

# Armed Texas citizens policing the police

By Carol Christian | **January 6, 2015** | Updated: January 7, 2015 7:40am

- <http://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/texas/article/Armed-Texas-citizens-policing-the-police-5997082.php#photo-7353683>
- 69 photos <http://www.chron.com/news/local/article/Photos-show-border-militias-moving-across-Texas-5647487.php>



Photo By Photos by Bobby Scheidemann for VICE

The Huey P. Newton Gun Club marches on downtown Dallas, October 2014.

For the Dallas New Black Panthers, marching against police violence is nothing new.

But officers' fatal shootings last year of unarmed black men in Missouri, New York and Ohio gave the Dallas group's leaders a new rallying cry, according to [VICE](#) magazine.

Meanwhile, in suburban Arlington, a group of white police watchers carrying guns has been following and filming police officers who have done nothing in response, according to [Atlanta Black Star](#).

Although Arlington police might see the cop-watchers as an annoyance, they don't seem to be afraid of a "group of guys" (who happen to be white) bothering the cops, Atlanta Black Star said.

This is not the history of the Black Panthers, who aroused fear among police officers 40 years ago when they roamed neighborhoods carrying weapons, Atlanta Black Star noted.

In August, the Dallas New Black Panthers formed the Huey P. Newton Gun Club as an umbrella organization for five smaller black or brown groups, wrote Aaron Lake Smith in the VICE article, "[The Revolutionary Gun Clubs Patrolling the Black Neighborhoods of Dallas](#)."

Gun club co-founders Charles Goodson and Darren X, national field marshal of the New Black Panther party, have been working together for a decade, Smith wrote.

"We accept all oppressed people of color with weapons," Darren X told the author. "The complete agenda involves going into our communities and educating our people on federal, state and local gun laws. We want to stop fratricide, genocide — all the 'cides.' "

In August, after police fatally shot Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., and Eric Garner in Staten Island, N.Y., the Huey P. Newton Gun Club staged its first armed march in Dixon Circle, a predominantly black Dallas neighborhood where police killed James Harper, an unarmed black man, in 2012, according to the article.

Since that march, the group's membership has grown and donations have "poured" in, although another march in October drew only a dozen participants, eight of whom had weapons, the article said.

After the October march, the group delivered a Dallas Communities Organizing for Change report on police violence to the U.S. Attorney's Office downtown, according to VICE.

## Anti-illegal immigration groups resurge on border

By [Lomi Kriel](#) January 5, 2015 Updated: January 5, 2015 6:18pm

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Photos showing dozens of members of the militia groups on the U.S.-Mexico border carrying semi-automatic rifles and wearing masks, camouflage and tactical gear provide one of the first glimpses into the group's activities on the border.

Michael Vickers has been on what he likes to call the front lines in the battle against illegal immigration for more than a decade, finding dead bodies of migrants on his South Texas ranch.

Vickers and about 300 volunteers, many from Houston, patrol Brooks County's brushy mesquite each month to hunt out immigrants here illegally and report them to U.S. Border Patrol.

Just 70 miles from the Mexico border, the area has been a busy crossing for migrants. And it's now attracting renewed attention after President Barack Obama announced his sweeping executive action for immigrants in November. Since then, Vickers said he's seen an uptick in people wanting to join Texas Border Volunteers, which he founded in 2005.

"Everybody's frustrated. It's just insane to do what he's proposing," the 65-year-old veterinarian said. "All that's going to do is create more traffic, more illegal smuggling, more dead bodies in Brooks County. We have absolutely nothing to gain and everything to lose."

Obama's changes would provide work permits to 4.7 million immigrants who've been here illegally for years and strengthen border security, though few details have been released as to how. But federal officials have said recent border-crossers are now their highest priority.

Still, Vickers isn't alone in worrying about the executive order's impact. Powerful conservative national grass-roots groups like NumbersUSA and Heritage Action are rallying supporters to pressure Congress. Others are joining militia groups like the one Vickers leads or myriad others with names like the Oathkeepers and American Patriots *which sprung up or resurged* after an influx of Central American children on the

Southwest border this summer. In all, conservative groups expect the flurry of anti-immigration activity to escalate this year as lawmakers return.

"People are discouraged and disgusted," said Larry Korkmas, the tea party-aligned president of the Houston-based Texans for Immigration Reduction and Enforcement. "There has been self-mobilization all over."

Maria Espinoza, director of the Remembrance Project, a Houston-based nonprofit based focused on honoring Americans who've been killed by immigrants here illegally, said her members are closely monitoring how Congress acts.

"Our families are asking for the bare minimum here, lawfulness," she said, calling Obama's action illegal. Espinoza, the daughter of a Mexican immigrant who came here on a work visa in the 1950s, said her group's membership has grown across the nation because there's a need.

"Every time an American is killed by someone who wasn't supposed to be here in the first place, that's personal," she said.

Unlike previous high-profile immigration clashes focused on California and Arizona, *Texas now is the battle's center stage*

"Arizona pretty much replaced California as the hot spot for several years but Texas is so much bigger and once Texas takes on something big it just kind of takes over the room," said Roy H. Beck, who heads NumbersUSA, an advocacy group focused on reducing immigration. "I'd say on this immigration fight that's happening."

It's a marked shift for the state, as for decades Texas Republicans were GOP outliers on immigration, allowing, for instance, in-state public college tuition for youth here illegally, approved by Gov. Rick Perry.

"Texas has always been happy with being a border state, its mixed cultures," Beck said. "The Texas way of dealing with its Mexican-American population has always been different. It's the Texas exceptionalism."

The major immigration crisis unfolded first in California, which passed Proposition 187, a controversial 1994 ballot measure limiting social services to immigrants here illegally. It was *later found unconstitutional*. The California Minutemen Project exploded into a nationwide movement with hundreds of militia groups patrolling the Arizona border in 2005. They helped stymie a GOP effort at immigration reform attempted under then-President George W. Bush.

Since then Arizona has taken the lead in pushing for tough anti-immigration laws, including one in 2010 requiring police to determine someone's immigration status if there's "reasonable suspicion" they're here illegally.

But the anti-illegal immigrant movement largely faded from public view after Mitt Romney lost his 2012 presidential bid. The number of armed border patrols dwindled from more than 300 at its peak in 2010 to just more than 30 in 2013, said Mark Potok, a senior fellow at the Southern Poverty Law Center, an Alabama-based civil rights organization monitoring hate groups.

Intense infighting between the groups split them, Potok said. Criminal scandals, most notably the 2011 murder conviction in Arizona of vigilante Shawna Forde for shooting and killing a 29-year-old Hispanic man and his 9-year-old daughter, shamed the movement. Many conservative state legislatures adopted policies for which the groups had advocated.

"It looked like the politicians were doing the work these groups wanted and nothing much happened really until the unaccompanied children crisis," Potok said.

The arrival of more than 63,000 Central American children in South Texas last year thrust immigration into the spotlight, making it a major political crisis. About 17 militia "teams" ***are active on the Texas border***, more than in any other state, according to the website Patriot Information Hotline, which helps recruit and organize groups. Many formed human chains blocking immigrants at the border. Two militia members were arrested for having explosives and possessing firearms as felons. And in July, Chris Davis of Von Ormy, a 37-year-old commander of the militia group "Operation Secure Our Border: Laredo Sector," ***said in a since-deleted Youtube video***, "You see an illegal. You point your gun dead at him, right between his eyes, and you say, 'Get back across the border or you will be shot.'"

Meanwhile Texas Republicans' stance on immigration has moved right. In the last eight years, Perry, a likely 2016 presidential contender, has spent more than \$800 million on beefed-up border security, touting it as an example of his leadership. Gov.-elect Greg Abbott is leading the charge to unravel Obama's executive action by challenging its legal authority. New Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick has pledged border security as his top priority, and has warned immigrants "are bringing Third World diseases with them." In all, the new state Legislature, convening in January, is more conservative on immigration than it has ever been.

Serious activism trying to undo Obama's executive action will pick up in January, said Ira Mehlman, spokesman for the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a Washington D.C.-based organization pushing for limited immigration.

"People are still coming to grips with the scope of the amnesty," he said. "But generally our members aren't taking to the streets for mass rallies, that's something for the other side. Our people are showing up at townhall meetings, members' offices, they're phoning, they're emailing."

It's unclear how effective these groups can be. A poll released this month by the Pew Research Center and USA Today found the public is essentially equally divided over executive action. Fifty percent disapprove and 46 percent approve.

And if anyone could have stopped executive action, they would have already done so, said Frank Sharry, executive director of America's Voice, a national immigration reform group.

"They have no viable strategy to stop it," he said. "They've been exposed as a weakened force that just makes a lot of noise."

At the same time, Border Patrol figures show that in the past two months apprehensions of immigrants crossing the southwest border illegally fell 24 percent to 51,129 compared to the same period last year. In all, immigrant apprehensions - considered the best gauge for how many are crossing illegally - are at their lowest levels since the 1970s, according to the Department of Homeland Security.

Nevertheless in Brooks County, Vickers said his group recently wrapped up a four-day mission helping catch about 20 migrants a night, five times more than they saw throughout the fall.

"Our traffic has quadrupled in just a few weeks," he said. "This executive action is just going to be another magnet."

## **Photos show border militias moving across Texas**



Photo By provided to the San Antonio Express-News

Photos showing dozens of members of the militia groups on the U.S.-Mexico border carrying semi-automatic rifles and wearing masks, camouflage and tactical gear provide one of the first glimpses into the group's activities on the border.

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SAN ANTONIO — Militia groups along the Texas-Mexico border have grown to more than 10 active "teams" from El Paso to the Rio Grande Valley, despite warnings from U.S. Customs and Border Protection and state lawmakers.

More than 30 photos obtained by the San Antonio Express-News show dozens of members carrying semi-automatic rifles and wearing masks, camouflage and tactical gear, providing a first glimpse of the militias.

The armed individuals are seen posing at campsites, walking along the Rio Grande while speaking with Border Patrol agents, and pointing rifles and pistols out of frame.

A spokesperson for the group provided the photos under the condition that members' faces be blurred because of fear of being identified by "cartel and gang members."

CBP said [this month](#) that it does not "endorse or support any private group or organization from taking matters into their own hands, as it could have disastrous personal and public safety consequences."

One of the photos shows a Border Patrol agent providing directions to a vehicle of armed militia members. The agency did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Gov. Rick Perry, who last week [ordered](#) 1,000 Texas National Guard members to the border, declined to comment through a spokesman specifically on whether he supports the militia groups but said the governor is "leading to secure the border."

State Sen. Leticia Van de Putte, D-San Antonio, denounced the groups in a statement, saying "pointing guns at children solves nothing.

"Local law enforcement and federal Border Patrol agents have been clear. The presence of these outside independent militia groups does nothing to secure the border; it only creates an unsafe situation for law enforcement officials that are protecting our communities. Unfortunately, the vile rhetoric of my opponent inspires misguided efforts," said Van de Putte, who is running against state Sen. Dan Patrick, R-Houston, for lieutenant governor.

In a statement released Monday, the Texas Democratic Party called on Patrick and Attorney General Greg Abbott, the Republican nominee for governor, to denounce the "armed vigilantes."

Patrick and Abbott did not return requests for comment Monday.

The groups, with members of groups including Oathkeepers, Three Percenters and Patriots, began recruiting and organizing more than a month ago as national media outlets began focusing on the growing number of Central American immigrants illegally crossing the border, including [more than 50,000 unaccompanied minors](#).

Barbie Rogers, founder of the Patriots Information Hotline, which is helping organize and recruit for the militia groups, said there are 10 "operations on the ground along the Texas border" from El Paso to Laredo to the Valley. Many of the groups are stationed on ranch land with permission from the owners, she said.

In an [interview](#) with the Express-News last month, Chris Davis, commander of the militia's Operation Secure Our Border: Laredo Sector, who is seen in some of the photos, said members would secure the border in a "legal and lawful manner."

In 21-minute YouTube video that has since been deleted, Davis said: "How? You see an illegal. You point your gun dead at him, right between his eyes, and you say, 'Get back across the border or you will be shot.'"

Davis, a 37-year-old truck driver from Von Ormy, was discharged from the Army in 2001 "under other than honorable conditions in lieu of trial by court-martial," according to a [summary of his military service](#) obtained by the Express-News.

The Texas militia's operation names, according to Rogers, are: Bolinas Border Patrol, Central Valley Militia, Independent Citizens Militia, Alpha Team, Bravo Team, FOB Harmony, Operation Secure Our Border: Laredo Sector, O'Shanessy's Team, the 77's and Camp Geronimo.

Rogers called on Perry to send 5,000 more National Guard members to the border and said that "if cost is an issue" then "call the militia. They will come if you call them."