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Border Patrol has caught 127 illegal immigrants on FBI terror watchlist in fiscal 2023

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Border Patrol agents on the Canadian and Mexican borders have caught 127 noncitizens listed on the FBI's terror watchlist who tried to enter the United States illegally since the start of fiscal 2023, according to newly released federal data.

Numbers published by U.S. Customs and Border Protection on Tuesday showed terror watchlist apprehensions between the eight months of October 2022 and May 2023 were higher than last year's 98 arrests over 12 months, which until now was the highest level in at least the last four years when comparable data are available.

The 98 in 2022 and 127 thus far this year represent major spikes from zero in 2019 when the U.S. border faced a smaller-scale humanitarian and national security crisis.

The nearly two dozen people stopped in May alone were among more than 170,000 people arrested by Border Patrol for entering the country illegally by going around the ports of entry.

CBP does not disclose the nationalities of immigrants who were a match for the terror watchlist, and the FBI database includes known and suspected terrorists, which can include family members or affiliates of such people who are not themselves involved in terrorism.

Last August, the *Washington Examiner* obtained unpublished data from the Department of Homeland Security that showed how the government internally tracked where immigrants with terror ties had traveled from.

That data revealed that in the first six months of 2022, 25 of the 27 known or suspected terrorists arrested by Border Patrol were citizens of Colombia, not countries in the Eastern Hemisphere, where terrorist groups al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and others are based.

Immigration analyst Alex Nowrasteh of the Cato Institute in Washington noted at the time that some Colombians on the watchlist might not be true terror threats.

“It’s ... possible that the individual Colombians apprehended were affiliated with FARC or the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia, which have since been delisted as Foreign Terrorist Organizations by the State Department, but their individual names are still in the TSDS and haven’t been purged,” Nowrasteh said.

The State Department lists two Colombian groups as foreign terrorist organizations: the Segunda Marquetalia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army, or FARC-EP.

The spike in the number of terrorist-related arrests over the past two years coincides with a dramatic demographic change in immigrants trying to enter the U.S. by way of the southern border.

CBP data going back to 2007 show that Mexicans made up 90% of all arrests that year. By 2019, immigrants from the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras made up more than 70% of all arrests. In 2021, immigrants from countries outside Mexico and the Northern Triangle made up 1.1 million of the total 3.4 million apprehensions, or 32%, according to CBP data.

At the air, sea, and land ports of entry nationwide, 337 noncitizens who sought admission in 2023 so far were determined to be on the FBI list — far higher than 127 by Border Patrol.

FBI Director Christopher Wray testified before the Senate in August 2022 that although there was no "imminent threat from a foreign terrorist organization on the border at the moment," terrorists were looking for any vulnerability to "exploit."

Up to half of Border Patrol agents were pulled from the field to process and transport the high volume of illegal immigrants crossing the border over the past two years, leaving holes in the border that immigrants have exploited to enter the U.S. without getting caught.