 165 people in three Arizona border cities (Douglas, Nogales and Yuma), 540 people in two California border cities (El Centro and San Diego), 167 people in Las Cruces, New Mexico, and 350 people in four Texas border cities (Brownsville, El Paso, Laredo and McAllen).

The margin of error was plus or minus 2.9 percent.

### Results

The overwhelming majority of respondents said they felt safe living in their border communities (67.1 percent), they felt their neighborhood was as safe as most neighborhoods in the United States (69.7 percent), and they felt safe going about their daily activities (walking and driving in their neighborhood: 87.5 percent; and allowing a child to play in a neighborhood park: 51.8 percent). Only 7.8 percent of respondents said they did not feel safe walking or driving in their neighborhood.



The results generally repeated themselves in the different cities polled, even cities in Arizona where recent anti-immigrant legislations have allegedly been prompted by fears over security.

In Douglas, Ariz., 76.8 percent of respondents said they felt safe as they walked and drove in their neighborhood during their regular daily activities; in Nogales, they were 90 percent; and in Yuma, they were 94.5 percent.

*(Raw results by the Reuel Group are attached.)*

### Analysis

According to the poll's results, the people who live on the border and are the most qualified to gauge their own safety do feel safe living on the border. Their responses show without ambiguity that they feel safe engaging in every day business and leisure in their neighborhoods. Their opinion should be taken into account by legislators and government officials working on border policy issues.



## Recommendations

In view of these results, the Border Network for Human Rights strongly recommends a full review of the current border enforcement policy of the United States. Federal crime statistics, our experiences, and the results of our poll suggest that the border is safe and that border residents do not feel threatened. Thus the priority should be on mitigating the damage done by wanton enforcement actions on the border that have disrupted communities and the environment. ***The Border Network for Human Rights supports a border policy that would stress quality of enforcement over quantity.***



The Border Network for Human Rights has worked for years with other border stakeholders to devise guidelines for a rational, accountable and humane border enforcement reform. First and foremost, the government should leave behind ill-conceived and short-sighted enforcement initiatives:

- Halt all wall construction
- Stop military deployment on the border
- Stop programs that mandate or allow that local law enforcement

officer enforce federal immigration laws

- Fight Arizona copycat laws that mandate that local law enforcement officers ask community members for their immigration papers and that would lead to racial profiling

At the same time, the Border Network for Human Rights is proposing affirmative ways to improve safety, prosperity and quality of life on the border:

- Create an independent oversight commission to review border enforcement practices
- Implement solutions to save the lives of the hundreds of migrants who die crossing the border each year, such as placing rescue beacons and cell phone towers in the desert and buoys and climbouts in canals
- Review the cost-effectiveness of border enforcement policies
- Increase staff levels at ports of entry to expedite legal crossings
- Establish a border-wide process of consultation between the Border Patrol, elected officials, and the communities most closely affected by enforcement decisions
- Include human rights instruction within Border Patrol agents' training
- Standardize the CBP complaint process
- Improve custody standards for those in CBP custody
- Protect the environment by studying, mitigating and restoring areas damaged by

- border security infrastructure and activity
- Pass comprehensive immigration reform as the only viable, humane and long-term solution for reducing undocumented immigration

The Border Network for Human Rights asks for a redesign of our national border enforcement policy, one that reflects and promotes the border's cultural and commercial vibrancy and one in which border communities are not treated as the enemy but rather as a valued partner.

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<sup>i</sup> Ann Garcia, "Fact Sheet: Setting the Record Straight on Border Crime: Border States Are Safe Today and Only Getting Safer," [http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/06/pdf/border\\_crime.pdf](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/06/pdf/border_crime.pdf) (accessed July 19, 2010)

<sup>ii</sup> Associated Press, "Dems Stop Bid for 6,000 More Troops at Border," <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/05/27/politics/main6524237.shtml?tag=contentMain;contentBody> (accessed July 19, 2010)

<sup>iii</sup> Mendoza, Martha, "Border safe and getting safer," Associated Press, <http://www.valleymorningstar.com/articles/safe-74792-border-safer.html> (accessed July 20, 2010)

<sup>iv</sup> Ann Garcia, "Fact Sheet: Setting the Record Straight on Border Crime: Border States Are Safe Today and Only Getting Safer," [http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/06/pdf/border\\_crime.pdf](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/06/pdf/border_crime.pdf) (accessed July 19, 2010)

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<sup>v</sup> Associated Press, "Dems Stop Bid for 6,000 More Troops at Border," <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/05/27/politics/main6524237.shtml?tag=contentMain;contentBody> (accessed July 19, 2010)

<sup>vi</sup> Mendoza, Martha, "Border safe and getting safer," Associated Press, <http://www.valleymorningstar.com/articles/safe-74792-border-safer.html> (accessed July 20, 2010)

<sup>vii</sup> Padgett, Tim, "The 'dangerous' border: Actually one of America's safest places," *TIME Magazine*, <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2007474,00.html?xid=rss-topstories#ixzz0vATLmLCI> (retrieved August 3, 2010)

<sup>viii</sup> CQ Press, "Borderline Confusion- Defining safe," July 26, 2010

<sup>ix</sup> Riccardi, Nicholas, "Quiet border towns don't live up to their notoriety," *Los Angeles Times*, <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/may/13/nation/la-na-border-crime-20100514> (retrieved July 20, 2010)

<sup>x</sup> CQ Press, *City Crime Rankings 2009-2010*, [http://os.cqpress.com/citycrime/2009/Rankings2009\\_Population.pdf](http://os.cqpress.com/citycrime/2009/Rankings2009_Population.pdf) (retrieved July 28, 2010)

<sup>xi</sup> Grissom, Brandi, "El Paso Sheriff on violence, immigration and Arizona," *Texas Tribune*, <http://www.texastribune.org/texas-mexico-border-news/texas-mexico-border/el-paso-sheriff-violence-immigration-and-arizona/> (retrieved July 28, 2010)

<sup>xii</sup> Napolitano, Janet, "If you look at facts, border is more secure than ever," *Arizona Republic*, <http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/opinions/articles/2010/06/03/20100603napolitano04.html> (retrieved July 28, 2010)

<sup>xiii</sup> Marosi, Richard, and Gaouette, Nicole, "Rules Waived for U.S. fence," *Los Angeles Times*, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/apr/02/nation/na-fence2> (retrieved July 28, 2010)

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<sup>xiv</sup> Sierra Club, Grand Canyon Chapter,  
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<sup>xv</sup> Federal Times, “DHS official: Virtual border  
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<sup>xvi</sup> The Houston Chronicle, “The bill for border  
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<sup>xvii</sup> Wagner, Dennis, “U.S. laws blamed for  
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