

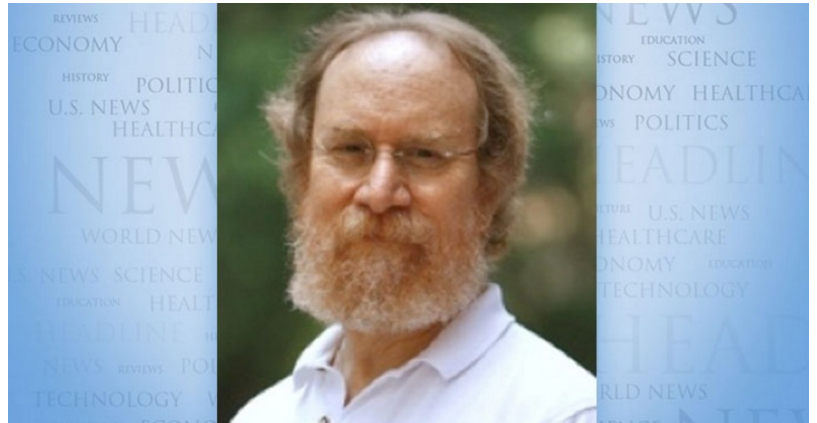


Written by [Sheldon Richman](#) on August 3, 2014

Borderlands: What's Happening to America?

A man, an American citizen, sits in his car as a U.S. Border Patrol agent insists that he roll down his window. He refuses. Agents use battering rams to smash the windows. Still, the driver refuses to leave his car, so he is hit with a Taser from two sides. He screams.

It would be bad enough if this scene, captured on video and shown recently on John Stossel's Fox News special "Policing America," had happened right at a U.S. border. But it happened far from the border. The U.S. government regards a large part of the country as close enough to a border or coast to justify treating individuals — citizens or not — as though they have no rights whatsoever. People have been beaten and had their personal belongings seized — without warrant or charge — just because they resented being treated like criminals. This should alarm anyone who thinks America is the "land of the free."



"Imagine the once thin borderline of the American past as an ever-thickening band, now extending 100 miles inland around the United States — along the 2,000-mile southern border, the 4,000-mile northern border, and both coasts — and you will be able to visualize how vast the CBP's [Customs and Border Protection] jurisdiction has become," [writes Todd Miller](#), author of [Border Patrol Nation: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Homeland Security](#), at TomDispatch.com. "This 'border' region now covers places where two-thirds of the U.S. population (197.4 million people) live.... The 'border' has by now devoured the full states of Maine and Florida and much of Michigan."

The ACLU calls the expanded borderlands, in which two out of three Americans live, a "[Constitution-free zone](#)." Specifically, the Fourth Amendment protection against unreasonable search and seizure appears to have been suspended.

This area is dotted with checkpoints at which anyone can be stopped, questioned, asked to exit his car, searched, and required to surrender personal belongings. Miller writes,

In these vast domains, Homeland Security authorities can institute roving patrols with broad, extra-constitutional powers backed by national security, immigration enforcement, and drug interdiction mandates. There, the Border Patrol can set up traffic checkpoints and fly surveillance drones overhead with high-powered cameras and radar that can track your movements. Within 25 miles of the international boundary, CBP agents can enter a person's private property without a warrant. In these areas, the Homeland Security state is anything but abstract. On any given day, it can stand between you and the grocery store.



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It doesn't matter if you are an American citizen merely going about your business. If you live in a borderland, you can be stopped along an east-west route and have your daily routine interrupted. Yet, it should be pointed out, you are more likely to be harassed or arrested if you aren't white.

The harassment has prompted people around Arivaca, Arizona, 25 miles from the Mexican border, to demand that a local checkpoint be removed. According to Miller, people

were fed up with the obligatory stop between their small town and the dentist or the nearest bookstore. They were tired of Homeland Security agents scrutinizing their children on their way to school. So they began to organize.

In late 2013, they demanded that the federal government remove the checkpoint. It was, they wrote in a [petition](#), an ugly artifact of border militarization; it had, they added, a negative economic impact on residents and infringed on people's constitutional rights. At the beginning of 2014, small groups from People Helping People in the Border Zone — the name of their organization — started [monitoring](#) the checkpoint several days a week.

Miller quotes James Lyall, an attorney with ACLU Arizona, as saying that "Border Patrol checkpoints and roving patrols are the physical world equivalent of the National Security Agency. They involve a massive dragnet and stopping and monitoring of innocent Americans without any suspicion of wrongdoing by increasingly abusive and unaccountable federal government agents."

This intolerable condition should outrage every American. Have we been reduced to a society of scared children who would rather have government agents harassing us wherever we go than take our chances with freedom?

Sheldon Richman is vice president and editor at [The Future of Freedom Foundation](#) in Fairfax, Va.



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