

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-50](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

The Border Patrol has primary responsibility for securing the border between U.S. ports of entry. On the southwest border, Border Patrol deploys agents along the immediate border and in areas up to 100 miles from the border as part of a layered approach known as the defense in depth strategy. Immigration checkpoints, generally located between 25 and 100 miles from the border, are one element of this strategy. GAO was asked to review the defense in depth strategy.

This report addresses: (1) the factors Border Patrol considers in deploying agents, (2) where apprehensions of illegal crossers and seizures of contraband are occurring, and (3) what data show about how checkpoints contribute to apprehensions and seizures, among other objectives. To answer these questions, GAO analyzed Border Patrol documents and data on apprehensions and seizures from fiscal year 2012 through 2016, visited two southwest border sectors, interviewed officials from the other seven southwest border sectors and Border Patrol headquarters, and reviewed prior GAO work on border security.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making any new recommendations at this time but has previously recommended that Border Patrol establish internal controls for checkpoint data, among other things. DHS concurred with this recommendation and has taken some steps to improve the quality of checkpoint data, but additional actions are needed to fully implement the recommendation.

View [GAO-18-50](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or [gambler@gao.gov](mailto:gambler@gao.gov).

November 2017

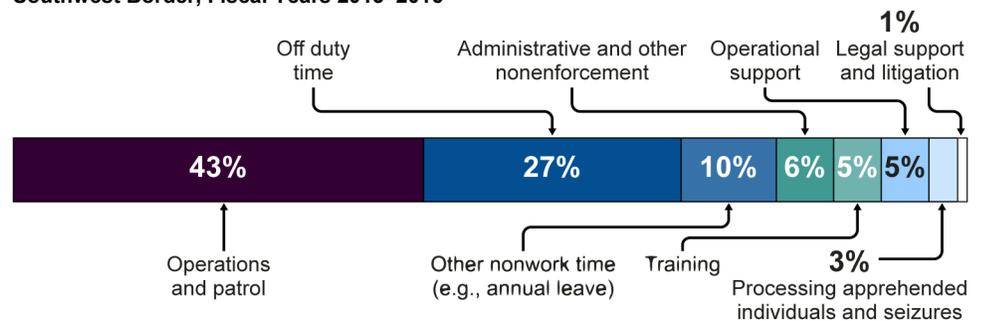
# BORDER PATROL

## Issues Related to Agent Deployment Strategy and Immigration Checkpoints

## What GAO Found

According to U.S. Border Patrol (Border Patrol), agent deployment decisions are based on factors such as staffing levels and the availability of agents, among other things. As of May 2017, nationwide, Border Patrol had about 1,900 fewer agents than authorized, which officials cited as a key challenge for optimal agent deployment. In recent years, attrition has exceeded hiring (an average of 904 agents compared to 523 agents) according to officials. GAO analyzed scheduling data, including time that agents were scheduled to be not working (for example, off duty or on leave) because these activities can affect deployment decisions by reducing the number of agents available on a particular day. GAO found that agents were available for deployment about 43 percent of the time.

Percentage of Agent Hours Scheduled for Time Off and Deployment Activities for the Southwest Border, Fiscal Years 2013–2016



Source: GAO analysis of Border Patrol data. | GAO-18-50

From fiscal years 2012 through 2016, Border Patrol apprehended a total of almost 2 million individuals along the southwest border, and these apprehensions increasingly occurred closer to the border, with 42 percent of apprehensions occurring one-half mile or less from the border in fiscal year 2016 compared to 24 percent in fiscal year 2012. One driver for this change is the increasing number of apprehensions of children, whom officials report may turn themselves in to Border Patrol without attempting to evade detection. Meanwhile, over this period, the locations where seizures of contraband occurred remained roughly the same, with the majority occurring 10 or more miles from the border.

For fiscal years 2013 through 2016, GAO found that 2 percent of apprehensions and 43 percent of seizures occurred at checkpoints; however, determining the extent to which apprehensions and seizures are attributable to checkpoints is difficult because of long-standing data issues. More apprehensions and seizures may be attributable to checkpoints, but Border Patrol's reporting does not distinguish apprehensions that occurred "at" versus "around" a checkpoint. Border Patrol is drafting guidance to clarify how checkpoint apprehension and seizure data are to be recorded that would respond to a 2009 GAO recommendation to improve the internal controls for management oversight of checkpoint data. GAO also determined that seizures at checkpoints differed from those at other locations. Specifically, 40 percent of seizures at checkpoints were 1 ounce or less of marijuana from U.S. citizens. In contrast, seizures at other locations were more often higher quantities of marijuana seized from aliens.