Fact Sheet

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Apprehensions by the U.S. Border Patrol: 2005–2008

NANCY RYTINA AND JOHN SIMANSKI

Statistics on apprehensions represent one of the few indicators available regarding illegal entry or presence in the United States. This Office of Immigration Statistics *Fact Sheet* provides information on recent trends in U.S. Border Patrol apprehensions and the gender, age, country of origin, and geographic location of persons apprehended during 2005 through 2008.[1]

Data beginning in 2005 were obtained from the Enforcement Case Tracking System (ENFORCE) of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). For prior years, data were obtained from the Performance Analysis System (PAS) of DHS.

DEFINING BORDER APPREHENSIONS

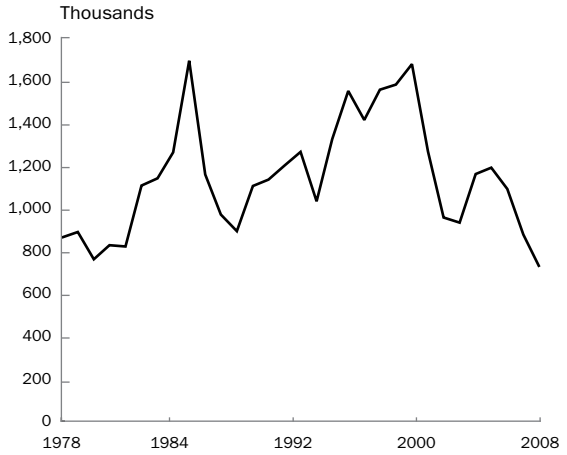
Apprehension statistics measure the number of foreign nationals who are caught for being in the United States illegally. Persons apprehended are subject to removal from the United States for violating the Immigration and Nationality Act. The vast majority of apprehensions, occurring near U.S. borders shortly after an illegal entry, are made by the Border Patrol of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) of DHS. Apprehensions beyond U.S. borders, involving foreign nationals illegally present in the United States who may have entered without inspection (EWI) or entered legally but lost their legal status, are handled primarily by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) of DHS.

Apprehensions data collected by DHS represent events, not individuals. The total number of apprehensions during a specific period will be greater than the total number of unique individuals apprehended because some individuals will have been apprehended more than once. The relationship between the number of border apprehensions to either the number of attempted illegal entries or the number of successful illegal entries is unknown.

OVERALL TREND

The number of apprehensions made by the Border Patrol declined for the third year in a row to 724,000 in 2008 after reaching a mid-decade peak of 1,189,000 in 2005 (see Figure 1). The decrease in apprehensions between 2005 and 2008 may be due to a number of factors including declining U.S. economic growth and enhanced border enforcement efforts. Border apprehensions in 2008 were at their lowest level since 1973. Apprehensions previously peaked at 1,676,000 in 2000. The all-time apprehension record was 1,693,000 in 1986 immediately preceding passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which allowed the legalization of several million unauthorized immigrants, established sanctions for employers who knowingly hired unauthorized immigrants, and provided for increased border enforcement.

Figure 1.
U.S. Border Patrol Apprehensions: 1978 to 2008



Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Enforcement Case Tracking System (ENFORCE) and the Performance Analysis System (PAS).

[1] In this report, years refer to fiscal years (October 1 through September 30).

Homeland Security

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Table 1.

U.S. Border Patrol Apprehensions by Border, Age, Gender and Leading Country of Nationality: Fiscal Years 2005 to 2008

Characteristic	2008		2007*		2006*		2005*	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Border								
Total	723,840	100.0	876,803	100.0	1,089,096	100.0	1,189,031	100.0
Southwest	705,022	97.4	858,737	97.9	1,071,979	98.4	1,171,391	98.5
Coastal	10,895	1.5	11,687	1.3	10,521	1.0	10,291	0.9
Northern	7,923	1.1	6,379	0.7	6,596	0.6	7,349	0.6
Gender								
Total	723,840	100.0	876,803	100.0	1,089,096	100.0	1,189,031	100.0
Male	606,761	83.8	730,217	83.3	893,380	82.0	969,879	81.6
Female	117,061	16.2	146,574	16.7	195,699	18.0	219,123	18.4
Unknown	18	0.0	12	0.0	17	0.0	29	0.0
Age								
Total	723,840	100.0	876,803	100.0	1,089,096	100.0	1,189,031	100.0
17 years and under	59,578	8.2	77,778	8.9	101,778	9.3	114,222	9.6
18 to 24 years	257,409	35.6	325,901	37.2	403,320	37.0	442,755	37.2
25 to 34 years	255,261	35.3	301,002	34.3	377,401	34.7	411,743	34.6
35 to 44 years	112,941	15.6	127,285	14.5	151,422	13.9	162,069	13.6
45 to 54 years	32,003	4.4	36,661	4.2	45,001	4.1	47,158	4.0
55 years and over	6,235	0.9	7,384	0.8	9,093	0.8	9,569	0.8
Unknown	413	0.1	792	0.1	1,081	0.1	1,515	0.1
Country of Nationality								
Total	723,840	100.0	876,803	100.0	1,089,096	100.0	1,189,031	100.0
Mexico	661,773	91.4	808,773	92.2	981,069	90.1	1,023,888	86.1
Honduras	19,351	2.7	22,914	2.6	28,709	2.6	52,741	4.4
Guatemala	16,395	2.3	17,337	2.0	19,925	1.8	22,594	1.9
El Salvador	12,684	1.8	14,114	1.6	41,391	3.8	39,309	3.3
Cuba	3,351	0.5	4,295	0.5	4,021	0.4	3,263	0.3
Ecuador	1,579	0.2	958	0.1	1,143	0.1	1,343	0.1
Nicaragua	1,467	0.2	1,646	0.2	2,736	0.3	3,921	0.3
Brazil	977	0.1	1,214	0.1	1,460	0.1	31,063	2.6
China, People's Republic	836	0.1	837	0.1	2,179	0.2	2,200	0.2
Dominican Republic	819	0.1	562	0.1	1,023	0.1	1,406	0.1
Canada	610	0.1	554	0.1	876	0.1	1,020	0.1
Other	3,998	0.6	3,599	0.4	4,564	0.4	6,283	0.5

* Data as of November–December 2008.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Office of Border Patrol (OBP).

DEMOGRAPHICS

Ninety-seven percent of apprehensions by the Border Patrol in 2008 occurred at the southwest border (see Table 1). Nearly 84 percent of persons apprehended were male. Seventy-one percent were between the ages of 18 and 34 years. Persons apprehended during 2005 through 2007 were similar in age, gender, and border location.

The vast majority (91 percent) of persons apprehended in 2008 were Mexican nationals. The next leading country of origin was Honduras (2.7 percent), followed by Guatemala (2.3 percent) and El Salvador (1.8 percent). Between 2005 and 2008, the percentage of persons apprehended who were from Honduras, El Salvador, and Brazil declined substantially. These decreases reflect the end of "catch and release," the practice of apprehending illegal aliens from countries other than Mexico and releasing them on their own recognizance pending a removal hearing.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about immigration and immigration statistics, visit the Office of Immigration Statistics web site at http://www.dhs.gov/immigrationstatistics.

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