



## The Cost of Immigration Enforcement and Border Security

Since the last major overhaul of the U.S. immigration system in 1986, the federal government has spent an estimated [\\$263 billion](#) on immigration enforcement.<sup>1</sup> As discussions with a new President and Congress start to focus on what immigration enforcement and border security should look like it is important to review how much money has already been spent on these initiatives and what outcomes have been produced.

Immigration enforcement spending largely falls into two issue areas: border security and interior enforcement. Border spending includes staffing and resources needed for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), an agency of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) working at and between United States ports of entry. Interior enforcement is primarily focused on staffing and resources for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), also part of DHS, to apprehend noncitizens in the interior of the country, detention for those undergoing removal proceedings, and the deportation of those ordered removed.

Currently, the number of border and interior enforcement personnel stands at more than [49,000](#).<sup>2</sup> The number of U.S. Border Patrol agents nearly [doubled](#) from Fiscal Year (FY) 2003 to FY 2016.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the number of ICE agents devoted to its office of Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) [nearly tripled](#) from FY 2003 to FY 2016.<sup>4</sup>

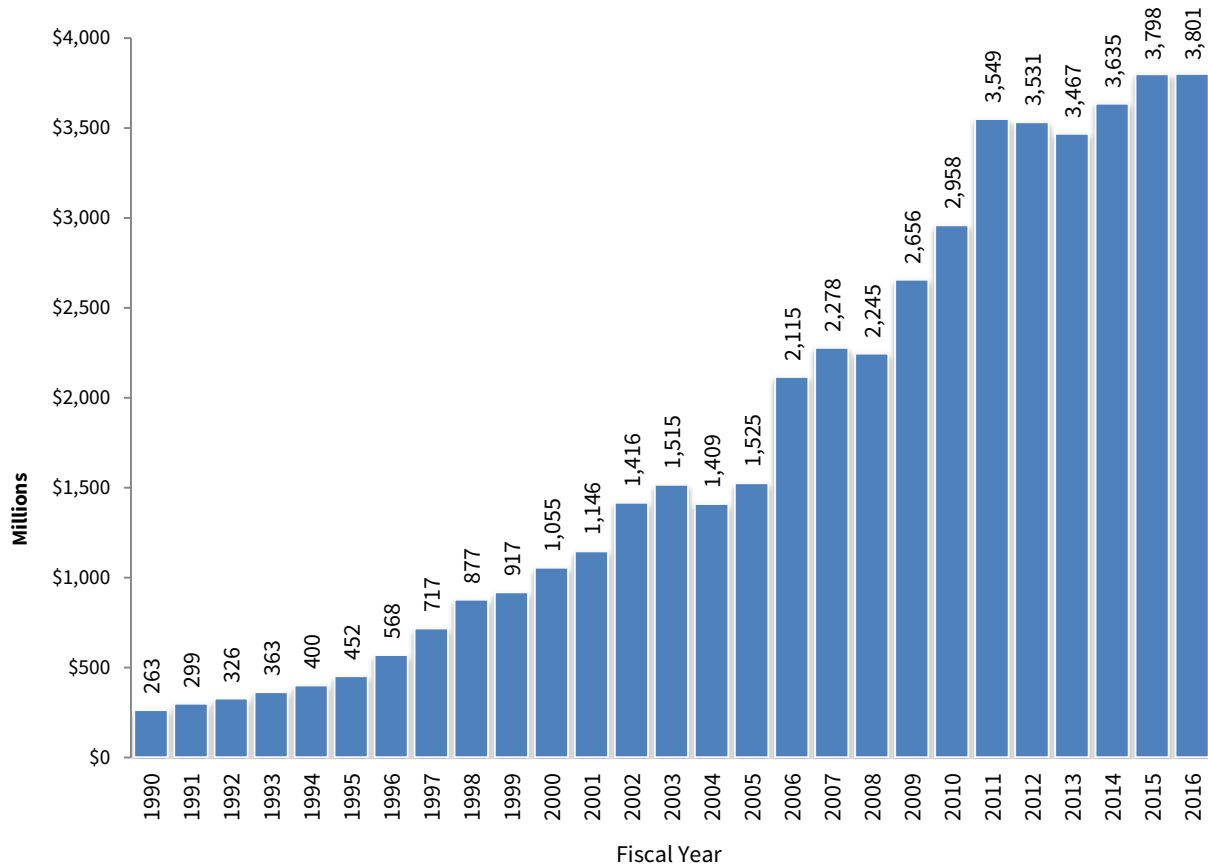
What has this spending bought? The United States currently has over 650 miles of fencing along the Southern border, record levels of staff for ICE and CBP, as well as a fleet of drones—among other resources. Some of these resources have been spent on ill-conceived projects, such as the \$1 billion attempt to construct a “[virtual fence](#)” along the Southwest border, a project initiated in 2005 that was later scrapped for being ineffective and too costly.<sup>5</sup> Even with record level spending on enforcement, enforcement alone is not sufficient to address the challenges of undocumented migration.<sup>6</sup> It also has significant unintended consequences, according to U.S. [Border Patrol statistics](#), the Southwest border witnesses approximately one death per day.<sup>7</sup> All of these efforts that have accumulated in the name of security, however, do not necessarily [measure border security](#).<sup>8</sup> It is past time for the United States to focus on metrics that actually assess achievements and progress on security.<sup>9</sup> DHS lacks transparent, consistent, and stable metrics for evaluating border enforcement. Before deciding how to address border security, Congress should require clear reporting on metrics from DHS.<sup>10</sup> Such metrics would better allow Congress and the public to hold the immigration agencies accountable and assess whether and what additional resources are needed (or not needed) to secure our border.

## The Cost in Dollars

The immigration enforcement budget has increased massively since the early 1990s, but Congress continues to call for more taxpayer dollars to be spent at the border.

- Since 1993, when the current strategy of concentrated border enforcement was first rolled out along the U.S.-Mexico border, the annual budget of the U.S. Border Patrol has increased more than ten-fold, from \$363 million to more than \$3.8 billion (Figure 1).<sup>11</sup>

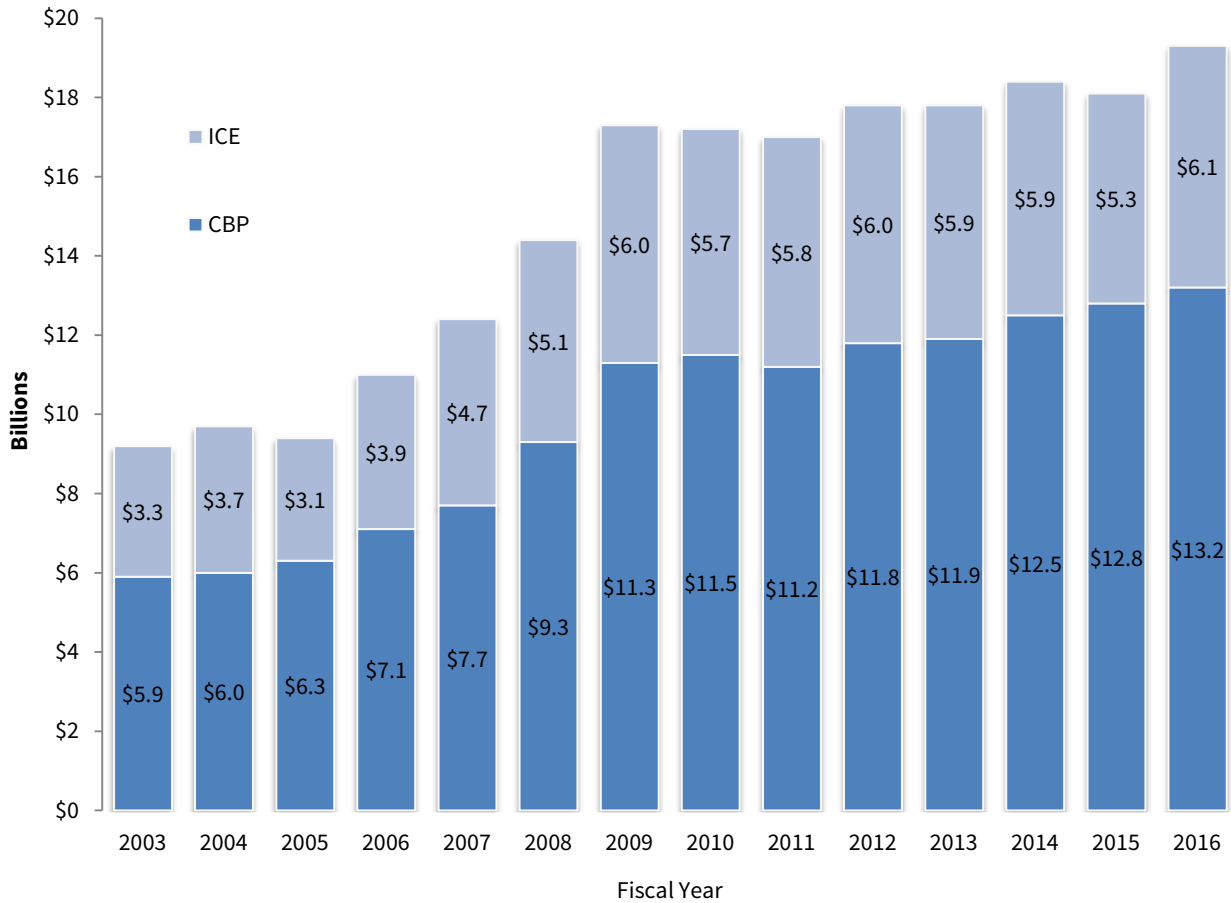
Figure 1: U.S. Border Patrol Budget, FY 1990-2015



Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection, "U.S. Border Patrol Fiscal Year Budget Statistics (FY 1990-FY 2015)," January 12, 2016.

- Since the creation of DHS in 2003, the budget of CBP has more than doubled from \$5.9 billion to \$13.2 billion per year (Figure 2).<sup>12</sup>
- On top of that, ICE spending has grown 85 percent, from \$3.3 billion since its inception to \$6.1 billion today (Figure 2).<sup>13</sup>

Figure 2: CBP & ICE Annual Budgets, FY 2003-2016

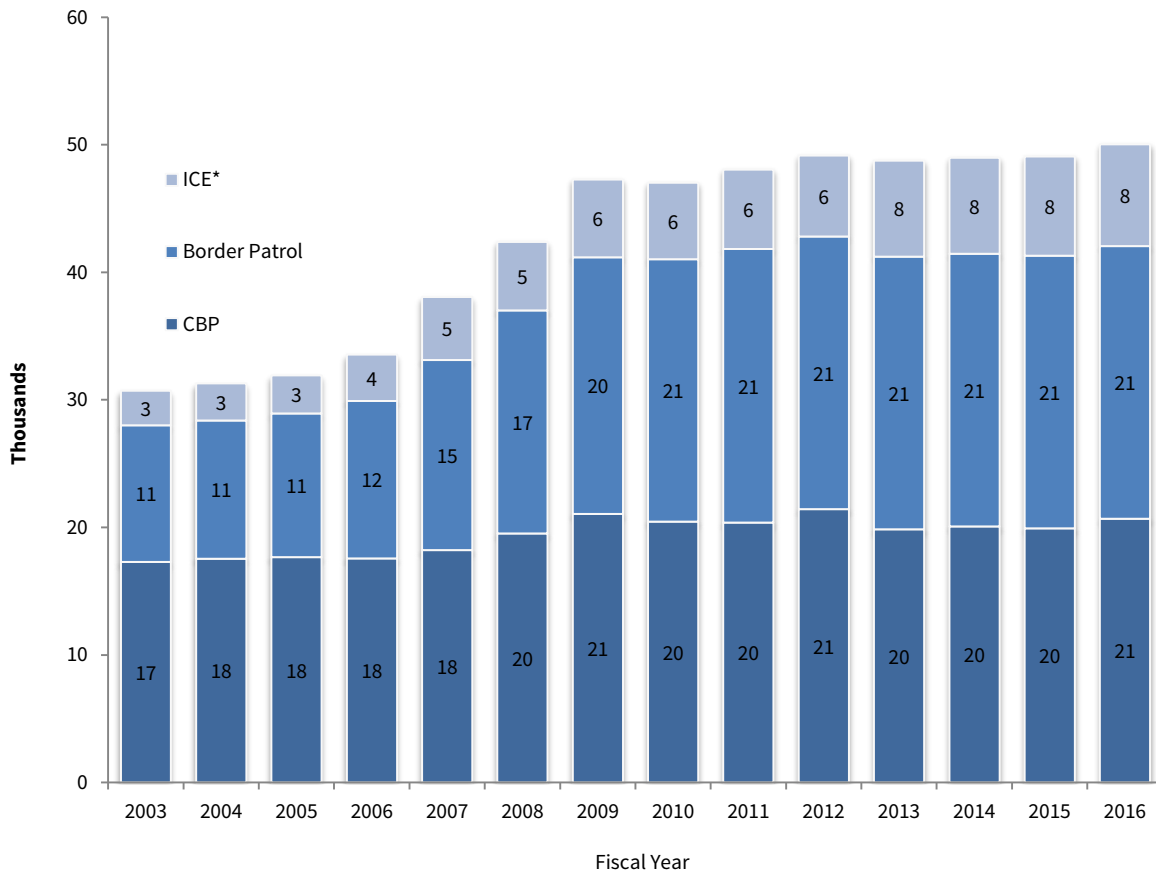


Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Budget-in-Brief, FY 2005-2017.

### Increases in Personnel

- Since 1993, the number of U.S. Border Patrol agents nearly doubled from 10,717 to a congressionally mandated 21,370 in FY 2016 (Figure 3).<sup>14</sup>
- The number of CBP officers staffing ports of entry (POEs) grew from 17,279 in FY 2003 to 21,423 in FY 2012 (Figure 3).<sup>15</sup>
- The number of ICE agents devoted to Enforcement and Removal Operations increased from 2,710 in FY 2003 to 7,995 in FY 2016 (Figure 3).<sup>16</sup>

Figure 3: CBP Officers, Border Patrol Agents, and ICE Agents, FY 2003-2016



Source: See endnotes 11, 12, and 13.  
\* Includes only ERO Officers.

The federal government has already met the border security benchmarks laid down in earlier Senate immigration reform bills.

- As the American Immigration Lawyers Association pointed out in a [January 2013 analysis](#), the “benchmarks” for border security specified in the bipartisan 2006, 2007, and 2010 immigration-reform legislative packages in the Senate have been largely met.<sup>17</sup>
- The requirements in those Senate bills for more border enforcement personnel, border fencing, surveillance technology, unmanned aerial vehicles, and detention beds have been fulfilled and in many ways surpassed.<sup>18</sup> As the Homeland Security Advisory Panel noted in 2016, ICE detention rose from the normal 34,000 beds to 41,000—an [all-time high](#).<sup>19</sup>

Border security depends on the smart and efficient use of available resources. At the same, border enforcement cannot and should not be done in isolation. Instead, it must be examined in the larger context of reforms needed for the entire immigration system.

## Endnotes

1. See American Immigration Council, *Giving the Facts a Fighting Chance: Addressing Common Questions on Immigration* (Washington, DC: December 2015), 16, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/addressing-common-questions-immigration>; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Budget-in-Brief*, FY 2017, 17, <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/fy-2017-budget-brief>.
2. See American Immigration Council, *Giving the Facts a Fighting Chance: Addressing Common Questions on Immigration* (Washington, DC: December 2015), 18, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/addressing-common-questions-immigration>.
3. U.S. Government Accountability Office, "U.S. Customs and Border Protection: Review of the Staffing Analysis Report under the Border Patrol Agent Reform Act of 2014," May 2016, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/680/677475.pdf>.
4. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Congressional Budget Justification", FY 2016, <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/FY%202017%20Congressional%20Budget%20Justification%20-%20Volume%201.pdf>.
5. Julia Preston, "Homeland Security Cancels 'Virtual Fence' After \$1 Billion is Spent," *New York Times*, January 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/15/us/politics/15fence.html>.
6. Doris Meissner, Donald M. Kerwin, Muzaffar Chishti, and Claire Bergeron, *Immigration Enforcement in the United States: The Rise of Formidable Machinery*, Migration Policy Institute, January 2013, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigration-enforcement-united-states-rise-formidable-machinery>.
7. United States Border Patrol, Southwest Border Sectors, <https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2016-Oct/BP%20Southwest%20Border%20Sector%20Deaths%20FY1998%20-%20FY2016.pdf>.
8. Bipartisan Policy Center, "Measuring the Metrics: Grading the Government on Immigration Enforcement," February 2015, <http://bipartisanpolicy.org/library/measuring-the-metrics-grading-the-government-on-immigration-enforcement/>.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Department Management and Operations, Analysis and Operations, Office of the Inspector General, U.S. Customs and Border Protection," *Congressional Budget Justification FY 2017-Volume I*, 880, [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/FY 2017 Congressional Budget Justification - Volume 1 1.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/FY%2017%20Congressional%20Budget%20Justification%20-%20Volume%201.pdf).
12. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Budget-in-Brief*, FY 2005-2017, <https://www.dhs.gov/dhs-budget>.
13. Ibid.
14. U.S. Government Accountability Office, "U.S. Customs and Border Protection: Review of the Staffing Analysis Report under the Border Patrol Agent Reform Act of 2014," May 2016, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/680/677475.pdf>.
15. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Congressional Budget Justification*, FY 2003 and 2012, <https://www.dhs.gov/dhs-budget>.
16. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Congressional Budget Justification*, FY 2003-2016, <https://www.dhs.gov/dhs-budget>.
17. Greg Chen and Su Kim, *Border Security: Moving Beyond Past Benchmarks* (Washington, DC: American Immigration Lawyers Association, January 2013), <http://www.aila.org/content/default.aspx?bc=25667|43061>.
18. Ibid.
19. Homeland Security Advisory Council, "Report of the Subcommittee on Privatized Immigration Detention Facilities," *Department of Homeland Security*, December 1, 2016, <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/DHS%20HSAC%20PIDF%20Final%20Report.pdf>; National Immigrant Justice Center, "Immigration Detention Bed Quota Timeline," January 2017, [https://immigrantjustice.org/sites/default/files/content-type/commentary-item/documents/2017-01/Immigration%20Detention%20Bed%20Quota%20Timeline%202017\\_01\\_05.pdf](https://immigrantjustice.org/sites/default/files/content-type/commentary-item/documents/2017-01/Immigration%20Detention%20Bed%20Quota%20Timeline%202017_01_05.pdf).