



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on May 10, 2011

DHS Adding New Index To Measure Border Security

Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano says her agency is developing a new "index" to gauge border security that goes beyond traditional measures such as crime and the number of collared drug traffickers or illegal aliens.

Speaking before the Senate Homeland Security Committee, Napolitano [again told](#) senators that the border is not out of control, contrary to what is widely believed and reported, and that such claims harm the economies of the border states.

Napolitano's claims directly contradict testimony from an official of the Government Accountability Office. In March, GAO border expert [Richard Stana told](#) the committee the border is indeed out of control, Napolitano's claims regardless.



Napolitano's Testimony

[According to](#) Napolitano, her agency's efforts to control the border have borne fruit in decreased crossings by illegals and more apprehensions of drug dealers.

These efforts are leading to significant progress on the Southwest border. In the past two years, seizures of contraband have risen in all categories — in terms of illegal drugs, weapons, and bulk cash. Furthermore, illegal immigration attempts, as measured by Border Patrol apprehensions of illegal aliens, have decreased by 36 percent in the last two years and are less than one third of what they were at their peak a decade ago. In addition, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) crime statistics demonstrate that crime rates in border communities have remained steady or dropped in recent years, continuing a decade-long trend.

As well, [she said](#), Immigration and Customs Enforcement is increasing security at the border. Along with the number of ICE intelligence analysts on the border to focus on drug cartels, DHS has built 649 miles of fence "out of nearly 652 miles where Border Patrol field commanders determined it was operationally required." DHS expects to hire 1,000 new Border Patrol agents and 250 new ICE special agents.

As well, Napolitano said, "In Fiscal Years 2009 and 2010, ICE removed more illegal aliens from our country than ever before, with more than 779,000 removals nationwide."

Most importantly, more than half of those removed last year — upwards of 195,000 — were convicted criminals, the most ever removed from our country in a single year. This surge in these criminal removals did not happen by accident. It is the result of a targeted enforcement strategy designed to identify and remove those who present the greatest danger to our communities.



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Beyond that, Napolitano cites more cooperation among government agencies and increased efforts to help employers verify that employees they are eligible to work in the United States.

[Napolitano attempted](#) to dispel the idea that the border, as Stana reported last month, is out of control. She said that notion is false and adversely affects the border states.

False and unsupported claims about the state of the Southwest border feed a misperception that American border communities are wracked by violence, an assertion which has damaging consequences to their economies. Border community leaders tell me that misperceptions about the border are driving away business and potential visitors. With the reliable and trusted measures of border security that we are developing and validating with third party experts, we can provide an accurate picture of the state of the Southwest border, prevent misperceptions about these communities, and more precisely guide future border security investments.

[Napolitano finished](#) by discussing the next initiative to quantify border security by going beyond crime statistics and the number of apprehensions. The new "index," as DHS calls it, will use such "traditional measures" as apprehensions and drug seizures, as well as state and local crime statistics. "But to fully evaluate the condition of the border and the effectiveness of our efforts," she said, "this index would also incorporate indicators of the impact of illegal cross-border activity on the quality of life in the border region."

This may include calls from hospitals to report suspected illegal aliens, traffic accidents involving illegal aliens or narcotics smugglers, rates of vehicle theft and numbers of abandoned vehicles, impacts on property values, and other measures of economic activity and environmental impacts. CBP is currently working with outside experts and stakeholders to further guide what data to include. These new measures are also critical to evaluating existing resources and guiding future federal investments in personnel, technology, and infrastructure. They are key to determining how best to apply limited resources to gain the most impact on border security. Defining success at the border is critical to how we move forward, and how we define success must follow a few guidelines: it must be based on reliable, validated numbers and processes, tell a complete and transparent statistical story, and draw heavily upon the values and priorities of border communities.

Locals React

Officials in Arizona are happy about the new measures. Cochise County Sheriff Larry Devers was among those, [according to](#) the *Arizona Republic*, which praised the plan. Devers is the sheriff [who claims](#) Border Patrol agents allege that their superiors ordered them to reduce the number arrests.

"I'm thrilled," [Dever told](#) the *Star*. "That's what I've been saying for the last year and a half. They finally got the message." Other local officials agreed:

"It's an area that's been totally ignored," said Pat Call, chairman of the Cochise County Board of Supervisors. "Some border residents here are afraid to let their grade-school kids walk a quarter of a mile down a dirt road to catch a bus."

"If they're going to start looking at quality of life and what's actually happening on the ground, I applaud that, but it's hard to believe," added Patrick Bray, vice president of the Arizona Cattle Growers Association, which has criticized the government on behalf of ranchers. "It will paint a completely different picture from what this administration and the secretary have been saying."



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Border Not Under Control

Whether the border is under control is a matter of opinion. The GAO's [Stana believes](#) otherwise. In his testimony to the Senate, he explained his agency's evaluation of the border. It does not square with Napolitano's picture.

Our preliminary analysis of these Border Patrol data showed that the agency reported a capability to deter or detect and apprehend illegal entries at the immediate border across 129 of the 873 southwest border miles and 2 of the 69 northern border miles. Our preliminary analysis also showed that Border Patrol reported the ability to deter or detect and apprehend illegal entries after they crossed the border for an additional 744 southwest border miles and 67 northern border miles.

As we previously observed in December 2010 and February 2011, and through selected updates, Border Patrol determined in fiscal year 2010 that border security was not at an acceptable level of control for 1,120 southwest border miles and 3,918 northern border miles, and that on the northern border there was a significant or high degree of reliance on enforcement support from outside the border zones for detection and apprehension of cross-border illegal activity.

Stana reported to the committee a week after Napolitano claimed the contrary at a public meeting. [Said Napolitano](#): "It is simply inaccurate to state, as too many have, that the border with Mexico is overrun or out of control. This statement — I think sometimes it's made to score some political points — but it's wrong. It's just plain wrong."

She [also announced](#) that the Obama administration has essentially enacted the DREAM Act, the failed amnesty legislation for the children of illegal aliens, by simply not arresting or deporting aliens who would fall under its parameters.

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Photo: Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano testifies on May 4, 2011, before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

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