BORDER SECURITY: PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

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INTRODUCTION

This paper presents original research on border security in the UK. The research was funded by a small ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) grant to examine and reflect on the current state of public perceptions towards border security. The research involved a mixed-methods approach, including focus groups and surveys, to explore public understandings of border security, particularly in relation to biometric systems.

The findings of the research are presented in this paper, which aims to contribute to a better understanding of how the public perceives and experiences border security. The paper explores how biometric technologies are perceived and experienced by the public, and how these perceptions and experiences affect policy decisions.

METHODS

The research design of this study is a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data. The research included focus groups and surveys to gather data from the public on their perceptions of border security.

The focus groups were conducted in different regions of the UK, and included people from different age groups, social classes, and educational backgrounds. The surveys were designed to complement the focus groups and to provide a broader picture of public opinion on border security.

The survey data was analyzed using quantitative methods, and the focus group data was analyzed using qualitative methods. The findings from both methods were then compared and integrated to provide a more comprehensive understanding of public perceptions of border security.

CONCLUSIONS

(1) Principles and generalisations inferred from the results

The survey data obtained from focus groups and survey responses enabled us to argue that the idea of a singular “public” that will understand, cooperate, and participate in development is a chimera; though there is consensus about border control as a leading security issue, public perceptions of threat and analytical lenses through which different and the politics of security come to the fore. For example, there is a bifurcation of the public for whom heightened surveillance necessitates justifications for suspicion of others, and those for whom heightened surveillance means they feel unfairly targeted because of their race. In addition, our research suggests that government framing of threats as global rather than national resonates with different kinds of individuals more than a singular “public”.

(2) Exceptions too, or problems with these principles and generalisations

The research took place in a single country and would benefit from an examination to other countries in Europe and beyond. The research is also reliant on recall and self-report of encounters with border security. Future research would benefit from engaging with members of the public immediately following experiences with border security at airports, seaports, and so on.

(3) Conclusions and recommendations

When a time global travel is on the rise and government expenditure is stretched, AOC technologies promise to risk-assess more passengers at a quicker rate without the need to appoint additional staff. Yet, despite these rapid developments and the solutions promised by AOC, representatives from government and industry readily admit that relatively little is known about how citizens perceive biometric border security technologies, whether different members of the population have varying attitudes towards them, or if there is popular appetite to see these systems rolled out beyond the airport environment. Ordinary members of the public are the two subjects of and participants in the exercise of border security and AOC technologies. The public’s understanding of the public, including a sensitivity to different perceptions and experiences. Public involvement in the development of border security as well as in its exercise will go far towards fostering cooperation. Thus, more research is needed into everyday experiences with border security and on attitudes towards new technology such as automated border control.

REFERENCES