

Cruelty toward immigrants is bipartisan

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Recent video footage reveals that U.S. Border Patrol officers in Arizona vandalized water jugs and humanitarian supplies on the U.S.-Mexico border. This state-sponsored violence results in the death of unknown numbers of desperate immigrants seeking opportunity in the United States. U.S. Customs and Border Patrol stated that they do not condone or support these actions, but the agency should be held responsible for its role in interfering with humanitarian aid.

These actions undermine the work of members of civil society who attempt to prevent immigrant deaths by leaving water for the thirst-stricken. Arizona-based advocacy groups No More Deaths and La Coalición de Derechos Humanos published a report revealing the destruction of more than 3,500 gallons of water intended for border crossers. The report analyzed a 64-month period and found pervasive vandalism and destruction of humanitarian aid within an 800-square-mile desert corridor in Arizona. If nobody is held accountable for this sinister practice, the value of liberal-democratic institutions will be further compromised.

According to U.S. Customs and Border Patrol's statistics, there were more than 7,000 border deaths between 1998 and the end of 2017. However, scavenging animals disperse human remains across the rugged terrain, making it impossible to determine reliable statistics.

Measuring rates of vandalism at water drop sites and comparing who may access the land, their findings indicate that "there is no statistically significant difference in vandalism according to land jurisdiction. . . . Border Patrol is the only group that has regular access to and is consistently present in all three land jurisdictions." The report does not claim that U.S. Customs and Border Patrol is responsible for all of the vandalism, however it concludes that the only actors with "sufficiently large and consistent presence" within these lands are CBP officers.

Additionally, the report attempts to assess how much of the vandalism can be attributed to hunters. Its findings indicate that there is a vandalism-event rate of 9.3 percent during hunting season. However, during the offseason, it found a vandalism-event rate of 6.6 percent. This rate of 6.6 percent indicates that hunters are not responsible for the majority of vandalism at the water drop sites.

As shocking as this conduct may seem, it is no accident that immigrants find themselves crossing the most remote and harsh areas of the borderlands. Due to Clinton-era policies known as Southwest Border Strategy, enforcement along the border shifted to focus on the areas with the most unauthorized entries, forcing immigrants to cross through hostile areas of the Sonoran

Desert, where temperatures reach highs of 118 degrees. Cruelty toward immigrants has long been a bipartisan endeavor.

Alex Nowrasteh of the libertarian Cato Institute recently published a report titled, “Border Patrol Termination Rates: Discipline and Performance Problems Signal Need for Reform.” His findings reveal that between 2006 and 2016, and with the exception of 2011, Customs and Border Patrol “agents were more likely to be terminated for discipline and performance” than all other federal law enforcement agencies.

While this may seem like the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol does a good job at disciplining bad apples, the reality is that the internal affairs agency is incredibly small. In 2015, the ratio of internal affairs investigators to law enforcement officers was 271 to 1. By comparison, the New York Police Department has an internal affairs investigator-to-officer ratio of 65 to 1. Customs and Border Patrol is the nation’s largest police force, and the ratio of investigators to officers should be at least the same as NYPD.

This type of hostility by law enforcement demonstrates that hate has become institutionalized. Let this serve as a reminder that borders kill people. This is not a partisan problem. This is an American problem.