

# Two immigrant workers killed by gunmen in Arizona

Our correspondents  
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Two immigrant workers were killed last Sunday along the Arizona border. A truck was found near Eloy, a town northwest of Tucson known for immigrant smuggling. There were 20 to 30 people in the truck when two men dressed in paramilitary clothing opened fire, killing two migrants. While the motive remains unknown and no arrests have been made, among the suspects are drug smugglers and border vigilantes.

Gerardo Perez-Ruiz, 39, of Toluca, Mexico, was identified as one of the victims; the other victim remains unidentified but is presumed to be from Guatemala. Most of the undocumented immigrants fled into the desert. Five found hiding in bushes near the truck were turned over to the border patrol.

According to Dawn Barkman, Pima County sheriff's deputy, this atrocity is similar to two attacks in 2007 in which five immigrants were killed. In response to these attacks, Pinal County Sheriff Paul Babeu, known for his anti-immigrant views, has called for the formation of the Border Crimes Unit.

Eloy, a town of 10,375 with about three-quarters of its population Hispanic, has a median household income of \$26,518. Nearly a third of its population falls below the poverty level, with youth and the elderly the hardest hit. These statistics reflect the general social crisis that many working-class families confront, and which affects immigrant families all the more severely. The state of Arizona has a 15 percent overall poverty rate, one of the highest in the country. About a quarter of the state's children are living in poverty, according to official figures.

Arizona is on the verge of passing Senate Bill 1083 (Arizona Special Mission Unit, or ASMU), which would create a government-funded volunteer armed militia. Sponsored by Senator Sylvia Allen, over \$1.9 million is to be allocated to the program. According to

Col. Luke Taylor, who drafted the bill, this unit is not only to serve along the Mexican border, but would serve as a "statewide agency that can operate anywhere within the state."

The legislation would allow militia volunteers to arrest and detain individuals, as well as seize property. Although ostensibly obliged to cooperate with local law enforcement, the ASMU, acting alongside the Arizona State Guard, would be accountable to the governor through a commander confirmed by the state Senate. The bill was actually opposed by 14 of 15 Arizona state sheriffs and supported solely by the aforementioned Paul Babeu.

These events do not occur in isolation, but in tandem with the Obama administration's increasingly draconian shift in rhetoric and policy in relation to immigration. The killings came a week after the six-day Operation Cross Check, in which more than 3,100 immigrants were arrested under the pretext of apprehending and deporting "immigration fugitives" and "criminal aliens." More than half of those rounded up either committed only minor misdemeanors or had no criminal convictions whatsoever.

The Obama administration has deported nearly 400,000 people in each of the past three years, a record number. There are more patrol troops than ever along the Mexican border, as well as plans for the creation of a three-tiered wall to be built along the border under the pretext of "border safety."

The Secure Communities (S-Comm) immigration enforcement program, which is managed by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) under the Department of Homeland Security, was initiated in 2008 under the Bush administration. The purpose of S-Comm is to build large databases of immigrants using biometric and other technology

aimed at increased deportation sweeps. The Obama administration has expanded S-Comm to over 1,210 state and local jurisdictions and is aiming to have all of 3,141 US jurisdictions in compliance with the program by 2013.

Developments such as S-Comm and Operation Cross Check are fully in keeping with the government's wider anti-immigrant agenda. They play a role in sustaining the social and political climate in which the recent murders of immigrants in Arizona, as well as other attacks on immigrant workers, take place.



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