

# HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN SOUTH TEXAS

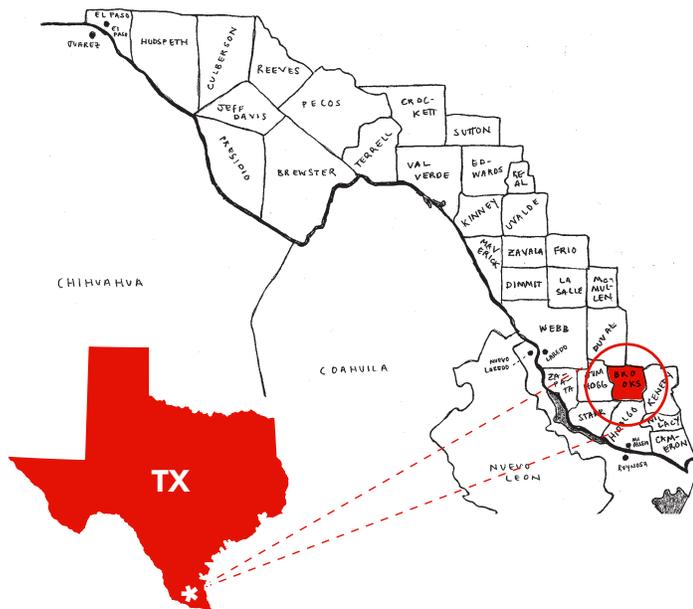
**FORENSIC  
BORDER  
COALITION**



**The Forensic Border Coalition (FBC) supports the families of missing migrants and addresses problems related to the identification of human remains found near the US/Mexico border.**

## **PREVENTION THROUGH DETERRENCE**

- Starting in 1994, increased enforcement in cities re-routed migration to remote and dangerous desert terrain.
- Officials knew death would be an outcome.
- 8,000 deaths have been recorded; many more remains have not been found.



## **MIGRANT DEATH IN SOUTH TEXAS**

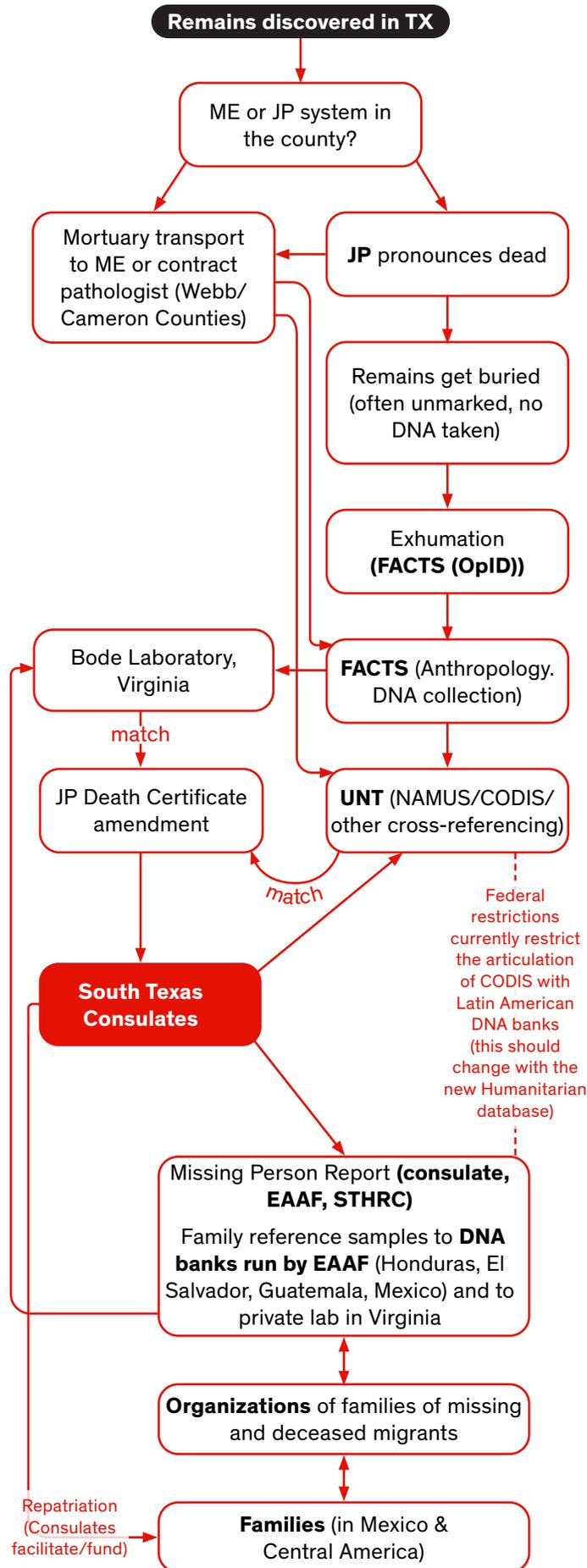
- In 2012 Texas surpassed Arizona in migrant deaths, with the highest rates in the Rio Grande Valley.
- **Many of these deaths are concentrated in Brooks County,\* 60 miles north of the border due to an inland Border Patrol checkpoint that migrants must circumvent on foot.**
- Texas is 96% private land, meaning that the remains are much more inaccessible than they are in Arizona's public lands.
- In Texas, forensic services are greatly lacking, with only 14 of the 254 counties having a Medical Examiner's office.
- Though Texas law requires that DNA be taken from all unidentified remains, South TX counties are among the poorest in the U.S. and do not have the resources to comply with the law.
- Additionally, because this county-based system is lacking in oversight, death certificates and case reports are often missing, incomplete, and unable to be traced back to remains.
- This means that the vast majority of unidentified remains in South TX are buried in unmarked graves without DNA sampling or proper documentation, which makes them very hard to find.

## **HOW MIGRANT DECEDENTS GET IDENTIFIED AND REPATRIATED: (SEE REVERSE)**

- In 2013 the FBC secured funding for Brooks County to send remains to the medical examiner in Laredo. However, this is the only ME serving the entire South TX region, and many of the long-term dead still need to be located, exhumed, and identified.
- Operation Identification (OpID) is a member of FBC based at the Forensic Anthropology Center at Texas State University (FACTS). OpID works to recover the remains of unidentified migrants to facilitate identification and repatriation to their families.
- In 2020, US Congress passed the Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains Act (S.2174), which will provide funding towards identification and repatriation. However, there is still more work to be done.

# HOW MIGRANT DECEDENTS GET IDENTIFIED AND REPATRIATED

- Once remains are exhumed, they are brought to the Forensic Anthropology Center at Texas State (FACTS) in San Marcos for forensic analysis.
- DNA is sent to the University of North Texas (UNT) for upload into the national CODIS database. Casefiles and photos are uploaded to the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs).
- OpID also sends DNA to a private lab in Virginia for comparison with family samples from the international forensic databanks of the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF), another FBC partner.
- In 2018 the FBC held a hearing with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to lobby for an FBI-sponsored humanitarian DNA database to include these family samples from Mexico and Central America. This database will enter a pilot phase in 2021.
- Once a DNA match is found and a positive identification is made, families are notified and remains are repatriated with the assistance of consulates.



## WHAT STILL NEEDS TO CHANGE

- **Develop a regional medical examiner system (including facilities and salaried positions) serving Starr, Hidalgo, Cameron, Brooks, and other border counties.**
- **Enforce death certificate completion and case tracking in accordance with state law.**
- **Designate respectful burial sites in South Texas exclusively for the unidentified.**
- **Mandate that all unidentified cases are entered into NamUs.**
- **Stop migrant deaths by supporting reforms that allow for safe migration in accordance with the Global Compact on Migration\* and an end to Prevention Through Deterrence.**

\*Global Compact for Safe Orderly and Regular Migration (2018): <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/migration-compact>  
 Forensic Border Coalition: <https://forensicbordercoalition.org/>  
 Donate to the South Texas Human Rights Center: [southtexashumanrights.org](https://southtexashumanrights.org)

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