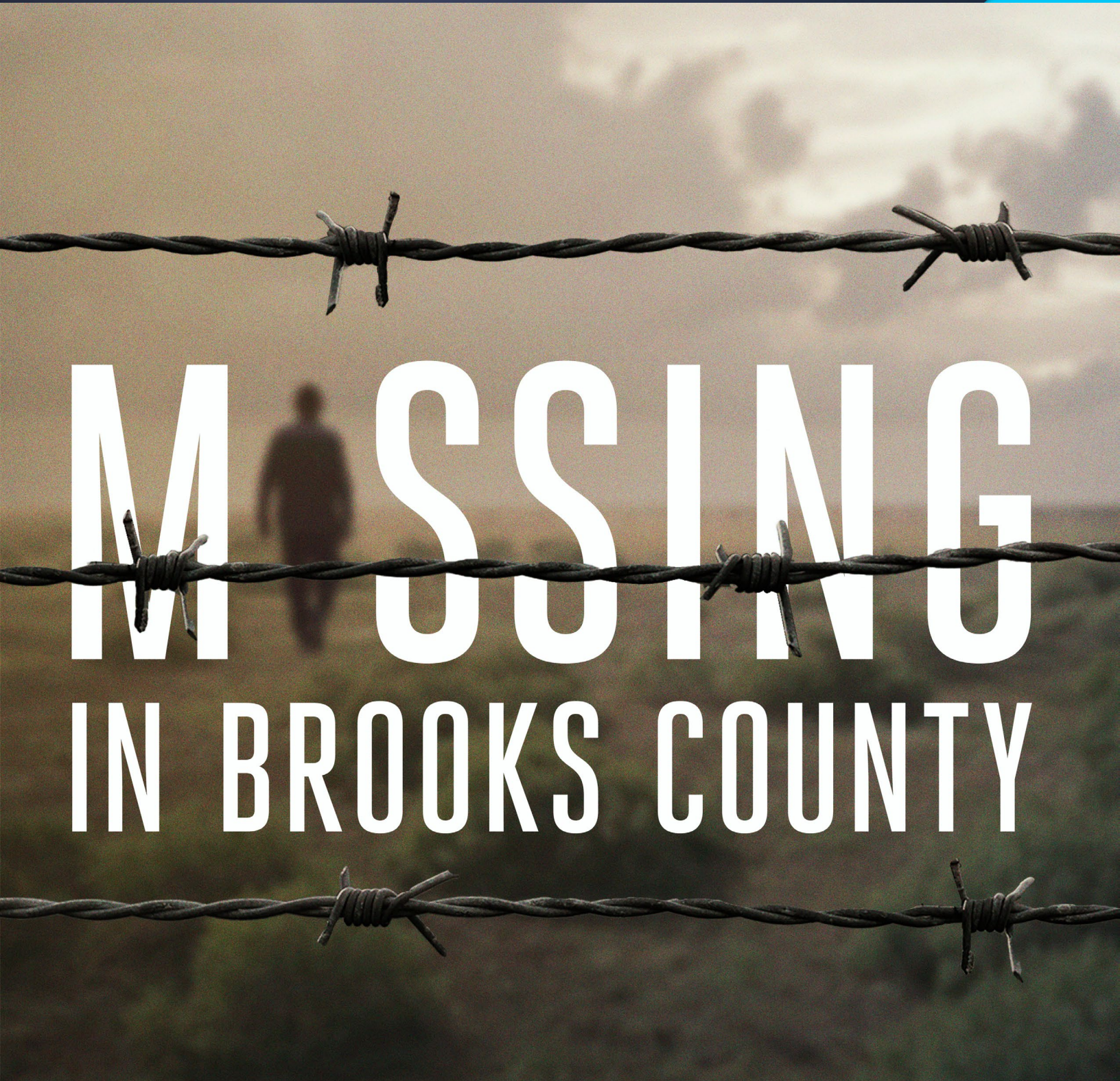




# MISSING IN BROOKS COUNTY

**DISCUSSION GUIDE**

# Table of Contents

|                                            |           |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Using This Guide</b>                    | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>About the Film</b>                      | <b>4</b>  |
| Content Advisory                           | 4         |
| How to Watch the Film                      | 4         |
| <b>About Indie Lens Pop-Up</b>             | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>From the Filmmakers</b>                 | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>Glossary</b>                            | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>Background Information</b>              | <b>8</b>  |
| Brief History of U.S. Immigration Policies | 8         |
| U.S. Border Patrol Checkpoints             | 9         |
| Finding the Missing                        | 10        |
| Dispelling Myths about Immigrants          | 10        |
| <b>Discussing the Film</b>                 | <b>12</b> |
| Framing the Conversation                   | 12        |
| Discussion Questions                       | 13        |
| <b>Potential Partners</b>                  | <b>14</b> |
| <b>Engagement Ideas</b>                    | <b>15</b> |
| <b>Additional Resources</b>                | <b>16</b> |
| Organizations                              | 16        |
| More Articles, Books, & Films              | 17        |
| <b>Credits</b>                             | <b>18</b> |

# USING THIS GUIDE



*Missing in Brooks County* tells the human story of immigration policies at the U.S. southern border. This guide is designed to help organizations and individuals host an event that brings together people affected by immigration policies to engage in a conversation about the film and its topics. It provides you with background information, discussion questions, and recommended engagement activities that will help viewers better understand *Missing in Brooks County*. Families and advocates, humanitarian and faith-based organizations, college students and professors, and elected leaders and public officials are all potential participants and audiences.

When planning your event, consider including the following actions and goals:

- Educate audiences about the humanitarian crisis that migrants and their families are facing not just in Brooks County, Texas, but across the United States, wherever the U.S. Border Patrol operates.
- Invite humanitarian leaders and immigration advocates to share their work to improve conditions and change policies for migrants and their families.
- Facilitate inclusive, fact-based, and humane discussions about immigration policies and proposals among elected officials, immigrant advocates and families, and community members.
- Encourage viewers to get involved in the work to protect human life and honor those who have been lost while attempting to migrate to the United States.

# ABOUT THE FILM



Eddie Canales runs the South Texas Human Rights Center, but the messages left by strangers on Eddie's phone speak more to his unofficial role as a private detective. In a rural community where more migrants go missing than anywhere else in the United States, families of lost loved ones call for help.

Omar and Michelle reach out for help finding Omar's brother Homero Román, a longtime but undocumented U.S. resident who was deported to Mexico after a traffic stop at age 27. Struggling to adjust in the unfamiliar country of his birth, Homero eventually tried to return to his true home of two decades in the United States. En route, he disappeared in Brooks County.

When another man, Juan Maceda, goes missing, his family also turns to Eddie, describing a familiar predicament in Mexico—a lifelong struggle against violence, poverty, and gang affiliation that compels migrants like Juan to cross the border. Follow Eddie as he engages with Border Patrol agents to solve disappearances and confront the agonizing facts of life and death in a South Texas town many miles north of the border.

## Content Advisory

This program contains content that may be upsetting for viewers, including images of deceased people and stories of traumatic death and loss. Viewer discretion is advised.

## How to Watch the Film

Indie Lens Pop-Up Screenings:

**January 1–February 14, 2022**

Independent Lens Broadcast Premiere ([check local listings](#)):

**Monday, January 31, 2022**

Stream online at [video.pbs.org](https://video.pbs.org):

**January 31–March 1, 2022**

# ABOUT INDIE LENS POP-UP



Indie Lens Pop-Up is a neighborhood series that brings people together for in-person and virtual film screenings and community-driven conversations. Featuring documentaries seen on PBS's *Independent Lens*, Indie Lens Pop-Up draws local residents, leaders, and organizations together to discuss what matters most, from newsworthy topics and social issues to family and community relationships. Make friends, share stories, and join the conversation at an Indie Lens Pop-Up screening: [pbs.org/indielenspopup](https://pbs.org/indielenspopup).

# FROM THE FILMMAKERS



**Jeff Bemiss, Co-Director/Producer**



**Lisa Molomot, Co-Director/Producer**



**Jacob Bricca, Editor/Producer**

*Missing in Brooks County* began as the story of a forensic scientist who was trying to identify migrants who had been buried anonymously in Brooks County, Texas. But each time we returned to South Texas, the story got bigger as we began to realize the complexity and severity of the situation. We met migrants, sheriffs, and activists. Ranchers, rangers, and vigilantes. Consuls, judges, and undertakers. Prior to making this film, we, Jeff and Lisa, held superficial impressions of Border Patrol agents, law enforcement personnel, Texas ranchers, and others. These have been obliterated by making this film, which attempts to convey some of the complexity of the situation we encountered.

Border Patrol agents operate a massive immigration checkpoint deliberately situated in the middle of a treacherous desert; they also save lives of migrants who attempt to circumvent it. Local ranchers are divided over what to do about the situation. Migrants themselves often have little grasp of the true dangers of the journey they have chosen to undertake, and they are at the mercy of human smugglers, known as “coyotes,” who leave the migrants to die if they cannot keep up over the three-to four-day trek.

To document this complexity, *cinéma vérité* footage is the foundation of *Missing in Brooks County*, drawn from the many moments of discovery and revelation that we witnessed. We documented the missing as they were reported, rescued, recovered, and/or exhumed. We rode with sheriff deputies and Border Patrol agents and with ranchers and vigilantes. We filmed men and

women wading across the Rio Grande at night, and we filmed men and women as they surrendered to Brooks County law enforcement, dehydrated and exhausted. We filmed the emotional testimony of a border crosser, his face shielded, as he described the moment he realized that the teenage boy he was carrying—one of the missing individuals portrayed in the film—was no longer alive.

After meeting with families of the missing, it became clear to us that these families had to be at the center of the story, even as we continued to insist on also building a portrait of everyday life in Falfurrias, Texas. As rendered through the stories of Homero Román and Juan Maceda, our vision for *Missing in Brooks County* is an immersive experience of an American town that has been caught in the middle of a humanitarian disaster created by the militarization of the United States–Mexico border and immigration policies of multiple administrations based on Prevention Through Deterrence, a set of policies aimed at deterring illegal border crossings from Mexico into the United States. And just as we have learned so much in making this film, we hope viewers will look at immigration in a new way and begin to include the deceased and the missing in the debate.

—Jeff Bemiss, Lisa Molomot, and Jacob Bricca

# GLOSSARY

- **Asylum seeker** – A person fleeing persecution in their home country or multiple countries based on a protected ground like race, religion, gender, or political opinion who seeks refuge in another country. (Asylum seekers differ from refugees. The primary difference between refugees and asylum seekers is that asylum seekers are seeking to be categorized as refugees – refugees have “achieved” the status of refugee, and as such, they have international protection. Please see the definition for refugees below.)
- **Border Patrol** – The federal law enforcement arm of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP).
- **Coyote** – A person who smuggles humans across a border.
- **DACA** – Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, a program launched in 2012 by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to use its discretion not to deport noncitizens aged 30 or younger who entered the United States before the age of 16, have resided in the United States continuously since June 15, 2007, and meet other eligibility requirements.
- **Department of Homeland Security (DHS)** – Created in 2003 to protect the United States following the 9/11 attacks. DHS oversees immigration through multiple agencies, including Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the CBP.
- **Deportation/removal** – Expulsion of a noncitizen from the United States. Once deported/removed, a noncitizen is barred from applying to return for five, 10, or 20 years or permanently.
- **Detention** – The incarceration of people while they wait for a decision on their immigration status, for example, asylum seekers waiting to hear about approval of their refugee claim.
- **Deterrence** – Describes a set of policy decisions to discourage unauthorized immigration by making it dangerous and undesirable. Detention, family separation, and funneling immigrants into dangerous conditions have all been used as deterrents by the United States in multiple administrations.
- **Green card** – A legal document that allows an immigrant, including a refugee or asylum seeker, to permanently reside in the United States. Green card holders have some of the same rights and responsibilities that citizens have, but may not vote in federal elections and may not run for public office at the federal level. Also, they can be deported for certain offenses. After five years (or three years if the green card is the result of marriage), a green card holder can apply for citizenship.
- **Humanitarian** – A person or organization who works to promote human welfare and aid people in need.
- **Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)** – The component within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security that enforces many immigration laws and conducts the apprehension, detention, and deportation of immigrants. ICE is distinct from the CBP and its enforcement arm, the Border Patrol, in that ICE's mandate is to enforce immigration laws in the interior of the country, whereas Border Patrol agents are tasked with stopping violations along the border.
- **Immigrant** – A person who comes to live in a country other than where they were born.
- **Migrant** – Someone who is in the process of relocating to a country other than where they were born.
- **Racism** – Discrimination directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized.
- **Refugees** – People who live or were living outside the United States and are fleeing armed conflicts and persecution based on one of five protected grounds—race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, and political opinion. Each year, a certain number of refugees abroad are screened by the U.S. State Department to enter the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. (Refugees differ from asylum seekers. Please see the definition for asylum seekers above.)
- **Rescue beacons** – Emergency transmission towers located throughout the southwestern United States, primarily in areas like the Sonoran Desert, where the environmental conditions are extremely harsh. The towers, which are 25 to 35 feet tall, are powered through externally mounted solar panels. Each tower has a mounted box with a red button that migrants can push to send a signal for emergency assistance. The signal automatically provides the location. To make the towers easy to spot, each has a high-visibility strobe light that blinks every 10 seconds as well as triangular pieces of polished stainless steel that reflect sunlight during the day. Placards on the beacons contain messages in multiple languages.
- **Sanctuary city** – A city that chooses not to assist ICE in detaining and deporting immigrants within its limits. Most such cities do still turn over those who have committed serious crimes. There are also sanctuary counties and sanctuary states.
- **Undocumented or unauthorized** – The status of not having citizenship, a green card, a visa, or other authorization to live in a country. These terms are recommended by humanitarians as more neutral language in place of “illegal” or “alien,” which carry pejorative connotations.
- **Visa** – A legal document that says a person can stay in the United States temporarily for tourism, work, or education.
- **Xenophobia** – Dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries.

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION



You do not need to be an expert on immigration policy to have a conversation about the film. This background information provides some basic historical context and legal framework to help you understand the U.S. immigration system.

## Brief History of U.S. Immigration Policies

Immigration in the United States has a fraught history intertwined with legacies of racism and xenophobia. For much of U.S. history, immigrants from northern and Western Europe have enjoyed an open-border policy. People from other areas of the world have been treated differently. People of African descent were forced to relocate to the United States via the slave trade to be free agricultural labor. People of Asian descent, especially Chinese people, were allowed to immigrate to fill labor needs associated with building the transcontinental railroad but denied equal rights.

Modern-day California, Nevada, and Utah as well as parts of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Wyoming—a region known in the 19th century as the Western Territories—became part of the United States when Mexico ceded the Western Territories to the United States as part of the official end to the Mexican-American War. Needing to address the status of a large formerly Mexican population, the U.S. government began formalizing its naturalization laws to determine who would be considered citizens.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, fueled by rising anti-immigrant political sentiment worldwide, U.S. lawmakers enacted a number of new policies restricting immigration. The Chinese Exclusionary Act of 1882 suspended immigration from China for 10 years and declared people from China to be ineligible for immigration. The Immigration Act of 1891 focused on moving enforcement to federal borders, taking away states' rights to set immigration policy, looking at immigration from countries other than China, and more. The Immigration Act of 1924 (also known as the Johnson-Reed Act), which includes the Asian Exclusion Act and the National Origins Act, ultimately prevented immigration from Asia and set quotas on the number of immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere. In addition, the act authorized the formation of the U.S. Border Patrol under the Department of Labor, primarily to guard the Mexico–United States border.

During World War II, however, labor shortages in the United States prompted an executive order called the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement, thus launching the Bracero Program, which granted temporary work visas to laborers primarily from Mexico. The

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

program ended in 1964, and the United States escalated its efforts to deport undocumented people of Mexican descent under an official U.S. policy called Operation Wetback,<sup>1</sup> even including lawful residents and citizens in its deportation sweep. At the same time, the United States welcomed immigrants fleeing from the Cuban Revolution with permanent residency. In 1965, the United States eliminated national origin quotas, but established a national limit of 300,000 immigrants per year, which was increased to 700,000 in 1990 and is currently 675,000, and it continues to enforce per-country caps, which are criticized as discriminatory.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1980s and 1990s, as unauthorized immigration steadily increased, the United States passed a series of reforms, including the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which legalized 2.7 million undocumented immigrants.<sup>2</sup> It also formalized rules around hiring immigrants, including making it illegal to hire or recruit undocumented labor, and it increased the number of Border Patrol agents by 50 percent. Then Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1990, which extended protections to more groups and increased the limits on immigration.

But in 1993, the United States launched Operation Blockade. It placed hundreds of Border Patrol agents along the Rio Grande River to deter migration. Thousands died and hundreds of thousands were detained in incarceration facilities over the next decade.<sup>2</sup> Under the Clinton administration, the United States began Prevention Through Deterrence, a set of policies with the explicit goal of making immigration from Mexico to the United States so dangerous that migrants would choose not to come. Separating migrant children from families, as was done systematically under the Trump administration, is also referred to as a Prevention Through Deterrence policy. In effect, Prevention Through Deterrence created a second interior border in American cities through the use of checkpoints and other tactics, and in order to avoid the so-called interior borders, migrants were forced to travel through the most dangerous parts of the country.

After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, fears of terrorism and rising xenophobia reshaped immigration enforcement. The Department of Homeland Security was created under President George W. Bush to reorganize immigration enforcement. This resulted in the creation of ICE and in a massive increase in the number of Border Patrol agents, which by 2009 had exceeded 20,000.<sup>2</sup>

Over the past two decades, more migrants from Central America, especially Nicaragua and the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, have made the journey to the United States through Texas, the border crossing closest to Central America.<sup>3</sup> These countries have been devastated by environmental disasters, economic instability, and civil wars, in which the United States was involved in during the 1980s as well as by increasing violence and corruption stemming from organized crime and the drug trade. Many have arrived in the United States seeking asylum and reunification with family members who have previously immigrated.

In 2012, under President Barack Obama, the United States stopped deporting some undocumented immigrants who entered the country as children through DACA. During this same time period, however, the United States accelerated to record levels its deportation and detention of other undocumented immigrants, a trend that continues today and has been reinforced during the current pandemic by hundreds of thousands of expulsions in the name of public health.

## Source:

1. Deeds, Colin. United States Immigration History & Policy: [statemuseum.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/data/Immigration%20History%20and%20Policy%201000-2012\\_0.pdf](http://statemuseum.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/data/Immigration%20History%20and%20Policy%201000-2012_0.pdf)
2. [history.com/news/operation-wetback-eisenhower-1954-deportation](http://history.com/news/operation-wetback-eisenhower-1954-deportation)
3. [migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-immigrants-united-states](http://migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-immigrants-united-states)

## U.S. Border Patrol Checkpoints

According to news reports, the CBP, a component of the Department of Homeland Security, operates approximately 170 interior checkpoints throughout the country within the “100-mile zone,” that is, within 100 miles of a U.S. land or coastal border.<sup>1</sup> The CBP does not make public the actual number of interior checkpoints. Nearly two out of three Americans, or 200 million people, live within the 100-mile zone.<sup>1</sup> Many interior checkpoints are located in the deserts of southern border states such as Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California.

At interior checkpoints, Border Patrol agents stop vehicles for a “brief immigration inquiry,” that is, the agents ask a limited number of questions, without individualized suspicion, to verify the citizenship of the vehicles’ occupants, an action that would violate the Fourth Amendment if attempted elsewhere. Agents may also visually inspect the exterior of a vehicle. However, without probable cause, they do not have the authority to search inside a vehicle or hold up a traveler for an extended time, beyond what is reasonable for the brief immigration inquiry.

Within the 100-mile zone, the Border Patrol also uses “roving patrols,” which can pull over a vehicle if agents have reasonable suspicion of an immigration violation or a crime.<sup>2</sup> Although it is illegal for agents to use race or ethnicity as the sole justification for pulling over a vehicle, there has been significant debate over suspected and overt racial profiling on the part of Border Patrol agents.

To avoid detection, migrants walk through dangerous desert conditions in one of the hottest regions in the United States. And as global warming worsens, U.S. counties along the Mexico border could begin to see an annual average of 60 days with a heat index above 100 degrees Fahrenheit.<sup>3</sup> Every year, countless people run out of water and die of dehydration and exposure before rescue parties can find them.

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Because they perish in unpopulated areas and their remains are often consumed by wildlife, it is unclear how many people have died crossing the southern border over the last couple of decades. The U.S. Border Patrol has recovered approximately 8,000 deceased persons, but researchers believe this is barely an indicator of the true number of deaths.<sup>4</sup> *Missing in Brooks County* estimates the number of deaths at more than 20,000, and some experts consider even that number to be very conservative.

## Sources:

1. [aclu.org/other/constitution-100-mile-border-zone](https://aclu.org/other/constitution-100-mile-border-zone)
2. [acluz.org/sites/default/files/field\\_documents/aclu\\_border\\_rights.pdf](https://acluz.org/sites/default/files/field_documents/aclu_border_rights.pdf)
3. [hrw.org/news/2021/09/15/us-extreme-heat-should-prompt-new-border-approach](https://hrw.org/news/2021/09/15/us-extreme-heat-should-prompt-new-border-approach)
4. [cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2021-Aug/U.S.%20Border%20Patrol%20Fiscal%20Year%20Southwest%20Border%20Sector%20Deaths%20%28FY%201998%20-%20FY%202020%29%20%28508%29.pdf](https://cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2021-Aug/U.S.%20Border%20Patrol%20Fiscal%20Year%20Southwest%20Border%20Sector%20Deaths%20%28FY%201998%20-%20FY%202020%29%20%28508%29.pdf)

## Finding the Missing

When the Prevention Through Deterrence policy was implemented in 1994 as part of Operation Gatekeeper, the idea was to cause enough deaths to deter others from attempting clandestine border crossings, but instead, the number of crossings and deaths increased. Policymakers did not expect that, so they had not created a system for responding to those who went missing or died trying to cross through the desert brush. Local governments, universities, and nonprofit organizations—such as the South Texas Human Rights Center, the Colibrí Center for Human Rights, the Coalición de Derechos Humanos, Desert Angels, and No More Deaths—have stepped in to serve families searching for their loved ones. But while they look, families like Homero's are vulnerable to extortion by the human smugglers.

In Arizona, the U.S. Border Patrol launched the Missing Migrant Program, which included installing rescue signs labeled with GPS coordinates, mapping thousands of landmarks that can be referenced in 911 calls, and installing rescue beacons equipped with cameras.<sup>1</sup> The program has since expanded borderwide. However, the overall success rate of the Border Patrol's search and rescue efforts is remarkably low. For nearly two thirds of all distress calls that families and advocates referred to the Border Patrol, the agency did not conduct any confirmed searches or rescue mobilizations whatsoever.<sup>2</sup>

Texas, the state with the most migrant crossings, has only 13 county medical examiner offices (the state has 254 counties), yet much of the work of tracking migrants falls to county examiners, who say they are too overwhelmed to properly track migrants or to provide funeral services to give migrants the dignity in death that they deserve. Universities have had to fill in the gap, but they, too, are overworked and backlogged with cases. And in 2012, a mass grave with hundreds of unidentified migrants was discovered at Sacred Heart Cemetery in Brooks County, Texas, by Dr. Lori Baker, a forensic anthropologist at Baylor University.<sup>3</sup>

In late 2020, the U.S. Congress passed the Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains Act, which provides more funding to state and local governments, humanitarian organizations, forensics labs, and medical offices that have been doing the work to respond to cases of missing migrants. It also provides for the installation of up to 170 new rescue beacons along the border and requires the federal government to centralize data collection in order to better identify the missing and dead.<sup>4</sup>

## Sources:

1. [latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-07-25/why-border-patrol-is-doing-more-to-rescue-and-identify-missing-migrants](https://latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-07-25/why-border-patrol-is-doing-more-to-rescue-and-identify-missing-migrants)
2. [thedisappearedreport.org/uploads/8/3/5/1/83515082/left\\_to\\_die\\_-\\_english.pdf](https://thedisappearedreport.org/uploads/8/3/5/1/83515082/left_to_die_-_english.pdf)
3. [texasobserver.org/illegal-mass-graves-of-migrant-remains-found-in-south-texas](https://texasobserver.org/illegal-mass-graves-of-migrant-remains-found-in-south-texas)
4. [theintercept.com/2021/01/05/migrant-deaths-law](https://theintercept.com/2021/01/05/migrant-deaths-law)

## Dispelling Myths about Immigrants

Harmful myths about immigrants are rampant in American political culture. Even if the speaker means no harm, a myth can still feed anti-immigrant sentiment in ways that influence policies. It's important to be able to recognize myths and debunk them with facts so people can have informed discussions about immigration.

- **Myth #1:** Migrants can just immigrate here legally.

**Fact:** It's extremely difficult to immigrate to the United States from a foreign country. The maximum number of immigrants permitted annually is 675,000 (with some exceptions) and the United States has a cap for how many people can apply for an immigrant visa from each country.<sup>1</sup> Many immigrants have to wait decades for their turn to apply. Undocumented immigrants brought to the United States as children are not eligible to apply for permanent residence; some of them can apply for two-year permits through DACA. However, even that unusual policy has been a political football in recent years, and the rules are constantly changing.

- **Myth #2:** Immigrants take jobs from U.S. citizens.

**Fact:** Immigrants are more likely to be entrepreneurs who add jobs to the American economy. They are 30 percent more likely to have their own businesses than the overall U.S. population.<sup>1</sup> Immigrants are often underemployed because they face barriers to obtaining a job. Those that do secure work typically fill entry-level positions, which complement U.S.-born workers, who more often fill managerial roles. Immigrants are also more likely to be essential workers in vital industries, such as in agriculture, where immigrants make up 73 percent of agriculture workers.<sup>2</sup>

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION



- **Myth #3:** Immigrants are more likely to commit crimes.

**Fact:** Immigrant populations have lower crime rates than native-born citizens as measured by arrest records.<sup>3</sup> Foreign-born youth also have lower delinquency rates when compared with their peers.<sup>3</sup> Advocates argue that immigrants to the United States tend to come for work and opportunity, which they are less likely to jeopardize with criminal behavior. It is important to note that this data can be skewed by inequities in the criminal justice system and may not necessarily reflect on any social group.

- **Myth #4:** Undocumented immigrants do not pay taxes, but receive benefits.

**Fact:** Generally, immigrants tend to work more hours than the average American, which means they pay more taxes. Undocumented immigrants pay more than \$10 billion in taxes each year,<sup>4</sup> yet they face substantial barriers to accessing the American social safety net. Under federal law, immigrants are ineligible to receive many public benefits until they have been lawful permanent residents for at least five years.<sup>4</sup>

- **Myth #5:** Migrants are responsible for increases in COVID-19 infections.

**Fact:** Highly contagious variants and the high rate of unvaccinated Americans are responsible for increases in COVID-19 infections.<sup>5</sup> Data analysis shows that states with fewer public health requirements have the highest rates of COVID-19 regardless of their proximity to the border.<sup>5</sup> Yet, so far during the pandemic, under Title 42, the U.S. Border Patrol has expelled 750,000 people who have crossed into the country, even those seeking asylum. Title 42 is a public health order first put in effect by former President Donald Trump and now maintained by the Biden administration.<sup>5</sup>

#### Sources:

1. [immigrantslist.org/ten\\_ways\\_immigrants\\_help\\_build\\_and\\_strengthen\\_our\\_economy](https://immigrantslist.org/ten_ways_immigrants_help_build_and_strengthen_our_economy)
2. [research.newamericaneconomy.org](https://research.newamericaneconomy.org)
3. [sentencingproject.org/publications/immigration-public-safety](https://sentencingproject.org/publications/immigration-public-safety)
4. [pbs.org/newshour/economy/making-sense/4-myths-about-how-immigrants-affect-the-u-s-economy](https://pbs.org/newshour/economy/making-sense/4-myths-about-how-immigrants-affect-the-u-s-economy)
5. [nbcnews.com/news/latino/no-surge-covid-cases-us-not-due-migrants-immigrants-rcna1656](https://nbcnews.com/news/latino/no-surge-covid-cases-us-not-due-migrants-immigrants-rcna1656)

# DISCUSSING THE FILM



A group discussion after watching a film can help viewers process what they've just seen. We encourage you to bring in speakers to help answer questions and/or to invite a moderator to lead the group in an inclusive discussion.

## Framing the Conversation

Your events for *Missing in Brooks County* are a chance to talk about human rights as they relate to migrants. We recommend finding an experienced moderator who can help guide the conversation. Journalists and educators are often good leads. Make sure you and the moderator are intentional about making the conversation inclusive for all audiences. Some tips for creating an inclusive discussion:

- Ask the audience to use words such as “unauthorized” and “undocumented” in place of “illegal” or “alien” to describe people who have crossed the border.
- Consider reviewing “Dispelling Myths about Immigrants” above in advance of the discussion to be able to correct misinformation as it comes up. This avoids other types of less reliable information about immigrants and immigration from circulating.
- Look into having Spanish and other translators available to make the conversation more accessible.

- Ask participants to speak only from their own perspective by using “I” statements and to keep conversation centered on the documentary—what they saw, what they learned, and how their own experiences relate to the issues raised.
- Remind participants to listen when others are talking and to always speak respectfully.

Scenes in the film may bring up difficult emotions for some, especially if they have lost a loved one. Consider having basic self-care items on hand, like tissues, water, and a quiet place to take a moment away if needed.

If someone in the group is missing a loved one, please direct them to this resource from Humane Borders: [humaneborders.org/missing-migrants](https://humaneborders.org/missing-migrants). If the loved one is missing in Arizona, recommend that they submit a missing person report to the Colibrí Center for Human Rights, [colibricenter.org/missing-migrant-form](https://colibricenter.org/missing-migrant-form). If their loved one is missing in Texas, recommend that they contact Eddie Canales at the South Texas Human Rights Center, [southtexashumanrights.org](https://southtexashumanrights.org).

# DISCUSSING THE FILM

## Discussion Questions

Choose from these sample questions based on which topics are most relevant to your speakers, partners, and audiences or work with your moderator to draft your own questions.

1. How did you feel after watching *Missing in Brooks County*? Did the film affect the way you think about immigration? Why or why not?
2. How has immigration affected your local community? Could you relate to the experiences of Brooks County residents?
3. How have you seen immigration policies change during your lifetime?
4. How familiar were you with Prevention Through Deterrence policies before watching the film? What effects do these policies have on immigration?
5. What did you hear people say in the film about why they immigrated to the United States?
6. Did your family immigrate to the United States? If so, what is your family's immigration story?
7. What are some of the conditions that make families like Homero's vulnerable to extortion? How might this be prevented for other families in the same situation?
8. In the film, we see how Homero's family is affected by not knowing his whereabouts. What would you do if your loved one was missing?
9. What were some of the flaws in the U.S. system's postmortem investigation and care that Dr. Kate Spradley and her students identified? How could these flaws be addressed?
10. Were you surprised to learn of unmarked graves in U.S. cemeteries? What rights should humans have after death?
11. What effect do you think words like "illegal" and "alien" have on the way people think about immigrants?
12. What are the different types of immigration? What paths to citizenship exist for people who want to come to the United States?
13. How do you think fear and racism shape immigration policy in the United States?
14. What changes, if any, would you like to see to the U.S. immigration system?
15. If someone is missing a family member who crossed into the United States at the United States–Mexico border, what can they do?
16. Do you think the U.S. Border Patrol checkpoint in Brooks County led directly to the many dangerous crossings shown in the film? Do you think Border Patrol checkpoints are necessary? If so, why? If not, what alternatives are there?
17. Do you see any problems with the Border Patrol's joint responsibilities for immigration enforcement and search and rescue? What might a better system look like?
18. How could U.S. border policy change to reduce the money flowing to coyotes and other organized crime?

# POTENTIAL PARTNERS



Many of these groups may be willing to collaborate with you to help you plan and/or promote your event, as well as provide speakers to discuss the topics in the film. Choose from the recommendations based on which ones best fit the people who will be participating in the event.

- Invite local **humanitarian, civil rights, and faith-based groups** that support immigrants and their families. Ask them to talk about how they are providing humanitarian relief to the immigrant community and to share any advice they have for families searching for loved ones.
  - Find your state affiliate in the ACLU national network: [aclu.org/about/affiliates](https://www.aclu.org/about/affiliates)
  - Southern Border Communities Coalition (SBCC) [southernborder.org/sbcc-leadership](https://southernborder.org/sbcc-leadership)
  - Kino Border Initiative (Arizona-based) [kinoborderinitiative.org/board/](https://kinoborderinitiative.org/board/)
- Invite **immigrant families** to speak on their experiences living in the country or being separated from other family members. If you partnered with organizations who work regularly with immigrant families, see if they know people willing to speak.
- Connect with **professors and students** working on border issues, like Dr. Kate Spradley, who is featured in the film, of Operation Identification (OPID) at Texas State University: [txstate.edu/anthropology/facts/outreach/opid.html](https://www.txstate.edu/anthropology/facts/outreach/opid.html). Even if you are not near the border, your local university may have an anthropology group that travels there, such as Beyond Borders out of the University of Indianapolis, Indiana: [beyondborders.uindy.edu](https://beyondborders.uindy.edu).
- Look for **immigration lawyers** who can give participants an overview of immigrant rights and resources. The American Immigration Lawyers Association provides a search tool to find immigration lawyers: [aila.org/about/immigration-lawyer-search](https://aila.org/about/immigration-lawyer-search). Check with an immigration lawyer to see if they will provide information about what to do if a family member has gone missing during a border crossing.

# ENGAGEMENT IDEAS

Deepen participants' experiences by organizing an activity that engages people in the issues after watching the film.

- Host a “know your rights” trivia event or workshop to help educate your audience about basic rights and responsibilities when interacting with a Border Patrol agent. This guide from the ACLU provides an overview: [acluaz.org/sites/default/files/field\\_documents/aclu\\_border\\_rights.pdf](https://acluaz.org/sites/default/files/field_documents/aclu_border_rights.pdf). Sample trivia questions include:
  - T or F: Border Patrol agents may stop vehicles at certain checkpoints to ask questions to verify the citizenship of the vehicles' occupants. (Answer: T)
  - T or F: It is legal for Border Patrol to rely solely on the race or ethnicity of a driver or passenger to justify a patrol stop. (Answer: F)
  - T or F: Border Patrol can enter onto private land, excluding dwellings, within 25 miles of a border without a warrant or consent. (Answer: T)
  - T or F: Refusing a search gives Border Patrol agents probable cause for a search. (Answer: F)
  - T or F: Border Patrol is authorized to stop vehicles at interior checkpoints in order to search for drugs. (Answer: F)
- Invite a healer to lead a **mental-health activity** that addresses the trauma and grief faced by immigrants living without documentation or being separated from a family member. Look for counselors that have experience working with immigrants, such as Inclusive Therapists: [inclusivetherapists.com/immigration-diaspora-refugee](https://inclusivetherapists.com/immigration-diaspora-refugee). For an overview of immigrant mental health, check out this article: [psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/cultural-competency/education/stress-and-trauma/undocumented-immigrants](https://psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/cultural-competency/education/stress-and-trauma/undocumented-immigrants).
- Ask a Latinx-led organization to create an *ofrenda*, or **traditional altar**, on which families place crosses, photos, and objects as offerings to loved ones from whom they have been separated. It is best to invite a healer with strong roots in the Latinx culture to lead this activity because of its deep spiritual meaning. For more background on this tradition, see: [americamagazine.org/politics-society/2019/11/04/remembering-children-who-died-detention-during-dia-de-los-muertos](https://americamagazine.org/politics-society/2019/11/04/remembering-children-who-died-detention-during-dia-de-los-muertos).
- Consider recognizing those who are missing or have died during a border crossing in a **memorial service**. For example, the project Hostile Terrain 94 organized a Moment of Global Remembrance and invited community members to read the names of people who have died while attempting to migrate to the United States. You can ask local immigration organizations as well as participants for names of people they would like to be read at the event. You can also ask audience members to volunteer to read names, like the Moment of Global Remembrance: [undocumentedmigrationproject.org/video](https://undocumentedmigrationproject.org/video).
- Organize a **donation drive** to raise funds for the South Texas Human Rights Center, featured in the film, [southtexashumanrights.org](https://southtexashumanrights.org), or the Arizona-based Humane Borders [humaneborders.org](https://humaneborders.org). You could post a suggested, optional donation on your event's promotional materials, making sure to mention that 100 percent of all donations go toward humanitarian efforts near the border.
- Host a **voter registration drive** to help educate and empower people to participate in political decision making around immigration. It's best to partner with an experienced voter registration organization that is familiar with all the rules and requirements. Note: Indie Lens Pop-Up is a public media program, which means that we cannot endorse advocacy for specific legislation at any of our events. However, we do encourage partners to provide civic education materials, such as those that explain how to register to vote and how to contact an elected official. [votolatino.org/article/register-to-vote/](https://votolatino.org/article/register-to-vote/)

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Learn more about the topics in the film from these relevant organizations and reading materials.

## Organizations

- **Border Angels** is a nonprofit organization that advocates for human rights, humane immigration reform, and social justice to reduce the number of fatalities along the United States–Mexico border. [borderangels.org](http://borderangels.org)
- **Coalición de Derechos Humanos** is a grassroots organization that promotes human and civil rights of all migrants regardless of their immigration status. [derechoshumanosaz.net](http://derechoshumanosaz.net)
- **Colibrí Center for Human Rights** promotes healing and change by working with families of missing migrants to identify and honor those who have lost their lives on the United States–Mexico border. [colibricenter.org](http://colibricenter.org)
- **Human Rights Watch** helps protect rights and save lives in more than 90 countries worldwide. [hrw.org](http://hrw.org)
- **Humane Borders**, motivated by faith, established a system of water stations in the Sonoran Desert to save migrants from dehydration and exposure. [humaneborders.org](http://humaneborders.org)
- **International Committee of the Red Cross** works to ensure humanitarian protection and assistance for victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence. [www.icrc.org/en](http://www.icrc.org/en)
- **No More Deaths • No Más Muertes** is a humanitarian organization in southern Arizona and an official ministry of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Tucson. [nomoredeaths.org/en](http://nomoredeaths.org/en)
- **Oxfam America** offers lifesaving support in times of crisis and advocates for economic justice, gender equality, and climate action. [oxfamamerica.org](http://oxfamamerica.org)
- **South Texas Human Rights Center** is a community-based organization in Falfurrias, Texas, dedicated to the promotion, protection, defense, and exercise of human rights and dignity in South Texas. [southtexashumanrights.org](http://southtexashumanrights.org)
- **Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)** works to advance human rights and social justice in the Americas. [wola.org](http://wola.org)

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## More Articles, Books, & Films

- “The Many Nameless Migrant Skeletons Buried along America’s Border,” by Kate Spradley, in *The Daily Beast*.  
[thedailybeast.com/the-many-nameless-migrant-skeletons-buried-along-americas-border](https://thedailybeast.com/the-many-nameless-migrant-skeletons-buried-along-americas-border)
- “The Dead Must Be Counted,” by Gabriella Soto, in *Sapiens*.  
[sapiens.org/culture/migrant-death-counts](https://sapiens.org/culture/migrant-death-counts)
- “Jenn Budd: Former Border Patrol Agent Turned Immigrant-Rights Activist,” by Southern Border Communities Coalition.  
[southernborder.org/jenn\\_budd\\_former\\_border\\_patrol\\_agent\\_turned\\_immigrant-rights\\_activist](https://southernborder.org/jenn_budd_former_border_patrol_agent_turned_immigrant-rights_activist)
- *The Line Becomes a River: Dispatches from the Border*, by Francisco Cantú.  
[penguinrandomhouse.com/books/555764/the-line-becomes-a-river-by-francisco-cantu](https://penguinrandomhouse.com/books/555764/the-line-becomes-a-river-by-francisco-cantu)
- “Extreme Heat Should Prompt New Border Approach,” by Human Rights Watch.  
[hrw.org/news/2021/09/15/us-extreme-heat-should-prompt-new-border-approach](https://hrw.org/news/2021/09/15/us-extreme-heat-should-prompt-new-border-approach)
- *Immigration Battle*, by Shari Robertson and Michael Camerini, on PBS *Independent Lens*.  
[pbs.org/independentlens/documentaries/immigration-battle](https://pbs.org/independentlens/documentaries/immigration-battle)
- *The State of Arizona*, by Carlos Sandoval and Catherine Tambini, on PBS *Independent Lens*.  
[pbs.org/independentlens/documentaries/state-of-arizona](https://pbs.org/independentlens/documentaries/state-of-arizona)
- *The Undocumented*, by Marco Williams, on PBS *Independent Lens*.  
[pbs.org/independentlens/documentaries/undocumented](https://pbs.org/independentlens/documentaries/undocumented)
- Radiolab’s Border Trilogy, by WNYC Studios.  
[wnycstudios.org/podcasts/radiolab/projects/border-trilogy](https://wnycstudios.org/podcasts/radiolab/projects/border-trilogy)

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## INDEPENDENT LENS

*Independent Lens* is an Emmy®

Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 PM. The acclaimed series, with Lois Vossen as executive producer, features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by ITVS, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. For more visit [pbs.org/independentlens](http://pbs.org/independentlens).

Join the conversation:

With #BrooksCountyPBS at [facebook.com/independentlens](https://www.facebook.com/independentlens) and on Twitter @IndependentLens.

## ITVS

ITVS is a San Francisco-based nonprofit organization that has, for over 25 years, funded and partnered with a diverse range of documentary filmmakers to produce and distribute untold stories. ITVS incubates and co-produces these award-winning films and then airs them for free on PBS via our weekly series, *Independent Lens*, as well as other series through our digital platform, OVEE. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. For more information, visit [itvs.org](http://itvs.org).

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