

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents original research on border security in the EU and sets out an agenda for future work on Automated Border Control (ABC) technology in response to the conference topics of "societal aspects", "human-machine interaction", and "user experience and satisfaction." Citizens are now central to border security, risk management, and resilience in the EU. They are expected to be vigilant in public spaces such as airports and to engage with biometric technologies when travelling. The success of initiatives such as ABC depends in part upon public interaction and cooperation. Some EU citizens may feel more "secure" as a result of such technological advances, and be willing to embrace them in their daily lives. Others, such as those from certain ethnic minority backgrounds, may experience heightened levels of personal insecurity and/or refuse to engage. For example, how are biometric kiosks based on facial recognition viewed by women who, for religious and cultural reasons, wear the niqab? Relatively little is known about everyday perceptions and experiences of border security, how the public view efforts to make them feel more secure, and whether or not they are aware of their own role in the threat management cycle. The overall aim of our paper is to help address this pressing research deficit by presenting the findings of a recent ESRC funded study, and to outline strategic priorities for future research into ABC in policy and practice for the mutual benefit of key stakeholders.

(1) Scope and objectives

This paper examines public perceptions and experiences of border security, as well as public preferences for border security as a policy solution to security threats, in the context of a broader exploration of what the public sees as being the most pressing security threats to the world, to the nation, to their communities, and to themselves as individuals. The objectives are: to explore how members of the public understand concepts such as "threat," "security," and "border security"; to examine how different members of the public experience border security in various ways, in particular at airports; to investigate the place of border security in the broader litany of contemporary security threats; to examine the relationships between perceptions of security threats, such as from terrorism and immigration, and policy preferences such as for spending on border security rather than on education or health; to ascertain the extent to which the public's views of border security coincide or diverge from government's; and to report on the societal and political dimensions that policy-makers, practitioners, and the private sector need to consider when developing and implementing ABC technologies.

(2) Literature

The existing academic literature in the fields of International Relations (IR), Security Studies, and Political Behavior does not address the above issues. In IR and Security Studies there is a burgeoning literature on biometric border security at airports (Adey 2010; Amoore 2006; Salter 2007), but citizens' perceptions and experiences remain elusive. This is arguably symptomatic of a deeper tendency for academics to overlook the role of public opinion and everyday views, stories and experiences in shaping securitizing moves and conditioning their ultimate success and/or failure (Balzacq 2010; McDonald 2008). Scholars of political behaviour and political psychology have been much more willing to examine public perceptions of security threats

such as porous borders, but there are two primary weaknesses as we see it: first, a tendency to focus on a specific "threat of the moment," such as the terrorist threat in the wake of 9/11 (Huddy et al. 2002, 2005; Joslyn and Haider-Markel 2007; Maoz and McCauley 2009), which means that less extreme threats, or threats such as perceptions of border (in)security, have been largely ignored; and, second, a focus on the individual level causes of perceptions of security threats, such as personality traits (Altermeyer 1996; Hetherington and Weiler 2009), at the expense of efforts to understand their implications for governments and public policy.

(3) Methods

The research mobilized an unusual combination of mini focus group work and a national survey in Great Britain. The fieldwork was carried out in three stages: a first wave of ten 90-minute mini-groups – each comprising of three people ("triads") – took place in April 2012; an Internet survey of 2004 participants, including a "booster" sample of 251 British Muslims, was conducted in June 2012; and a second wave of ten 90-minute triads completed this phase of the research in September 2012.

(4) Overview of main results

- Although there is considerable variation in perceptions of the most pressing security threats, there is consensus about the importance of border security that spans age, religion, and race. Sometimes this is a direct reflection of perceptions of a security threat such as immigration or international organized crime, but it can also be an indirect response to a concern such as economic insecurity.
- However, there is variation in the way in which people experience surveillance and security technologies that leads to wariness about their use, effectiveness, and unintended consequences. For example, Muslims often feel that they are victims as much as beneficiaries of border security and that the practices of border security exacerbate perceptions of Muslims as terrorists.
- Perceived threats to security, including weak border controls, tend to be associated with less tolerant attitudes towards groups such as immigrants.
- Perceived threats to security are also associated, inter alia, with a desire for more spending on border security and a willingness to pay more in tax for the provision of border security. These relationships are strong for people who see more national threats and who identify terrorism and immigration as particular threats but they are also strong for individuals who feel personally threatened in these areas.
- There is little public awareness of government strategies on border security or government messages about the role of citizens in border security. Indeed, there is evidence of some fear of involvement, beliefs that there is little ordinary members of the public can do, and an association between awareness of government messages and perceptions of more rather than less threat.
- Without more research into public perceptions of and attitudes towards new security technologies such as ABC millions of Euros could be spent not knowing whether engagement is likely or if societal resilience will be enhanced or compromised as a result.

METHODS

The research design of ten triads of three people, a large sample survey, and a second wave of ten triads allowed the findings of each stage to reflexively inform and shape the next, which meant that survey questions largely arose from the content of the initial tranche of group discussions. In turn, the results of the survey fed into the agenda of the second round of triads. Triads varied by region, life-stage, social class, and religion. They covered a great deal of substantive ground regarding security threats and subjects' experiences of, and thoughts about, specific security threats. This included encouraging them to describe a particular experience and also to discuss certain scenarios, for example:

 Anne's niece is getting married in Florida. A week before she is due to leave for the wedding Anne checks the home office website and the threat level has been raised to severe. Should Anne still travel to the US?

Figure 1. Pen portrait stimulus

Other group stimulus material included examples of various government campaigns designed to raise awareness of security threats and what to do about them. Participants were asked about their awareness of these various campaigns, whether or not they felt these initiatives were effective in changing their behaviour and that of the public more generally, and if they had any ideas about how security-related communication of this nature could be changed in the future. For the analysis, the mini-focus group transcripts were examined in vivo for narratives, recurring themes, illustrative experiences, and so on.



FINDINGS AND ARGUMENT

We used group discussions as an opportunity to discuss how participants perceive and experience border security. The triads demonstrated the extent to which concerns about border security, in keeping with the NSS's categorization of border control, are perceived as a priority risk:

I think that the government should be taking more control of who is coming into the country. I think we are far too lenient. Watch any border control program. [...] I am worried about fanatics coming into the country, getting in and getting lost in the system and then meeting up, teaming up with others, online as we said, meeting up and joining together (younger white woman, Glasgow, Triad 12).

The range and strength of opinion on the need for "tougher border security" did not vary between our groups. Some of the most vocal and passionate calls for more rigorous border security came from our Muslim and Sikh participants:

What happens if a bunch of Al Qaeda comes from Europe and we don't have our border security sorted? I think this is a massive security issue and I don't know whether they will be able to deal with it or not (older male Muslim, Leicester, Triad 3).

In general, groups said they felt less secure now than in the past. The invocation of 9/11 as a turning point was common and conversations with older groups in particular tended to contrast today's climate of fear and anxiety as being higher when compared to the eras of the Cold War. For other groups, however, it was not terrorism per se that mattered, but more specifically the threat of particular religious and ethnic groups being stereotyped and connected with terrorist activity.

Islamophobia was overwhelmingly cited among our Muslim triads (Triads 3, 7, 15 and 19) as the most significant security threat facing participants in their everyday lives. A common refrain among these groups was that Islamophobia is a relatively recent development in Britain: "9/11 changed everything." These dynamics were especially pronounced in the context of participants' encounters with airport security as methods to prevent terrorism.

Awareness of strategies designed to enhance security such as eyeball and face recognition software, full body scanners and increased security at airports, and biometric passports

The institutions or actors that are most important in tackling border control, including the "international system," the European Union, and individual citizens

Trust in the UK Border Force

We used the survey data to assess statistically the strength and certainty of relationships using structural equation models, which allow us to simultaneously estimate the effects of perceptions of threats such as terrorism or immigration on the willingness to pay more in taxes for greater border security.

I can understand some profiling because obviously we want to fly and we want to be safe as well so I can understand some sort of security checks and all this, that's fine but I think sometimes they go that step too far (younger male Muslim, Oldham, Triad 15).

The survey data provide statistical support for these kinds of group differences—for example, Muslims in the sample had different perceptions of the greatest security threats, being more likely to cite Islamophobia and less likely to identify terrorism or religious extremism—but also allow broader examination of what the public is threatened by and the relationship between perceptions of threats and attitudes towards border security. Table 1 below presents findings about where weak border control "fits" for the public as a contemporary security issue. It shows the proportion of the survey sample that identified an issue as a global, national, community, or personal threat (respondents could identify more than one) and where that issue ranked as a threat (out of 22). The table shows that weak border control is seen as a particularly salient global and national problem but not as a direct threat to communities or individuals, although perceptions of threats such as terrorism and immigration may be seen as indirectly related to border security.

Table 1. Weak border control and perceptions of other contemporary security threats

	Global	National	Community	Personal
Terrorism	69 (1)	48 (1)	8 (10)	10 (7)
Religious extremism	56 (2)	35 (3)	10 (8)	8 (9)
Economy	46 (4)	45 (2)	36 (1)	38 (1)
Environment	44 (5)	22 (8)	11 (7)	12 (5)
Racial/religious hate crime	41 (6)	26 (6)	14 (6)	9 (8)
Weak border control	27 (9)	28 (5)	6 (13)	5 (14)
Immigration	26 (12)	33 (4)	16 (4)	11 (6)

Reference: ICM survey, June 6-15 2012, n=2004. Numbers are %. Figures in parentheses are ranks.

The survey data also show a general association between perceptions of security threats, including weak border control, and a desire for more spending on border control and defence, less spending on international aid, a willingness to pay more in taxes towards the provision of security services, and support for more punitive and aggressive measures against terrorists and "illegal" immigrants, but variation by age, sex, religion, and education. Our models also show variation by whether perceptions of threat are seen to be global or at a national or subnational level. Individuals who perceive more global threats are frequently shown to favour less spending on policies such as tighter borders and more spending on international aid.

CONCLUSIONS

(1) Principles and generalisations inferred from the results

Data obtained from focus groups and survey responses lead us to argue that the idea of a singular "public" that will understand, cooperate, and participate in developments in border security is a chimera, even though there is consensus about border control as a leading security issue: rather, public perceptions of threat and security are analytical lenses through which difference and the politics of security comes to the fore. For example, there is a bifurcation between those for whom heightened surveillance necessitates and justifies 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, with different consequences for attitudes towards border security.

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

The research took place in a single country and would benefit from an extension to other countries in the European Union and beyond. Our research is also reliant on recall and self-report of encounters with border security. Future research should draw on direct observation and on interviewing members of the public immediately following experiences with border security at airports, sea ports, and so on.

(3) Conclusions and recommendations

At a time when global travel is on the rise and government expenditure is stretched, ABC 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 ABC, 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. If ordinary members of the public are to be both subjects of and participants in the exercise of border security and ABC technologies there needs to be a deeper 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 further 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 gates. This will be of mutual benefit to national governments, EU agencies such as Frontex, stakeholders in the private sector, and EU citizens alike.

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