

# Immigration Policy Center (IPC)

*...providing factual information about immigration and immigrants in the United States.*

## PRESS RELEASE

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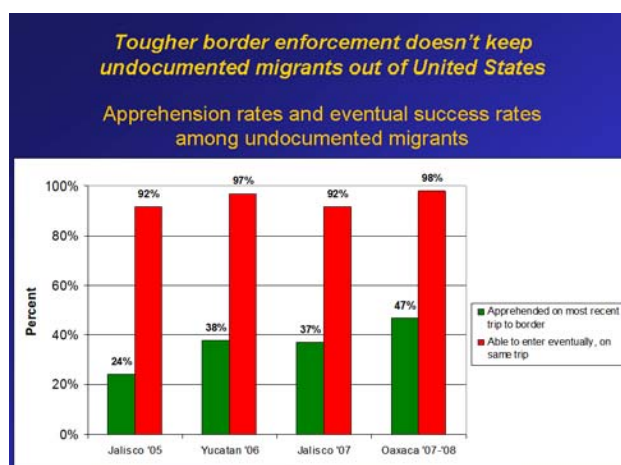
### **National Guard Border Troops Moving On: Two Years and \$1.4 Billion Dollars Later Border Experts Declare Symbols and Smugglers the Winners of “Operation Jump Start”**

**Washington, D.C.**—June 2008 simultaneously marks the two-year anniversary and the end of Operation Jump Start, a joint program by the Border Patrol and Department of Defense. Under the operation, roughly 6,000 National Guard troops were temporarily deployed to the U.S.-Mexico border to assist the Border Patrol with surveillance operations and the construction of fences and vehicle barriers. The last National Guard troops are due to leave by late July, and the Border Patrol is meanwhile attempting to hire thousands of agents to permanently take their place.

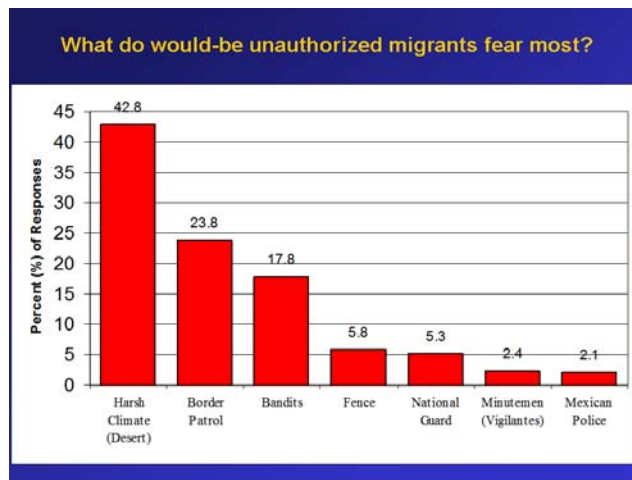
Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff recently declared that the \$1.4 billion operation “has succeeded.” However, if the persistence of undocumented immigration is any indicator, Jump Start is anything but a success. Instead, it has been a costly and ineffective approach to border control that was incorporated into a larger, self-defeating strategy of enforcement-without-reform.

Josiah Heyman, Chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Texas-El Paso, told the *Chicago Tribune* that the National Guard’s presence “makes for good symbolic politics,” but “doesn’t seem to have had a big impact on border security.” Similarly, Wayne Cornelius, Director of the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies at the University of California-San Diego, informed the *Tribune* that border enforcement hasn’t lessened the ability of undocumented immigrants to cross the border, but has motivated more of them to hire people smugglers to make the journey (“[As Guard wraps up, debate revs up on border](#),” *Chicago Tribune*, June 22, 2008).

According to the findings of a research team led by Dr. Cornelius, fewer than half of undocumented immigrants who come to the border are apprehended even once by the Border Patrol. The research, which coincided with Operation Jump Start, found that the vast majority of those attempting to cross the border—between 92 and 98 percent—eventually get through. Border experts have also pointed out that much of Chertoff’s proclaimed victory can be explained by smugglers charging more for their increasingly creative services. If immigrants don’t succeed in crossing on the first try, they almost certainly do on their second or third ([Controlling Unauthorized Immigration from Mexico: The Failure of “Prevention through Deterrence” and the Need for Comprehensive Reform](#), June 10, 2008).



Moreover, undocumented immigrants are well aware of the many risks they face in crossing the border, but are not deterred from leaving hometowns with few economic opportunities in order to fill available jobs in the United States. According to Dr. Cornelius' research, 91 percent of migrants know that crossing the border is "very dangerous," and nearly one-quarter know someone who has died while crossing. Yet they cross anyway out of what they perceive to be economic necessity. As for what migrants "fear most" about undertaking a border crossing they know to be perilous, National Guard troops rank low on the list. Only 5.3 percent of migrants voiced a high degree of fear over the presence of the National Guard—about the same as the 5.8 percent who expressed a significant fear of border fences.



Dr. Cornelius and this research team conclude that "comprehensive immigration reform is the best immigration control strategy." They call for creating a pathway to legal status for most undocumented immigrants already living in the United States; expanding the available avenues for legal immigration; border enforcement in tandem with workplace enforcement; and targeting development programs to migrant-sending communities. In short, Cornelius and his fellow researchers conclude that stopping undocumented immigration will involve more than simply throwing more money and manpower into an enforcement-only strategy that has failed for decades. It will involve creating a rational, fair, and practical immigration system that restores the rule of law through realistic regulation.

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