



May 4th, 2018

International Borders in a Globalizing World



International Borders in a Globalizing World

Perry World House 2018 Borders and Boundaries Workshop

Introduction

Organized by Beth Simmons, Andrea Mitchell University Professor of Law, Political Science and Business Ethics; Perry World House Postdoctoral Fellow Mike Kenwick; and Perry World House Predoctoral Fellow Benjamin Laughlin, the day-long conference brought together academic experts from around the world to present and discuss cutting edge, policy-oriented research on borders and boundaries in international politics.

International borders and boundaries remain politically relevant even in an increasingly globalized world. The construction of border walls and fences is accelerating and countries around the world are increasingly concerned about security along their borders. This tension between increasing cross-border connections and heightened border security means that there is a need more than ever to understand both the policy causes and consequences of international border security. To this end, participants at the conference developed new perspectives and are collecting new data on changes in border security around the world.

Several participants focused on unintended negative effects of border security in specific contexts. Studies of border fortifications built by the European Union, Israel, and the United States show that even when policies appear to be successful at reducing migration or smuggling it may simply be displaced to other routes. Rather than having the intended effect, border fortifications can instead increase crime, migrant deaths, and violence. The discussion of this research pointed out the need to fully consider how individuals and organizations whose activities border fortifications are intended to block will change their behavior in response.

Session 1

Paulina Ochoa Espejo, Associate Professor of Political Science at Haverford College, opened the conference by discussing the moral basis for the unilateral management of borders. She pointed out that, unlike many government policies, border security has profound effects on both sides of the border, but is nearly always instituted without fully considering the effects it will have on the neighboring country. This opened up a discussion of why it may be important to approach border control in a cooperative manner.

This discussion was complemented by research presented by Professor Tina Kempin, Director of the Institute for Human Rights at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Professor Kempin's research blends political science and anthropological perspectives when investigating the socio-economic and cultural implications of barriers built along the US-Mexican border. This project highlighted the local perspectives and consequences of border security politics, which are often overlooked in national debates.





International Borders in a Globalizing World

Perry World House 2018 Borders and Boundaries Workshop



Session 2

Given the potentially negative policy implications of physical structures to secure international borders, what may be driving such policies? Several contributions pointed to economic, cultural and nationalist explanations. Economic differentials as well as cultural homogeneity predict especially stark “state presence” at the border, according to research by Beth Simmons, University of Pennsylvania, and Mike Kenwick, a Postdoctoral Fellow at Perry World House. Their groundbreaking project measures state presence at all border crossings of the world, based on satellite images of customs facilities, gates, government buildings, and barriers at border crossings. They used this data to construct a measure of state presence at border crossings around the world. Surprisingly, they found evidence suggesting that cultural homogeneity may be a stronger predictor of border security structures than security threats. Their research brings into question a strictly security rationale for states to develop gates and barriers at their borders.

Hein Goemans, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Rochester, investigated the nationalist roots of international borders. He presented the results of an experiment to investigate how the way governments present borders can affect conflict. When Bolivians were shown a map used in local school textbooks that included territory lost over 100 years ago they became more nationalistic and expressed a willingness to give their life for their country. He points out that politicians in many countries use a nationalistic presentation of historic greatness in the educational system to build nationalist sentiment and this can lead not just to increasingly secured and militarized borders, but in support for international conflict. This demonstrates that nationalist education policies play an important role in international hostility. With the recent Chinese militarization of disputed islands in the South China Sea and Russian occupation and annexation of Crimea in violation of international law, it is important to recognize how the manipulation of nationalist sentiments may promote support for irredentism and international conflict.

Session 3

Faten Ghosn, an Associate Professor at the University of Arizona’s School of Government and Public Policy, presented research coauthored with Alex Braithwaite, also at the University of Arizona, on the relationship between border fortifications and migrant deaths in the Mediterranean. Since 2009, European countries have increased border security in order to reduce the number of asylum seekers traveling to Europe. These policies have often been regarded as successful in reducing the influx of migrants into the European Union, but after collecting extensive data on migrant flows, migrant deaths and border security, Ghosn demonstrated that “population flows are simply displaced to more dangerous, less commonly traveled routes,” and more migrants died while traveling on these routes. She points out that simply increasing border security without focusing on the causes of migrant flows—conflict, persecution, poverty, and environmental change—will fail to stem the flow of migrants and has substantial humanitarian implications.

Benjamin Muller of Kings University College then presented research on the causes and implications of the global visa regime. This led to a discussion that blended the discussion of how the international visa regime both affects and is affected by the refugee flows investigated in Professor Faten’s research.



International Borders in a Globalizing World

Perry World House 2018 Borders and Boundaries Workshop



Session 4

Benjamin Laughlin, a Predoctoral Fellow at Perry World House, presented research on the effect of the fence along the U.S.-Mexico border on drug smuggling and the drug war in Mexico. He collected detailed data on the location of the border fence built since 2006 as well as violence in Mexico and showed that as border fortifications blocked cross-border smuggling routes, drug cartels fought to control territory near the border with access to alternative smuggling routes. This resulted in thousands of additional deaths in Mexico. Changes in border security do not affect the huge demand for drugs in the U.S., so drug cartels have powerful economic incentives to find alternative smuggling routes and will fight to control those routes.

Guy Grossman, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania, discussed his research, coauthored with Anna Getmansky, Assistant Professor of Government at the University of Essex, and Austin Wright, Assistant Professor of Public Policy at the University of Chicago, on the effectiveness of the Israeli separation barrier at reducing smuggling. Israel constructed this wall in the West Bank, blocking smuggling routes used by organized crime to smuggle stolen cars to chop shops. However, rather than reducing car theft, the wall only displaced it to areas with previously low levels of car theft near smuggling routes that were not blocked by the wall. Home break-ins also increased as criminals switched to activities that did not require crossing into the West Bank.

Session 5

David Carter, Associate Professor of political science at Washington University in St. Louis, and Paul Poast, Assistant Professor of political science at the University of Chicago, discussed the relationship between border walls and trade. Though border walls are intended only

to reduce illegal trade and migration, they show that border fortifications may also reduce legal trade between neighboring countries. This demonstrates that there may be significant trade-offs to increased border security. These trade-offs may not always be fully considered by policy-makers or understood by citizens.

Finally, Professor Xiaojun Li of the University of British Columbia presented an ongoing research project focused on evaluating political and economic development along international border regions. Preliminary analyses revealed that states with dissimilar political institutions lead to a dampening of economic activity along their shared borders.

Conclusion

The research and discussion at the conference provided plenty of grist for policymakers.

- First, it raised the issue of why border securitization seems to be the policy du jour globally, especially in rich countries. Policy makers should think carefully about the sources of demand for border fortifications of various kinds.
- Second, some of the research exposes the unintended consequences associated with securitizing international borders.

Given these findings, governments should do more to address the causes of unwanted cross-border movements of people and products. Moreover, research and education can play an important long-term role in causing or mitigating the building of border infrastructure and cross-border hostility.