

GONE TOO FAR:

**BORDER RESIDENTS
IN TEXAS ARE
CONCERNED ABOUT
IMMIGRATION
ENFORCEMENT**

OCTOBER 2026



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Border Residents in Texas Are Concerned About Immigration Enforcement

SUMMARY

Residents of Texas border communities in the Rio Grande Valley and El Paso are living with the heaviest immigration presence in their lifetimes. According to our poll of more than 1,000 adults in those two regions, many residents report encountering federal, state, and/or local immigration enforcement every single day. Despite the ubiquity of enforcement agents in the areas, most border residents do not feel that immigration enforcement is making them safer.

- **53% of residents across El Paso and the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) think state and local immigration enforcement presence makes life harder without making their communities safer. Only 34% say it makes their communities safer.**
- **63% of people living in border communities, including people who have a family member employed by a federal immigration enforcement agency, believe Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) tactics have gone too far.**
- **64% of residents in border communities want local and state law enforcement to prioritize preventing and solving crime rather than immigration enforcement.**

METHODOLOGY

On behalf of the ACLU of Texas, Change Research conducted a poll of 1,031 adults from August 25–September 2, 2026 in El Paso County and four RGV counties (Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy). Researchers recruited respondents via targeted online ads and text messages, with sampling adjusted across age, gender, race, and partisanship to deliver a representative sample. Using Census and voter file data, researchers then weighted data on age, gender, race/ethnicity, county, and 2024 presidential vote. The modeled margin of error is +/- 3.4 percentage points. [Access the full methodology statement here.](#)

CORE FINDINGS

53% of residents in El Paso and the RGV think federal, state, and local immigration enforcement presence makes life harder without making their communities safer.

A majority of respondents reject the idea that immigration enforcement by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), ICE, and the cooperation of local and state police with immigration authorities makes them safer. Just 34% of respondents said the presence makes their community safer.

Across the Texas border, the presence of immigration enforcement agents is constant:

- **68% of respondents in the RGV and 60% in El Paso report seeing agents or state troopers daily or a few times a week.**
- **60% of respondents in the RGV and 51% in El Paso have either seen or heard about local or state police such as county sheriff's deputies, city police, or Department of Public Safety (DPS) state troopers detaining someone and turning them over to ICE or CBP.**
- **48% of respondents in the RGV and 50% in El Paso say they, a family member, or a friend or acquaintance have been stopped, questioned, or asked about immigration status by CBP, ICE, or state or local police.**

“We are by the border and it has never been dangerous like it is now. ICE is mostly arresting/detaining innocent people.”

— Hispanic or Latino/a, 35–49, RGV, 2024 Kamala Harris voter.

“Very aggressive ICE enforcement [is] putting strain in [the] building sector.”

— Hispanic or Latino/a, 35–49, RGV, 2024 Donald Trump voter.

63% of El Paso and RGV residents say immigration enforcement tactics have gone too far.

The lived experiences of border residents, many of whom are employed by federal enforcement agencies, shape local views on immigration. Overall, more than half of respondents— including 52% of people in the RGV and 50% in El Paso — say they or someone they know works for DPS, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), ICE, or CBP. Despite these personal ties to enforcement agencies, 63% of respondents — including 62% of residents in the RGV and 65% in El Paso — believe tactics used by ICE have gone too far. Only 21% of respondents believe they've been about right.

“El Paso has always been a sister city to [Ciudad] Juarez. It is sad to see that politics has changed that. Our environment is so uneasy now.”

— Hispanic or Latino/a, 65+, El Paso, 2024 Harris voter.

“ICE isn't helping by deporting our hard- working immigrants regardless of their status. This whole region and country has been built on the backs of immigrants...”

— Hispanic or Latino/a, 35–49, RGV, 2024 Trump voter.

Border residents believe preventing and solving crime, not immigration enforcement, should be the highest priority for state and local police.

64% of survey respondents, including 63% of RGV residents and 65% of El Paso residents, say that preventing and solving violent crime should be the top priority for local and state police. In addition, one in four residents say concern about immigration enforcement makes them less likely to report a crime to police, suggesting current immigration enforcement is undermining the public safety priorities residents want police to focus on.

“Immigrants are not a threat, rather, they contribute more than people expect. My community is very safe considering we live near the border.”

— Hispanic or Latino/a, 50–64, RGV, 2024 Trump voter.

“Estamos altamente militarizados por alto patrullaje por demasiadas agencias de ley, lejos de infundir seguridad nos sentimos invadidos por el Estado.”

— Hispanic or Latino/a, 50–64, RGV, too young/ineligible/not registered in 2024.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

People in border communities hold highly partisan views of President Trump and the Trump administration’s immigration enforcement policies, according to our survey results. However, respondents who approve of the job Trump is doing — as well as those who do not — identify that there is a heavy presence of immigration enforcement authorities in their communities. Overall, respondents reported

seeing border enforcement authorities daily (39%) or a few times a week (25%).

With one in five respondents saying they fear getting caught up in an immigration enforcement operation, this increased presence causes anxiety and hardship for people living along the border. That anxiety has also led to residents feeling less likely to do basic tasks like shopping for groceries, attending church, driving on certain roads, sending their children to school, or reporting a crime to police. Young people (between the ages of 18–34) report the highest rates of stress or anxiety (37%), and fear (28%) about immigration enforcement actions.

“American born children in my community are scared because they see their parents scared. A child should not be afraid of law enforcement.”

— Hispanic or Latino/a, 35–49, RGV, 2024 Harris voter.

“We are a community full of Hispanics and racial profiling is hurting out community.”

— Hispanic or Latino/a, 35 to 49, 2024 Trump voter

“The community I live in is mostly immigrants. I am a minority here. The people here have been nothing but kind, generous and caring to me and my family. I've seen no crimes or violence but I have seen people ripped from their cars and high speed dangerous chases by ICE.”

— White/Caucasian, 35 to 49, 2024 Harris voter

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Border residents pay hefty prices for federal, state, and local immigration enforcement efforts. Those trade-offs include diminished regional economic productivity, worsened regional health outcomes, and less educational attainment for area children. Yet, the federal government continues to expand its immigration enforcement presence along the Texas-Mexico border. Texas Governor Greg Abbott and the state legislature are mandating local collaboration with ICE. Local law enforcement, including some agencies that are not mandated to collaborate, are joining formal collaboration agreements.

Local and state policymakers can take concrete steps to prioritize public safety, improve conditions for residents of Texas’ border communities, and represent the interests and prevailing views of border residents.

Recommendation 1: Halt 287(g) agreements and end existing local ICE collaboration agreements.

287(g) agreements blur the line between community policing and immigration enforcement. Local officials should not enter into any further optional 287(g) agreements in Texas. Communities that have entered discretionary 287(g) agreements should terminate them as soon as possible. Local law enforcement should prioritize public safety.

Recommendation 2: End state police involvement in federal immigration enforcement.

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DPS troopers and other state law enforcement should focus their resources on the public safety needs rather than acting as an extension of federal immigration authorities. Focusing the mission of state police on public safety rather than immigration enforcement will start to restore trust between residents of border communities and state law enforcement.

Recommendation 3: Support victims of crime.

Local law enforcement and state police must demonstrably break from ICE and their aggressive tactics so that victims of crime and witnesses to crime are comfortable calling the police. 28% of border residents say that recent immigration enforcement actions have increased stress or anxiety for themselves, a friend, and/or a family member. All Texans should be concerned if vulnerable members of our communities stop reporting crime. Ultimately, this fear undermines the effectiveness of police investigations.

Additionally, local and state law enforcement officials must protect crime victims and witnesses to crime by honoring only judicial warrants signed by a judge and not administrative warrants signed by ICE. Administrative warrants do not allow a local officer to detain someone but officers have made mistakes. In one public case in Texas, local police erroneously detained a crime victim for ICE based on an administrative warrant instead of going after the people who committed the alleged crime.

Finally, local law enforcement should maximize U Visa certifications, which provide lawful presence in the US for victims of crime, so victims and witnesses, irrespective of their immigration statuses, are comfortable speaking up. Agencies should adopt clear policies distinguishing their roles from federal immigration enforcement and invest in outreach to build relationships with communities that include immigrants and families including members with mixed immigration statuses.

Recommendation 4: Tailor Local Enforcement Priorities to Avoid Sensitive Locations.

Consistent with authority under SB 4 (2017), local law enforcement should refuse to support immigration enforcement actions that target sensitive locations such as schools, places of worship, and hospitals. A significant percentage of border residents reported rethinking travel to school (19%), church and community events (24%), and visiting the doctor (18%) as a result of the massive enforcement efforts along the Texas border. Local officials should take steps to allow everyone living in border communities the basic decency of access to medical care and religious community.

CONCLUSION

Along the Texas-Mexico border, residents share the conviction that immigrant communities deserve dignity and respect. Residents raise important questions about local law enforcement prioritizing immigration enforcement over focusing on public safety. Growing militarization at the border and the omnipresence of immigration enforcement — including federal agencies and state and local law enforcement — is damaging Texas communities. From Brownsville to El Paso, we call on elected officials to take seriously the concerns raised by Texans living along the border.