

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Surge of Central Americans drive jump in border arrests

Elliot Spagat, Associated Press

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SAN DIEGO (AP) — Central Americans attempting to enter the United States illegally on the nation's border with Mexico helped drive a 23 percent increase in **U.S. Border Patrol** arrests during the 2016 fiscal year, according to figures released Friday.

Apprehensions surged to 415,816 during the 12-month period ended Sept. 30 from a 44-year-low of 337,117 during the same period a year earlier, the U.S. Department of **Homeland Security** said.

Still, the most recent numbers represent the Border Patrol's fifth-lowest arrest tally since 1972 and were far below numbers seen in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The number of Central Americans stopped during the 2016 fiscal year by the Border Patrol surpassed the number of Mexicans, as it did for the first time in 2014.

Many were families and unaccompanied children from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras that Homeland Security says are fleeing poverty and violence, a shift from earlier years when crossers were largely adult men from Mexico.

Homeland Security said in its year-end report that "a growing share" of people entering the country illegally surrender to authorities to seek humanitarian protection, instead of trying to evade capture. That trend has exacerbated backlogs in immigration courts, which determine whether to grant asylum.

Homeland Security Secretary **Jeh Johnson** credited decades of spending on border security for the sharp decline in arrests over time. Border Patrol arrests peaked at 1.7 million in 2000 — quadruple the amount in 2016.

The Border Patrol is responsible for areas between land crossings and makes nearly all its arrests on the nearly 2,000-mile border with Mexico.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which covers the entire country, reported a modest decline in arrests in 2016.

Total immigration apprehensions by ICE and the Border Patrol for the year reached 530,250 from 462,328 a year earlier — a 15 percent increase.

U.S. authorities say they prevented 274,821 entries at land crossings, at airports and by ship, an increase of 8 percent from a year earlier. That number isn't reflected in the arrest total.

Homeland Security said deportations totaled 450,954 in 2016, with 85 percent of those people apprehended at the border.

The administration of President **Barack Obama** has prioritized border crossers, convicted felons and those who pose public safety threats for deportation.

<http://www.chron.com/news/texas/article/Surge-of-Central-Americans-drive-jump-in-10827141.php>