

# New Poll Reveals America's Views on Border Security

**Americans prefer strengthening Ports of Entry as a better approach to border security than more border walls. This poll demonstrates how quickly accurate information moves Americans from a majority supporting, to a majority opposing, extending the border wall.**

- The most important issues for most Americans are the economy (44%) and the budget deficit (11%), not immigration (5%), terrorism (4%) or illegal drugs (1%).
- Americans generally support border security measures, and with a little information, strongly prefer a focus on bolstering efforts at Ports of Entry, not on the hundreds of miles between Ports of Entry.
- Initially, 63% support building a border wall between the U.S. and Mexico, but only 33% at that point say that they know a lot about the border wall.
- When Americans are informed of three facts:
  1. The border is 2000 miles long,
  2. about 650 miles of fence have been built, and
  3. fences between the 42 official Ports of Entry where U.S. Customs and Border Protection maintains inspection points would cost between \$6 million and \$9 million per mile to extend ...<sup>i</sup>support for building more walls drops immediately by 4 points, to 59%.

**92% of Americans favor strengthening inspections at Ports of Entry to prevent illegal activities.**

- When asked to choose, Americans prefer to focus resources on Ports of Entry (55%) rather than on building hundreds of miles of new border wall between Ports of Entry (45%).<sup>ii</sup>
- After hearing arguments for and against building an additional 300 miles of wall, only 56% support building new walls.<sup>iii</sup>
- When respondents see photographs and receive information about the flooding and damage that has occurred when the Department of Homeland Security has made bad decisions in constructing the wall, a majority (52%) come out against new border walls, with a minority (48%) still favoring building walls.<sup>iv</sup>
- Impressively, at the extremes of opinion among an informed public, 34% strongly oppose extending the wall another 300 miles, while only 26% strongly favor it.

**Americans want the Department of Homeland Security to do what it does best where its efforts are most effective: Blocking the illegal entry of immigrants and drugs at Ports of Entry. Americans prove very uncomfortable with proposals for DHS to operate outside its area of expertise. That negative reaction is strong whether DHS is waiving environmental laws in sensitive lands, or engineering and constructing border walls without the engineering expertise necessary to do it safely.**

- A solid majority (64%) of respondents oppose giving Homeland Security sole discretion to waive environmental and other laws in order to build border walls and infrastructure.<sup>v</sup>
- A similar majority (64%) of respondents oppose Congress permanently waiving environmental and other laws for border security.
- When given information and shown photographs demonstrating that flooding and damage are occurring along the border due to DHS lack of expertise in constructing the wall, 76% say that represents a serious problem.

**Sky Island Alliance • Texas Border Coalition • Sierra Club**

**Center for Biological Diversity • International League of Conservation Photographers**

## Sources:

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<sup>i</sup> The cost range for the construction of pedestrian fencing varies widely, resulting from factors that include labor (some border wall sections were built by members of the National Guard, while others were built by private contractors); topography; remote vs. urban locations; land purchases and condemnations; materials (wall sections built in the 1990's used scrap metal, obtained from the military for free, while more recent sections have required the purchase of concrete, steel, etc.); and the design that is being utilized.

In October 2008 the Houston Chronicle reported that "The Army Corps of Engineers estimated that the amount spent for pedestrian fencing has jumped 88 percent since February to \$7.5 million per mile."

*"As border fence lags, costs, controversy rise"* by Stewart Powell, *Houston Chronicle*, October 10, 2008  
<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/metropolitan/6052544.html>

In January 2009, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported that costs for sections built up to that point ranged from \$400,000 to \$15.1 million.

*Secure Border Initiative Fence Construction Costs*, United States Government Accountability Office, January 29, 2009  
<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d09244r.pdf>

Sections that were later completed, and therefore were left out of the 2009 GAO report, included the 3.6 miles of pedestrian fence built through the Otay Mountain Wilderness Area, at a cost of \$57.7 million, averaging just over \$16 million per mile.

*"\$57.7-million fence added to an already grueling illegal immigration route"* by Richard Marosi, *Los Angeles Times*, February 15, 2010  
<http://articles.latimes.com/2010/feb/15/local/la-me-fence15-2010feb15>

Also unfinished at the time were the border wall and earthen berm blocking Smuggler's Gulch, near San Diego, which cost \$59 million for 3.5 miles, an average of \$16.8 million per mile.

*"A Barren Promise at the Border"* by Rob Davis, *Voice of San Diego*, October 22, 2009

[http://www.voiceofsandiego.org/environment/article\\_13330282-1245-5e49-bd68-5a10237c9f44.html](http://www.voiceofsandiego.org/environment/article_13330282-1245-5e49-bd68-5a10237c9f44.html)

In 2010 the GAO reported that "Since fiscal year 2006, DHS has received about \$4.4 billion in appropriations for SBI, including about \$2.5 billion for physical fencing and related infrastructure, about \$1.5 billion for virtual fencing (e.g., surveillance systems) and related infrastructure (e.g., towers), and about \$300 million for program management."

*SECURE BORDER INITIATIVE: DHS Needs to Strengthen Management and Oversight of Its Prime Contractor*, United States Government Accountability Office, October, 2010  
<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d116.pdf>

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<sup>ii</sup> ABC News reported in April 2009 that, "most of the drug shipments smuggled into the U.S. by the Mexican cartels are hidden in trucks that drive across U.S. border checkpoints in plain sight, with little fear of inspection... Only about 5 percent of trucks coming into the country from Mexico are inspected, according to U.S. officials."

*"Cocaine Highways: Post-NAFTA, Most Drugs Cross U.S. Borders in Trucks"* Richard Esposito, Asa Eslocker and Brian Ross, *ABC News*, April 16, 2009

<http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/story?id=7354412&page=1>

In 2011 the GAO reported that "To mitigate infrastructure weaknesses, such as the lack of vehicle barriers, CBP estimated in 2007 that it would need about \$4 billion to make capital improvements at all 163 of the nation's land crossings."

*BORDER SECURITY: DHS Progress and Challenges in Securing the U.S. Southwest and Northern Borders*, United States Government Accountability Office, March 30, 2011  
<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d11508t.pdf>

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<sup>iii</sup> The border wall's effectiveness was the argument for and against further wall construction that a majority responded to. 66% replied that the statement, "The wall is working. It is slowing down those who try to enter illegally as immigrants, drug smugglers or terrorists in between the ports of entry," was either a very or somewhat strong reason for adding more wall. 60% responded that the statement, "The wall is ineffective, due to breaches, tunnels, and how easily it can be scaled," is a very or somewhat strong reason to oppose further border wall construction.

Claims for the efficacy of border walls are based on anecdotal, rather than empirical, evidence. The GAO stated that "CBP reported an increase in control of southwest border miles, but could not account separately for the impact of the border fencing and other infrastructure. In our May 4, 2010, testimony, we concluded that until CBP determines the contribution of border fencing and other infrastructure to border security, it is not positioned to address the impact of its investment."

*BORDER SECURITY: DHS Progress and Challenges in Securing the U.S. Southwest and Northern Borders*, United States Government Accountability Office, March 30, 2011  
<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d11508t.pdf>

As of mid-May 2009, the fence had been breached more than 3,300 times, with costs to repair each breach averaging \$1,300.

*Secure Border Initiative: Technology Deployment Delays Persist and the Impact of Border Fencing Has Not Been Assessed*, Government Accountability Office, September 2009  
<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d09896.pdf>

In 2011 the GAO stated that "According to CBP, during fiscal year 2010, there were 4,037 documented and repaired breaches of the fencing and CBP spent at least \$7.2 million to repair the breaches, or an average of about \$1,800 per breach."

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*BORDER SECURITY: DHS Progress and Challenges in Securing the U.S. Southwest and Northern Borders. United States Government Accountability Office, March 30, 2011*  
<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d11508t.pdf>

153 tunnels have been found along the border since 1990. "The Department of Homeland Security said that since 1990, officials have found 42 tunnels into San Diego, 12 to Calexico, Calif., and two to Tierra Del Sol, Calif. In Arizona in that time, they have discovered three in San Luis, 88 in Nogales, one in Naco and three in Douglas."

*"Nogales is site of majority of tunnels" Maggie Pingolt, Nogales International, June 21, 2011*

<http://www.nogalesinternational.com/articles/2011/06/21/news/doc4e00ba0613177268278043.txt>

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<sup>iv</sup> In July of 2008 seasonal monsoon rains fell on the Arizona/Sonora border. Border walls dividing Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora, including barriers built by Customs and Border Protection in drainage tunnels beneath the cities without notifying the International Boundary Water Commission, backed up water in the Mexican town. The Arizona Daily Star reported, "The \$8 million in damage caused by the flood includes damage to 578 homes and 45 cars, Mexican officials say. State officials have declared the damaged part of the city a disaster zone. Two days after the flooding, U.S. officials found the bodies of two people in the wash." *"Mexico Ties Flooding in Nogales to U.S. Border Patrol-Built Wall", Brady McCombs, Arizona Daily Star, July 23, 2008*

The same rain event caused flooding in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. The National Park Service found that debris had piled up against the fence, including in drainage gates designed to allow water to flow through and prevent flooding. The 6-foot deep fence foundation also stopped subsurface water flow. This caused water to pool 2 to 7 feet deep, and water that would otherwise have flowed north to south across the border in natural drainage washes flowed laterally. When it reached the nearest port of entry it caused millions of dollars of damage to private businesses and public facilities.

*Effects of the International Boundary Pedestrian Fence in the Vicinity of Lukeville, Arizona, on Drainage Systems and Infrastructure, Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, Arizona, prepared by the National Park Service, August 2008*

[http://www.nps.gov/orpi/naturescience/upload/FloodReport\\_July2008\\_final.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/orpi/naturescience/upload/FloodReport_July2008_final.pdf)

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<sup>v</sup> The Real ID Act of 2005 gave the Secretary of Homeland Security the authority to waive any local, state, or federal law that the construction of border walls might otherwise violate. Section 102 says, "Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of Homeland Security shall have the authority to waive all legal requirements such as Secretary, in such Secretary's sole discretion, determines necessary to ensure expeditious construction of the barriers and roads under this section." Former Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff issued five waivers, culminating in a pair issued on April 1, 2008. One waived 27 federal laws to allow for the insertion of border walls into the existing flood control levees in Hidalgo County, Texas. The second waiver covered every other section of border fencing scheduled for construction from the Pacific to the Gulf of Mexico. This border-wide mega-waiver suspended 36 federal laws. Along with the environmental laws, such as the Endangered Species Act, set aside in earlier waivers, Secretary Chertoff waived the Farmland Protection Policy Act, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, and a host of others, along with "all federal, state, or other laws, regulations and legal requirements of, deriving from, or related to the subject of" the named federal laws.

*Over The Line, Jenny Neeley, 2010.*

<http://dl.dropbox.com/u/369702/JLNeeley2010FisherPrizeinEnvironmentalLaw.pdf>

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Hundreds of miles of protected lands lay along the U.S.-Mexico border, providing habitat for scores of species, including many that are listed under the Endangered Species Act. With the Endangered Species Act waived, border walls now slice through these areas, fragmenting the habitats of the animals that live here. Cut off from their usual range, populations may not have access to mates in other groups or sources of food and water. This can push endangered species that live in border areas closer to extinction.

*"Potential Effects of the United States-Mexico Border Fence on Wildlife" Flesch, et. al., in Conservation Biology, 2009*

[http://files.dropbox.com/u/369702/Flesch et al 2009 Potential effects of US-Mex border fence on wildlife.pdf](http://files.dropbox.com/u/369702/Flesch%20et%20al%202009%20Potential%20effects%20of%20US-Mex%20border%20fence%20on%20wildlife.pdf)

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Speaking before a U.S. House of Representatives hearing on the border wall, Tohono O'odham Chairman Ned Norris Jr. described fence construction following the waiving of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, testifying that, "... fragments of human remains were observed in the tire tracks of heavy construction equipment. Imagine a bulldozer parking in your family graveyard, turning up bones. This is our reality."

*"Walls and Waivers: Expedited Construction of the Southern Border Wall and Collateral Impacts to Communities and the Environment." April 28, 2008 Joint Oversight Hearing, Subcommittee on Fisheries Wildlife and Oceans and Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands of the House Committee on Natural Resources*

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/38155314/Congressional-Testimony-Tohono-O-odham-Chairman-Ned-Norris-re-border-walls-April-2008>