

# Inside Border Enforcement: The Everyday Policing and Surveillance of Mobile Populations

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## Background and Research Questions

Although borders define geographic boundaries of political entities and legal jurisdictions, they are also ways of dividing the world - and people. Above all, borders are characterised by their communicative function, signifying state control over territory and mobility. It has long been recognised that the police represent the most visible aspect of the body politic. Thus, the practice of policing provides people with one of their most tangible experiences of the state. Yet, while policing and security is an increasingly global enterprise, we still know very little about one key chapter in the policing story – the everyday enforcement of borders. The study involves examination at two levels:

### (i) *The Field of Border Enforcement*

In exploring border control, there seems to be a peculiar tension at work. Economic imperatives to facilitate the movements of goods and capital are at odds with the desire of many states to restrict the mobility of people across their borders. The events of September 11, 2001, have only aggravated these contradictory impulses. What remains clear is that states have fundamentally changed the ways they police and monitor the passage of people and flow of information across borders. Yet, our understanding of the multiple ways in which border policing is accomplished remains opaque and prompts several questions. (1) How do the impulses of the state to control borders shape the nature of policing on-the-ground? (2) How does social unease about terrorists, immigrants and other folk devils drive legislation and policy? (3) To what extent are the practices of border control shaped by the claims made by states to be liberal democracies, and how do they challenge that claim? (4) In a nodal and fluid policing landscape, who else controls the border?

### (ii) *The Local Life of Border Enforcement*

Understanding border policing is not only a matter of exploring the broader social, political, and legal context. It also invites examination of the culture and practices of those involved in the routine preservation of border priorities. With a view to examining the local life of border enforcement, the following research questions have been identified: (1) What events and people arouse suspicion on the border? (2) How do border police use their discretion and the tools available to them? (3) What are their dispositions towards different enforcement styles and kinds of mobility? (4) how are technologies for policing and surveillance used by border enforcers?

## Objectives

The study has four principal objectives:

- (1) to generate new knowledge about the policing of borders, through an examination of how arrangements to secure borders are being received on-the-ground;
- (2) to connect the realities of border enforcement to the larger concerns of current debates about nodal governance and security;
- (3) to map the process of how political culture and social control interact to produce policing arrangements along the border;
- (4) to bring criminology and the sociology of policing closer to the concerns of broader social science by exploring border protection in a globalised world and as an expression of national sovereignty

*Just one example of the border controls in operation*



## Empirical Investigation at the Canadian-U.S. Border

Drawing on the U.S.-Canadian border as its empirical base, this study aims to 'build a picture' of a contemporary border policing regime. Historically, there has been a low level of security along the border, with several civil society groups involved in protecting the state boundary.

In the post 9/11 climate, however, there have been many developments in security arrangements. Along with a dramatic rise in the use of technologies for surveillance and information-gathering, the border has also witnessed an expansion of social control actors involved in enforcement and detection.

Fieldwork was conducted in British Columbia, Canada, during July and August 2013, and comprised the following:

(1) *Analysis of border enforcement discourses.* It was crucial to undertake a reading and analysis of key legislation, policy documents and mission statements surrounding the border. In order to understand the deployment of ideologies of border policing, the methodology also included an examination of media representations of the border and its enforcement.

(2) *Ethnography in a Border Town.* The study also included some limited ethnographic fieldwork around the British Columbia/Washington State border. In particular, I visited a key border town in order to explore border enforcement symbology. I also spent time with the local police department to understand the dilemmas involved in policing a border town.

(3) *Interviews with key actors in wider arena of border enforcement.* Interviews were held with those who have a broader stake in border enforcement and the policy environment.

## Future Research and Outputs

Analysis from the Canadian field trip is currently in its early stages. In 2014 I hope to conduct research with 'Coastwatch Wales', an amalgamation of specialist officers and agencies working together to police the Welsh Coastline, viewed as a vulnerable part of the UK border. This would offer an interesting comparative dimension to the overall study.

Plans for publication including a short monograph and articles submitted to *The British Journal of Criminology*, *International Migration Review* and *Policing and Society*. Along with published work, results will be disseminated at national and international conferences.

*The border is not always obvious*

