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# **The Geography of Border Militarization: Violence, Death and Health in Mexico and the United States**

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## **Abstract**

Despite proposed increases in spending on personnel and equipment for border enforcement, the complex geography of border militarization and the violence it produces require further examination. We take a geographical perspective to determine the role of violence in both its official forms, such as the incarceration and punishments experienced by undocumented migrants, as well as through abuses and violence perpetrated by agents in shaping border and immigration enforcement. By drawing on the Migrant Border Crossing Study (MBCS), which is a unique data source based on 1,110 surveys of a random sample of deportees, as well as research with family members and return migrants in Puebla, Mexico, we provide an innovative and robust account of the geography of violence and migration. Identifying regional variation allows us to see the priorities and strategic use of violence in certain areas as part of enforcement practice. We assert that understanding the role of violence allows us to explain the prevalence of various forms of abuse, as well as the role of abuse in border enforcement strategies, not as a side effect, but as elemental to the current militarized strategies.

Keywords: *Violence, Trauma, Border Security, Migration*

## **Resumen**

A pesar de las propuestas para aumentar los gastos en agentes y equipo para la seguridad fronteriza, la geografía compleja de la militarización de la frontera y la violencia que produce son muy pocos entendidos. Tomamos una perspectiva geográfica para entender

el papel de la violencia tanto en sus formas oficiales como el encarcelamiento y castigos para migrantes, que los no-oficiales, tales como los abusos y la violencia perpetrada por agentes. Por medio de los datos del Estudio de Migrantes y el Cruce Fronterizo (MBCS por sus siglas en inglés), basado en más que 1,100 encuestas con un muestreo aleatorio de deportados con un equipo binacional en cinco ciudades fronterizas y la Ciudad de México y una investigación con familiares y migrantes que han devuelto a Puebla, proporcionamos una explicación sobre la geografía de violencia y migración. Las diferencias regionales demuestran las prioridades y el uso estratégico de la violencia en ciertas zonas fronterizas. Afirmamos que el entendimiento del papel de la violencia nos permite explicar la prevalencia de varias formas de abuso en las estrategias de control fronteriza. La violencia no es un efecto secundario sino un aspecto central de las prácticas fronterizas militarizadas.

Palabras claves: *Violencia, Trauma, Seguridad Fronteriza, Migración*

## Introduction

In 2013, the United States Congress was locked in a contentious battle over immigration, border security, and the desire for a militarized surge to close off the border. The Senate passed a comprehensive immigration reform (CIR) bill (S. 744) that included nearly \$30 billion in additional spending on border security and calls for 20,000 – 30,000 new U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) agents in addition to the 20,863 agents already employed as of FY 2014 (CBP 2015). Despite its hardline militarization, the bill has stalled in the House where more conservative politicians claim it does not go far enough. Talks of a new surge in border enforcement funding are omnipresent in Washington D.C., suggesting that a new round of increased enforcement measures is highly likely in the coming years. This proposed expansion comes on the heels of an unprecedented buildup along the border that tripled the size of the USBP between FY 2004 and 2012.

Despite the billions of dollars spent each year, how these funds as well as any proposed increases are spent in terms of the day-to-day activities of agents, specific enforcement programs, and technological interventions, have rarely been analyzed. Most scholarship on border militarization and enforcement centers around the “prevention through deterrence strategy” (e.g., Operation Hold the Line, Operation Gatekeeper, etc.), which consisted of the buildup of enforcement in urban centers that pushed people to remote and dangerous border zones (Dunn 2009, 1996, Nevins 2002, Andreas 2000, Cornelius and Lewis 2007). While this body of work has been attentive to the increased lethality of undocumented migration,<sup>1</sup> the present article seeks to examine enforcement practices in the US-Mexico border region, particularly by comparing the Tijuana, El Centro, Tucson, El Paso and Laredo sectors of the border. Our goal is to develop a more geographically nuanced perspective, one that interrogates the role of violence within an increasingly militarized and violent border region.<sup>2</sup> We contend that violence, not security objectives, guides border enforcement strategies. In recent years, border enforcement strategy has centered on the development of a militarized logic and a strategic plan for enforcement that emphasizes pain, suffering, and trauma as deterrents to undocumented migration. Vital to understanding enforcement practices are the ways in which the

instrumental use of natural hazards, criminalization and incarceration of migrants, and the institutionalized abuse of power contribute to state policy.

By approaching the border, not as one homogenous geographic region, but rather as a series of highly interconnected, and yet disparate zones, we will show how enforcement practices are highly varied across border patrol sectors. Not only does the specific physical geography of these areas result in unique sets of challenges and concerns, but behavioral patterns emerge that illuminate the institutional cultures of the Border Patrol.

While there is a large body of literature that examines the discursive (Brown 2010) or performative aspects of militarization and the state (Secor 2007), these are not the goals of the present article. Rather, we are interested in the effects of previous waves of militarization, and how these impacts may affect the future of subsequent border enforcement measures. For example, while the previous rounds of border militarization through the “prevention through deterrence” strategy and Operation Gatekeeper in the mid-1990s have been associated with an increase in migrant deaths (Nevins and Aizeki 2008, Eschbach *et al.* 1999, Cornelius 2001), the next wave may increase deaths or it may not. Much of this is contingent upon how proposed increases to militarized enforcement (something we take as inevitable for the purposes of this article) are actually manifested on the ground. However, if the past is any indication of the future, increased border militarization is likely to lead to an increase in migrant deaths and escalated violence perpetrated by human smugglers and border bandits known as *bajadores* (Slack and Whiteford 2011, Nevins 2005). This occurs not only through formal policies such as the funneling of people into remote and dangerous zones and increasing the criminal penalties for undocumented migration, but also through informal sets of practices such as rampant abuse and a lack of accountability of U.S. authorities perpetuating such abuses. We contend that the formal and informal practices of enforcement are intimately linked by the centrality of violence in border enforcement strategy.

We begin with a discussion of important definitions and aggregate figures provided by scholars examining border militarization and clandestine migration from Mexico before proceeding to our theoretical orientation on violence, death, and the interwoven traumas produced through state practices. After a discussion of our methodology, we present our findings, which draw on two research projects: a border-wide post-deportation survey and a series of in-depth interviews with migrants who had returned to their hometowns in Puebla, Mexico. We examine the dangers of the crossing experience through different border sectors, the practices and procedures of U.S. authorities that create different forms of violence for undocumented migrants, and the trauma produced for families waiting on family members that may never return.

### **An Increasingly Militarized Border**

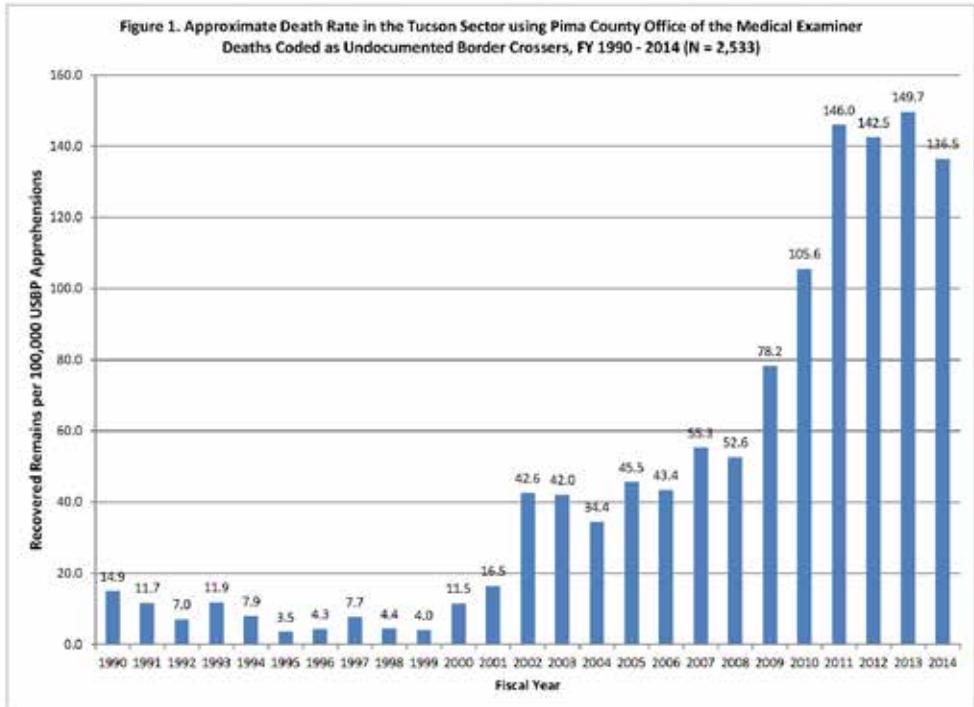
Unprecedented investment by the United States in immigration and border enforcement has transformed the region. Timothy Dunn used the term militarization to describe enhanced border policing with the specific aim of highlighting “the use of military rhetoric and ideology, as well as military tactics, strategy, technology, equipment and forces” which in turn conflicts with the human rights of border crossers and residents

(Dunn 1996: 3). U.S. border militarization efforts of the 1990s and early 2000s—often described by scholars as the Gatekeeper Era—have received substantial attention in the literature (Dunn 1996; Andreas 2000). But less attention has been given to the more recent exponential increase in resources allocated to enforce the U.S.-Mexico border. Funding for the Secure Border Initiative increased from \$38 million in 2005 to \$800 million in 2010, totaling almost \$4.5 trillion in spending over this time period (GAO 2010). Political discourse in Congress and in mainstream media frames security as almost synonymous with militarization, stressing that a secure border is one that necessitates more equipment, agents, and fortifications. However, academics have problematized the militarization-securitization nexus, aiming to refocus the concept of security on an inclusive understanding of human life (Fukuda-Parr and Messineo 2012, Kaldor 2007, Kaldor, Martin, and Selchow 2007). The concept of “human security” is an attempt to distance understandings of security from those of war by focusing explicitly on the range of needs for a healthy, productive life that is free from direct violence perpetuated by others, including agents of the state. While the human security framework has grown in popularity among European academics, emphasizing the rights to local, sustainable, and inclusive frameworks for livelihoods, this project has largely been neglected in the United States due to the prevalence of post-September 11, 2001 frameworks for militarized security (Hale 2008; For an exception, see the relatively new policy-oriented *Journal of Migration and Human Security* edited by the Center for Migration Studies of New York). However, aside from human security, others use feminist geopolitics as a way to examine how “security” is an entirely subjective concept, creating insecurity and violence for some, while protecting the rights of the powerful, in a racialized and gendered manner (Boyce and Williams 2012). It is important to acknowledge that other formulations of secure borderlands could exist beyond the militarized version we see on Mexico’s northern border and the increasingly closed borders of the European Union.

Despite the fact that no U.S. politician has been able to adequately describe what constitutes a “secure border,”<sup>23</sup> in 2010 the United States spent \$17.1 billion on border enforcement, with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) receiving \$5.8 billion and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) receiving \$11.3 billion (DHS 2013). The construction of the border fence between 2006 and 2010 cost taxpayers between \$3.9 million to \$16 million per mile for a total of \$2.4 billion (Cornelius 2011). The 2010 deployment of 1,299 National Guard troops on the U.S.-Mexico border by President Obama cost taxpayers \$660 million dollars before they were withdrawn in 2011 (Meissner *et al.* 2013). In a short time the U.S.-Mexico border changed from relatively calm, highly interconnected border cities into a heavily patrolled border with more than 20,000 USBP agents, long wait times, new entry and exit requirements, and a variety of border barriers monitored by drones and other high-tech devices (Boyce 2015).

A well-developed literature links border militarization to the increase in deaths at the border. While scholars have noted that the border crossing experience was lethal prior to the 1990s, enforcement practices drastically changed the distribution of mortality, concentrating it in southern Arizona (Eschbach *et al.* 1999). Others note that migrant deaths have increased exponentially since the early 2000s, particularly in southern Arizona and South Texas (Nevins and Aizeki 2008, Nevins 2002, Cornelius 2005, Cornelius and

Lewis 2007, Andreas 2000, Eschbach *et al.* 1999, Hagan 2008, Rodríguez 2004, Martínez *et al.* 2014, Rodríguez and Hagan 2004). As illustrated in Figure 1 (below), these trends have continued unabated in southern Arizona, with the rate of death remaining high even as apprehensions have slowed in recent years. Figure 1 also illustrates the notable increase in migrant death rates in the area after the implementation of the “prevention through deterrence” strategy of the mid-1990s and early 2000s (See Martínez forthcoming for a full discussion).



Others have linked economic and social factors to a system of enforcement that has done little to stem overall flows or deter future crossers (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002, Fernandez-Kelly and Massey 2007, Durand and Massey 2004, Cornelius and Lewis 2007, Heyman 2008). Although scholars have long disproven the immigration-crime nexus, (Orrenius and Coronado 2005) security and crime, notably through the guise of the “War on Terror” and the “War on Drugs,” continue to drive rationales for channeling money into border enforcement.

In addition to the military equipment employed, there are several other ways in which the border has become increasingly militarized according to former USBP agents (Miller 2014). First, the increased hiring of former military personnel as USBP agents has changed the organizational culture of the agency. One problem with this approach is that military forces are trained to engage enemy combatants. But undocumented migrants are not enemy combatants. USBP officers commonly refer to migrants as “tonks.” This is a derogatory term referring to the sound of large flashlights striking migrants’ heads. This not only dehumanizes migrants, but also normalizes and naturalizes acts of physical abuse

(Heyman 2004). Second, politically-laden idioms such as the “War on Drugs,” “War on Terror,” and “war to control the border” have transformed the border debate from one about sensible immigration to one about protecting the state from “alien invaders” as a military mandate.

CBP officials frequently evoke images of terrorists and foreign threats materializing at the U.S.-Mexico border. While this has occurred most recently with an unsubstantiated claim by Judicial Watch of an Islamic State training camp near Ciudad Juárez along the Texas border with Mexico (JudicialWatch 2015), it has a longer and more entrenched history within the organization. In fact, the mission statement for CBP does not mention immigration at all, but rather focuses explicitly on terrorism. As stated on the CBP website, their mission is “[t]o safeguard America’s borders thereby protecting the public from dangerous people and materials...We protect the American people against terrorists and the instruments of terror” (CBP 2015). The disconnect between the day-to-day activities of CBP officials and their stated mission is one of our principle areas of concern. The only way to fulfill this mission is by a steadfast assertion that undocumented migrants are dangerous people and synonymous with terrorists, despite a widespread understanding that migrants are largely driven by economic and family-oriented factors. This rationale reinforces the need, or, at the very least, tolerance for violence against migrants as an acceptable or necessary aspect of border enforcement.

A final dimension of militarization involves the institutional rearrangement of CBP. The Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS), the former umbrella organization for CBP, was dissolved in November of 2002 with the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). This led to a drastic change in the strategic plan for border security. Instead of relying on the natural physical hazards of the desert and physical barriers—including the border wall and Border Patrol check points—to deter immigrants, the inauguration of the Consequence Delivery System (CDS) in 2011 marked a new era of enforcement (Martínez and Slack 2013). This set of practices includes escalating punishments for undocumented migrants apprehended along the southern border and plays a key role in the “whole of government” approach that involves all levels of law enforcement across several agencies in immigration enforcement (De Genova and Puetz 2010). This has led, among other things, to local law enforcement and other officials acting as immigration authorities, arresting and holding people for alleged immigration violations (Coleman and Kocher 2011), a mass trial system called Operation Streamline (Lydgate 2010), and the lateral repatriation of people who cross in one sector into another part of the border (De León 2013). However, the overarching result of these programs, largely stemming from Operation Streamline, has been increased incarceration rates and lengths of sentences for immigration offenders (Martínez and Slack 2013, Lydgate 2010). This has fundamentally reshaped how migrants experience the border, as well as conveniently framed an ever-expanding majority as “criminal aliens” due to the changes in prosecution brought about by Operation Streamline.

### **Theoretical Orientation**

While much of the critical scholarship on violence comes from medical anthropology, geographers have recently begun to address this issue as well (Gregory

and Pred 2007, Garmany 2011, Chatterjee 2009, Slack 2015). Important questions regarding the role of violence in forming state practices, shaping boundaries, and creating categories of exclusion are vital to understanding current border enforcement practice in the United States. From our perspective, the spectrum of violence at the border includes the institutional violence that causes border-crossing deaths through policies designed to funnel people into deadly terrain (Martínez *et al.* 2014), as well as informal types of migrant abuse by *bajadores* (border bandits), drug trafficking organizations, and authorities from the United States and Mexico. While all these phenomena are inextricably linked to an increasingly militarized border region, our goal for this article is to focus on the direct aspects of border enforcement strategies and practices that will likely be exacerbated by increased border enforcement measures.

Debates about the significance of violence have been particularly profound in medical anthropology because of the focus on understanding how violence impacts life, death, and the overall life-outcomes available to people (Galtung 1969). Researchers increasingly employed the concept of structural violence in the mid-1990s to understand the nature of violence beyond physical blows and pain inflicted by instruments of war (Arendt 1970). Structural violence allows scholars to examine exactly how inequalities lead to death from preventable illnesses or the lack of treatment that can maim or limit one's future capacities (Farmer 1996, 2003). The recognition that violence is present even in times of peace has allowed scholars to understand the more insidious forms that violence takes, which are often neglected because of the visible and shocking nature of conflict and direct state violence (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004). There is a well-developed literature in political ecology addressing violence and the environment, explaining how exclusionary, capitalist appropriation of the environment generally involves the use of force and violence to displace and disenfranchise people (Watts 2013, Peluso and Watts 2001, Le Billon 2001). Other scholars address the political geography of violence and its power to shape space and place (Gregory and Pred 2007, Garmany 2011, Chatterjee 2009, Slack 2015). James Tyner attempts to situate direct interpersonal violence within social structures of gender and race "to understand how violence informs both space and place and, concomitantly, how, space and place inform violence" (Tyner 2012: 5). These approaches necessitate an understanding of the psychological impacts of trauma (Fassin and Rechtman 2009, Robben and Suarez-Orozco 2000), the often overlooked, everyday nature of violence within certain societies (Scheper-Hughes 1992, Bourgois 2009), and the symbolic nature of violence, as an internalized, rationalized product of people's marginality within society as a whole (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, Bourdieu 2001). Examining the different types of violence that people experience in their attempts to cross the border, upon apprehension, during incarceration, and ultimately, when returned to Mexico makes visible the routinized abuse of a marginalized population through the militarized logic of security. However, violence is an inherently uneven political phenomenon, one that organizes space. Because our research was conducted in different geographic regions along the U.S. Mexico border, we are able to trace these patterns and show how specific border zones become prioritized and therefore are subject to escalated violence, while others are ignored, which leads to a more benign enforcement process. A border, especially Mexico's northern border, is not one homogenous region but is intersected by different physical

and political boundaries. The following sections outline these findings, starting with our research methodology.

## Research Methodology

The data discussed in this paper come from two independent yet complementary projects: Wave II of the Migrant Border Crossing Study (MBCS) and the Economic Crisis and Response in Migrant Communities in Puebla Study, hereinafter referred to as the Puebla study. The MBCS is based on 1,110 surveys with a random sample of recently deported Mexican migrants (Slack *et al.* 2013). The surveys were conducted in five Mexican border cities: Tijuana, Mexicali, Nogales, Ciudad Juárez, and Nuevo Laredo. These cities are located across the border from five of the nine USBP Sectors, although respondents had crossed through all southern border sectors (See Figure 1). Moreover, sixty-six percent of all deportations to Mexico occurred in these cities. Surveys were also completed in Mexico City among people who had participated in the Mexican Interior Repatriation Program (MIRP), which consists of flights from Arizona to Mexico City during the summer months. MBCS participants were randomly selected in migrant shelters and ports of entry. In order to be eligible to participate, respondents must have crossed the border without any form of documentation in the past decade (post-September 11, 2001) and have been repatriated/deported to Mexico within a month prior to being interviewed. We gathered data on migrants' experiences with violence at the hands of drug trafficking organizations, *bajadores*, kidnappers, USBP, and detention officials. The data are weighted using repatriation statistics from the Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM) and are generalizable to migrants deported to these cities during the study time period.

In the Puebla study, researchers conducted 120 in-depth interviews in four communities in Puebla, Mexico, with undocumented migrants who returned to their hometowns between 2007 and 2010. While the study originally focused on the impact of economic crisis on migratory flows, border violence emerged as a major theme in the interviews, revealing negative physical and psychological health effects from the violence people experienced during their journey. Together these two studies document the various forms of violence among one of North America's most vulnerable populations—undocumented Mexican migrants.

## Demographic Profile

While scholars have noted an increase in female migration (O'Leary 2009, Staudt 2009), data show that 86 percent of people apprehended (USBP 2013b) and 90 percent of those deported to Mexico in 2012 were male (INM 2013). These figures are consistent with estimates gathered through the MBCS, with about 85 percent of the sample being male. Overall, a typical respondent in the MBCS can be described as a male, near the age of 31, with eight years of formal education and about \$280 USD in monthly household income before his most recent crossing attempt. Among those with previous living and working experience in the United States, well over 90 percent were employed last time they were in the country, and 42 percent were the sole income provider for their household. Of 120 migrants interviewed in the Puebla study, 12 were deported; only one deportee was

female. Approximately a quarter of the migrants experienced violence along the border or hardships resulting from border militarization.

### **Violent Journeys: The Contemporary Crossing Experience**

In terms of their prior migration experience, MBCS respondents can be described as having, on average, 4.8 crossing attempts, with 2.9 prior apprehensions. About two thirds had been apprehended by the USBP while attempting to cross, and the remaining 30 percent managed to successfully arrive at their destination, but were apprehended later by local law enforcement officials. Just over 70 percent had relied on a *coyote* or human smuggler to get into the United States, agreeing to pay a median of \$2,500 USD for their services. Respondents walked for more than two days through harsh conditions along the border before either being apprehended by U.S. authorities or being picked up by someone helping them cross the border. Thirty-nine percent ran out of water during their trip, and 31 percent ran out of food. Temperatures along the border, particularly in the Sonoran Desert where almost half of all apprehensions occurred during the study period, frequently reach 110 degrees Fahrenheit (43 C) during the summer and drop well below freezing at night (0 C) during winter months. For example, the following vignette represents a common experience for many undocumented migrants:

Andrés food ran out on the third day of a six-day trek through the desert. He rationed his only bottle of water for the remainder of the journey. On the final day, the USBP chased the group, scattering and separating the migrants. Augustín avoided capture, but fell and twisted his knee badly during the pursuit. He painfully limped for several hours to reach the pick-up point. Using a cell phone, he called the coyote who instructed him to wait for a vehicle. More than a day passed with no signs of his ride; then the cell phone battery died, cutting him off from the guide. Weak and hopeless, Augustín staggered along the highway for an hour in broad daylight, trying to flag down drivers who might have something to drink. Eventually a USBP truck stopped, gave him water and took him into custody. Augustín reflected on how fortunate he had been to be near the highway when the pernicious effects of dehydration set in. (Andrés, Puebla study, interview June 19, 2011)

While this interview illustrates a typical experience of dangerous desert crossings, there has been notable controversy around USBP not responding to migrants actively searching for their help. This has been a frequent topic of conversation in our interviews, as respondents report being left by the road for hours even after making contact with agents, and was also explored in depth by the award winning, *Need to Know* documentary on PBS (Frey 2013).

Enforcement practices that push people into physically dangerous border terrain have killed thousands of people. The concept of structural violence is frequently deployed to understand how the state, while not directly inflicting violence upon people, is nonetheless creating structural conditions that lead to death and increased mortality (Martínez *et al.* 2014, Holmes 2013, Nevins and Aizeki 2008a). According to the U.S. Border Patrol, four hundred sixty-three migrants were found deceased along the border

in 2012 alone (USBP 2013a). In southern Arizona the remains of over 2,100 migrants have been recovered since 2000, 6 percent of whom were children under the age of 18 (Martínez *et al.* 2013). Even more disturbing, many bodies are never recovered due to the extreme isolation of areas along the border. Martínez and colleagues found that nearly 34 percent of migrant remains recovered in southern Arizona between 1990 and 2012 remained unidentified. In a similar vein, the Missing Migrants Project, led by Robin Reineke of the Tucson, AZ-based *Colibrí Center for Human Rights*, has compiled a database with over 1,500 missing persons reports from the families of undocumented border crossers (Martínez *et al.* 2014). This has left thousands of family members in Mexico, Central America, and in the United States to deal with an agonizing sense of “ambiguous loss” of loved ones (Boss 1999, Boss 2002). Not finding a loved one’s remains and the torture of not having a definitive answer about what happened to a loved one creates its own set of emotional and psychological issues for family members of the missing.

Jorge and Leo’s stories suggest how easy it has become for migrants to be abandoned in the Arizona-Sonora desert.

The coyote told [the three female migrants] if you don’t keep going, you’re not going to make it. He gave them drugs to help them keep walking all day. And well, they didn’t make it. The coyote left them in the desert. They were abandoned in the desert. (Puebla study, Jorge, June 10, 2011)

Leo had trouble sleeping for months after meeting a man in an Arizona “safe house” who cried inconsolably because coyotes left his snake-bitten nephew in the desert. The guides would not return the man to the area. (Puebla study, Leo, June 6, 2011)

While the number of deaths along the border remains high despite decreases in migrant flows, it appears that border militarization has once again re-arranged this lethal geography. Although Arizona became the principal undocumented crossing point along the border in the mid-1990s (Andreas 2000), there has been a recent increase in crossings through South Texas, which have led to increased fatalities in an area that previously received little attention from activists, and the USBP, as evidence by the significantly greater number of agents currently stationed in the Tucson Sector (Martínez *et al.* 2014). This shift can be explained by two interrelated factors. The first is the relative buildup of border enforcement in Southern Arizona. There are over 4,000 USBP agents in the Tucson sector alone, up from 300 in agents in 1992 (USBP 2013b). Data suggest that the danger of crossing through the remote Arizona desert has been compounded by the costs as well as the likelihood of failure over the past decade (Slack *et al.* 2015). The second contributing factor is the recent increase in Central American migration. The journey to the South Texas border is at least two weeks shorter than to the Arizona border because one must travel thousands of miles farther to the west and north. This has caused an influx of migrants into a part of the border with significantly less enforcement, but a deceptively deadly climate.

Table 1. Context of Respondents' Most Recent Crossing Experience

MBCS Survey Question	% / Mean Among All Respondents		% / Mean Among Males		% / Mean Among Females		Difference
	%	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean	
Total lifetime crossing attempts?	4.8	attempts	5.2	attempts	2.9	attempts	(2.3 attempts)
Total lifetime apprehensions?	2.9	apprehensions	3.2	apprehensions	1.7	apprehensions	(1.5 apprehensions)
First-time crossers?	16.6%		14.5%		26.2%		(11.7%)***
Had previously crossed or attempted to cross the border?	83.4%		85.5%		73.8%		(11.7%)***
Used a <i> coyote </i> or guide to cross the border?	71.7%		69.1%		84.2%		(15.1%)***
Cost of <i> coyote </i> (in US dollars)?	\$2,400		\$2,289		\$2,902		(\$613)***
Number of days walking through the desert?	2.3	days	2.4	days	1.8	days	(0.6 days)**
Ran out of water?	39.2%		40.1%		34.4%		(5.6%)
Ran out of food?	30.7%		31.8%		25.0%		(6.8%)+
<b>Migrant Deaths</b>							
Known migrant deaths border-wide, FY 2012	463		-		-		-
Known migrant deaths in southern Arizona, FY 2012 <sup>1</sup>	171		137		14		-

1. The biological sex of 10 decedents was unknown due to advanced decomposition or skeletalization.

N = 1,110

Notes: +p < 0.10, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001 indicate the difference is statistically significant

Source: *Migrant Border Crossing Study, Wave II*

Table 2. Comparison of Crossing Experience by U.S. Border Patrol Sector (West to East)

Survey Question	San Diego (N = 167)		El Centro (N = 86)		Tucson (N = 440)		El Paso (N = 134)		Laredo (N = 154)		Rio Grande (N = 72)	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Days traveled?	1.73	2.46	1.51	1.49	3.32	2.84	1.05	2.65	1.73	1.80	1.40	1.64
Successful crossing?	0.37	0.48	0.22	0.42	0.21	0.41	0.24	0.43	0.51	0.50	0.54	0.50
Run out of water?	0.45	0.50	0.41	0.49	0.48	0.50	0.15	0.35	0.34	0.48	0.28	0.45
Run out of food?	0.47	0.50	0.29	0.46	0.39	0.49	0.14	0.35	0.15	0.36	0.16	0.37
Used a coyote or guide?	0.57	0.50	0.65	0.48	0.76	0.43	0.64	0.48	0.84	0.37	0.83	0.38
Abandoned by group?	0.11	0.32	0.13	0.33	0.19	0.39	0.11	0.32	0.07	0.25	0.11	0.31
Group abandoned others?	0.18	0.39	0.11	0.32	0.22	0.41	0.11	0.32	0.08	0.27	0.15	0.36
Physical abuse by US authorities?	0.18	0.39	0.08	0.28	0.11	0.32	0.04	0.19	0.09	0.29	0.11	0.32
Verbal abuse by US authorities?	0.35	0.48	0.11	0.31	0.30	0.46	0.25	0.44	0.06	0.23	0.11	0.32

Notes: All associations are statistically significant beyond the 0.005-level. Yuma, Big Bend, and Del Rio sectors omitted due to low number of observations  
 N = 1053

Source: *Migrant Border Crossing Study, Wave II*

Table 2 compares the experiences of individuals who crossed in different border zones. The journey through the Tucson desert is by far the most arduous with a mean of 3.3 days crossing as compared to 1.7 through Tijuana and Nuevo Laredo. Nearly half of all respondents report running out of water and 39 percent report running out of food on this journey. The Tucson sector also exhibits the highest level of abandonment in the desert (either of the respondent or another member of their group), a factor that no doubt contributes to the historically high number of deaths in this region. In contrast the sectors along South Texas show much lower levels of abuse by U.S. authorities, but the highest percentage of respondents who used a *coyote*, suggesting either a greater amount of control by organized crime (Izcarra Palacios 2012), or a lack of previous knowledge of the region. These differences highlight the uneven nature of militarization across the border; immigration enforcement was prioritized in Southern Arizona, escalating violence in that sector, while South Texas received less impetus for control, leading to a relatively lower rate of abuses.

### **U.S. Authority Abuse**

When trying to understand the role of direct state violence committed by U.S. authorities, we also need to understand its regional variations. There are distinct patterns that emerge when investigating physical and verbal abuse, as well as abuses of due process such as the removal of personal items. If this violence is simply a routine aspect of the apprehension process, then why is there such variance across regions? A constant refusal to investigate fatal instances or share documentation with the public in regard to these cases highlights the punitive nature of the USBP, an institution long-endowed with a sense of entitlement and exceptionality (Heyman 2004). While a hesitance to regulate and investigate misconduct or provide public information is common to most bureaucracies, scholars have argued that the unique political circumstances of the U.S.-Mexico border exacerbate this situation.

Lack of transparency and accountability continues to be a widespread problem within CBP and other authorities involved with enforcing immigration (e.g., ICE, USBP and many police departments). One of the challenges is determining which abuses stem from day-to-day practices by individual officers versus organizational policies that prevent reporting or reprimanding infractions. The USBP has tripled in size since 2004 to 20,863 agents as of fiscal year (FY) 2014 (CBP 2015). Amendments to S.744 would once again expand CBP, nearly doubling its current staffing numbers. The USBP is now the largest police force in the United States. This rapid expansion has raised concerns about training, especially in light of abuses. As noted in table 3, 10 percent of migrants report some form of physical abuse during their last apprehension and one in five report verbal abuse. Another report by the non-governmental organization No More Deaths found a physical abuse rate of 10 percent (NMD 2011), which has also been corroborated in a study of Central American deportees to El Salvador which also reported a physical abuse rate of about 20 percent during the apprehension process and 10 percent during detention (Phillips, Hagan, and Rodriguez 2006). While this rate may not seem alarming, we emphasize that the USBP has apprehended approximately 400,000 people each year over the past several years. And many individuals cross multiple times, increasing the likelihood that they will encounter

an abusive situation. Furthermore, this trend has remained consistent over time, indicating that this is a systematic problem. These manifestations of violence help us understand how violence is being used as part of the enforcement toolbox. USBP has for years lamented the propensity of return migration among undocumented border-crossers (Heyman 2001). This led to the “prevention through deterrence” strategy and, more recently, to one that is aimed at delivering a direct “consequence” for undocumented migrants. Overall, this prioritizes pain and suffering as integral to immigration enforcement. We contend that state violence committed against migrants is an extension of this institutional mandate. This helps explain why there have been almost no attempts to limit, reprimand, or curtail this violence. Moreover, it demonstrates that the stated mission of CBP is used to justify violence, providing another way of reinforcing the perceived dangerous and violent nature of undocumented migrants.

Table 3. Mistreatment While in U.S. Custody

Survey Question	% Among All Respondents	% Among Males	% Among Females	Difference
Reported <i>physical abuse</i> by US authorities	10.3%	10.2%	10.6%	(0.4%)
Reported <i>verbal abuse</i> by US authorities	22.8%	21.2%	31.2%	(10.0%)**
DID NOT receive sufficient food while in US custody	44.5%	42.8%	52.2%	(9.4%)*
Needed medical attention while in US custody	23.0%	20.9%	33.9%	(13.0%)***
Needed medical attention AND ask for it <sup>1</sup>	66.8%	69.8%	58.5%	(11.3%)+
Needed medical attention AND ask for it, but DID NOT receive it <sup>2</sup>	37.3%	36.7%	39.5%	(2.8%)

1. N = 268, 2. N = 185

N = 1,110

Note: +p < 0.10, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001 indicate the difference is statistically significant

Source: Migrant Border Crossing Study, Wave 11

A general lack of oversight and transparency has led to numerous complaints against USBP, with no available criteria for understanding how and when agents are allowed to use force (Martínez, Cantor, and Ewing 2014). Furthermore, the 43 documented cases of lethal force by USBP, 15 of which were U.S. citizens between 2005 and 2013 (Nevins 2014), as well as other cases of severe beatings have enraged border communities and devastated families. In none of these cases are agents known to have faced any consequences (Ortega and O’Dell 2013). The shooting of 16 year old Jose Antonio Elena Rodriguez on October 10, 2012 in Nogales, Sonora sparked intense outrage on both sides of the border. Autopsy reports show that he was shot between eight and eleven times in the back, while he was lying on the ground. Officials reported that there was suspected drug trafficking in the area and later, that rocks were thrown, a frequent justification for use of lethal force. Surveillance video of the incident has not been released (Woodhouse 2013). And, while an internal investigation cleared all agents of culpability, USBP agent Lonnie Schwartz was indicted for second-degree murder on October 9th, 2015, three years after the shooting (Burnett 2015). This is the first indictment of a border patrol agent who shot into Mexico at a suspect, despite similar instances like the shooting of Sergio Adrian Hernández Güereca in Ciudad Juárez where judges ruled that people in Mexico are not protected by the U.S. Constitution. (Tanfani *et al.* 2015)

### **CBP: A Rogue Agency?**

Attempts to understand the centrality of violence in shaping and enacting border enforcement measures needs to take into account the disconnect between official policies and material practices on the border. A congressional order, prompted by the high profile death of Anastasio Hernandez, a migrant who was filmed being beaten and tazed to death at the San Ysidro port of entry, mandated external review of CBP's use of force protocols. The Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) conducted an external review of CBP but the final report was released in redacted form, with officials from CBP accepting only the most limited suggestions and subsequently redacting the most damning criticisms. However, a non-redacted version was leaked several months later. The redacted passages were highly critical of current procedures, namely shooting at rock throwers, and people driving cars, rather than first attempting to step out of harm's way. The suggestion that agents not step in front of vehicles to shoot at the driver were summarily rejected stating that drug trafficking organizations would now try to run them over if they knew that U.S. authorities could not fire (Bennet 2014). This report, as well as other complaints about enforcement procedures, directly challenges assertions by USBP press secretaries that problems are the results of "a few bad-apples" rather than the institutional mandate of immigration enforcement. The lack of official and explicit ways of dealing with violence perpetrated by agents against a highly vulnerable population is emblematic of the current approach to enforcement.

One report found that 97 percent of all complaints against CBP agents result in no action taken, suggesting that this multi-billion dollar agency has no formal system for receiving and addressing complaints (Martínez, Cantor, and Ewing 2014). Other documents have shown that there is a pervasive problem of alcohol abuse among agents leading to an average of two alcohol related arrests per week within CBP (Blacher 2013). When the non-redacted version of the congressionally commissioned PERF report was finally leaked (Bennett 2014), a revised statement was issued by USBP Chief Mike Fisher acquiescing to a reassessment of their use of force doctrine (Bennet 2014). Moreover, the much sought after use of force manual was quietly leaked by the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR), and to the surprise of the activist community, contained no mention of rock throwers (Becker and Schulz 2014). The only truly remarkable thing about the use of force manual is the fact that CBP refused to release it. The document does not address the use of lethal force against rock throwers or other common practices by border patrol. While the Use of Force Manual has since been updated, the most disturbing problem is that the practices of this multi-billion dollar agency do not relate to any official policy.

The documented evidence of abuses and irregularities shows the blurred line between institutional policies and practices, suggesting that these violent actions are not in fact aberrations, but part of the systemic process of border and immigration enforcement. It is important to note however, that not everyone reports negative experiences with USBP (see Table 4). Many of those who get lost in the desert, for example, express gratitude at being saved by USBP. The vast range in people's experiences with USBP helps further contextualize that this is not an issue that can be reduced to individual behaviors from bad faith actors. Instead, this is a systemic, institutional problem, one directly produced by the militarization occurring along the border and its accompanying security discourse

represented by CBP's mission statement, which constructs undocumented migrants as terrorists and justifies the violence against them.

**Table 4. Treatment While in US Custody**

	Percent
<b>"In general, how were you treated by US immigration officials during your most recent encounter with them?"</b>	
EVERYONE treated me with respect	28%
THE MAJORITY treated me with respect	30%
ABOUT HALF treated me with respect	28%
The majority DID NOT treat me with respect	9%
NO ONE treated me with respect	5%

*Source: Migrant Border Crossing Study, Wave II (N = 1,110), weighted data*

### **Border Violence and Collective Trauma in Sending Communities**

The effects of this militarization and violence have far-reaching impacts, not limited to solely to those migrating. Before the border buildup began in the mid-1990s and escalated post-September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, researchers often reported that informants viewed the border-crossing process as a rite of passage or coming-of-age event, especially for young males: a somewhat difficult, occasionally dangerous event that helped one gain social status back home (Spener 2009, Brigden and Vogt 2014, Dunn 2009, 1996, Andreas 2000, Kandel and Massey 2002). However, the Puebla study suggests that this view is changing because of the accumulation of migrants' violent border experiences that increase their sense of the border as chaotic, dangerous, and unpredictable (Lee 2014). Accounts of run-ins with *bajadores*, *coyotes* that abuse or abandon migrants, and prolonged detentions followed by deportation travel quickly through migrants' hometowns, heightening migrants' and their families' sense of vulnerability. Even if a person did not experience the violence directly, what happened to family members and friends is internalized, forms painful memories and sows fear and frustration in the community. The border, which has always been viewed as a risk, is seen as increasingly impenetrable and dangerous. "I think you just have to definitively say good bye to your family if you decide to go [to the United States]," Ignacio declared, preparing both himself and his family for the worst (Puebla study, June 23, 2011).

Border violence produces not only individual trauma but also collective trauma, through the on-going physical and psychological assaults on people's ability to maintain social bonds and a sense of community (Erikson 1994, Robben and Suarez-Orozco 2000, Suarez-Orozco 2002). Trauma is one product of the structural violence created out of quotidian injustices at the border and perpetrated on marginalized populations simply hoping to improve their chances to distance themselves from pernicious poverty. Migrant families, long divided by borders, now agonize even more over whether or not spouses and children should accompany their families across the border for a permanent relocation. While considerations of the economic costs of maintaining one's family in the north and the impact of U.S. culture on children's socialization continue to be important, now

parents must face an increased possibility that their children will witness or experience violent acts in the border region. Stories of child kidnappings and parents and children being separated during the crossing are especially terrifying. Some parents simply decide that their children will remain in Mexico despite the problems that long-term separation has on family and community dynamics (Suarez-Orozco 2002), including depression and anxiety among parents and children and behavioral problems in young and adolescent children (Cavazos-Rehg, Zayas, and Spitznagel 2007). To avoid or ameliorate these problems, migrants cited family reunification as the most important reason for return to Puebla, despite the fact they knew they would have to face a dangerous border if they were to migrate in the future.

## Conclusion

Violence, whether it is structural or directly perpetrated by the state has become central to the militarized strategy for border enforcement. With the proposed increases to border security we need to disentangle the different practices that make up immigration enforcement to determine what aspects are causing which specific types of violence. We found that the Tucson sector, which has seen the largest build-up of the USBP in the past two decades, also has the highest levels of violence in terms of abuse by U.S. authorities and, the most border deaths over the past decade. However, as an increasing number of Central Americans continue to cross through South Texas, what will be the results of a shift in border build-up to this region? The high death toll in South Texas over the past few years shows how a strategy of neglect and isolation is also highly lethal. This does not explain the lower levels of reported abuse in this region. With additional agents and resources arriving in South Texas, will levels of abuse and violence accompany this escalation? Continued research will be required to understand the intraregional variations in border militarization and how these practices produce and manage different forms of violence.

Previous research on migration has tended to obscure geographical variations by taking a meta approach to the border as a geopolitical phenomenon, one that can conveniently be relocated or expanded (Gregory 2011). Or, conversely, empirical studies have had difficulty connecting across border regions and localized studies in one area are presented as representational of some sort of universal border politic (see Johnson *et al.* 2011 for a full discussion). This is understandable as working along the entire border is extremely difficult, not only because transportation between cities is limited, but also because of the complicated safety situation in each location. Researchers concerned with empirical studies of migration have run into the material and institutional challenges of drug violence on the border. This leaves many unanswered questions: How does the institutional mission and attitude shape abuse in different sectors? How do enforcement protocols lead to different forms of violence such as kidnapping by coyotes and gangs (Slack 2015)? Moreover, with the increases in militarization on the Mexican side of the border, how has it reshaped patterns of violence for those moving through this terrain? Future research needs to be done to determine how drug related violence in Mexico reshaped the geography of migration as a whole.

For many in the political sphere, “secure” is synonymous with militarized, but this is not true for the majority of the people who live on the border. Harassment, long lines and impediments for social and economic activities contradicts what a “human security” framework for the border would require (Hale 2008, Kaldor, Martin, and Selchow 2007). Enforcement actions such as the “Consequence Delivery System” increase the punishments and vulnerability of people looking for work or to reunite with family, and contribute to twisting the logic of border enforcement away from economic and family based migration, into an anti-terrorism mission. Moreover, the very fact that they are applied with such variation across the border region, as evidenced by wide variations in abuses among border patrol sectors, shows the ad hoc nature of this multi-billion dollar agency. It is hard to fathom how a militarized border can ever result in greater security. Rather, by understanding the role of public policy and institutional frailty in structuring geographies of violence, we can clearly see how militarization produces pain, death and trauma in the border region.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For this article we use the terms “undocumented” and “migrants” specifically because the sample we interview for this article as part of the MBCS must have crossed the border without proper documentation. Other scholars have noted that there are complexities of legality within the population of immigrants and therefore use the term unauthorized. Because of our methodological approach, this distinction does not apply. We also use the term “migrant” instead of immigrant to denote the different motivations present within the population. Some intend to immigrate permanently, while others simply plan on migrating to work for a specific period of time. However, we also discuss various “immigration authorities” in the United States, as the official perspective does not distinguish these intentions. Moreover, these institutions are officially titled immigration authorities.

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<sup>3</sup> Discussions about the need to define a secure border led to the proposal of a metric (turnbacks + apprehensions) / (Got aways + turn backs + apprehensions). However, a lack of standardized data, the feasibility in documenting “turnbacks” (i.e., when groups turn around and return to Mexico) or “got aways” (especially because this implies that everyone crossing the border was being tracked at some point) and no agreement on what level this would take (GAO 2013).

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