Local Resident Perceptions of Border Security Dynamics: Are Citizens Safe or Intimidated?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to explore perceptions of border security amongst residents of Grand Island, New York, living on the Canada – United States (U.S.) border (N194). The author found that perceptions of border security issues have softened a bit since the 2006 survey. In 2006, there were generally heightened feelings that the border between Canada and the U.S. along the Niagara River was a dangerous place. The author’s 2012 survey reveals that fewer people feel as strongly about the subject as they did in 2006. In 2012, many men shifted from the strongest feelings that the border was not very dangerous (5) to a more muted not dangerous (4). Many men shifted to their perception of this border region as slightly more dangerous than in 2006. Women, many of whom felt that the border was dangerous, shifted to a more muted neutral or softer position. Women were found to have changed their personal safety habits more frequently than men.

Keywords: Border Patrol, Canada – USA Border, Risk Perception, Terrorism, Uncertainty

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, securing the U.S. borders has become a higher priority of the U.S. government. The U.S. Customs and Border Protection division of the Department of Homeland Security has roughly quadrupled staffing over the past two decades and it has doubled staffing since 2001 (United States Customs and Border Protection 2011).

The increased presence of United States Border Patrol (USBP) personnel is visible to the community, and it can feel intimidating. In order to better understand the dynamic at play between residents of the border and law enforcement protecting the border, a survey of border residents was sponsored by the USBP Buffalo Sector to study border residents’ perceptions of border security.

Statement of the Problem

This study focuses upon residents’ perceptions of safety, and law enforcement’s response to border threats. USBP is interested in understanding and responding to the public’s perceptions of their work, ambient levels of safety, and engaging in community outreach.

Residents wonder if the presence of multiple police and paramilitary forces monitoring the international border with Canada from cars, boats, helicopters, camera towers, etc… is worth the expense when the area is relatively tranquil.

The USBP is interested in working with academics to ensure a more objective review.

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of the local conditions is designed; and, so they engaged the author to develop a simple survey. The results of the survey were analyzed and documented in this article.

The Location of the Border

The northern border between the United States and Canada is thousands of miles long and is largely unguarded. The Western New York and Southern Ontario region of the Canada – U.S. border is one of the most populated areas. The international border in this region lies in Lakes Erie and Ontario, as well as the Niagara River. There are four auto crossings and two train bridges across the Niagara River between Ontario and New York State. Grand Island lies in the upper Niagara River, just north of Buffalo, New York, and south of Niagara Falls. The named river in reference to the Niagara is a misnomer because the body of water is, by definition, a strait. The West River Parkway is a strip of land controlled by New York State Department of Parks and Recreation, and it follows the west branch of the Niagara River in Erie County, New York. See Maps 1 to 3 (Figures 1-3).

Literature Review

The perception of the riskiness of a place is an amalgam of science and beliefs. Goodwin and Strang (2012) summarize the research methods of multi-cultural and multi-disciplinary perceptions of risk.

England and Simon (2010) wrote a comprehensive review of the geography of fear literature. Pain (2000 & 1991) and Smith (1987) have conducted thorough research on how places are related to crime, or the fear of crime. Smith (1987) succinctly encapsulates the concerns about fear and highlights areas of opportunities:

Victimization surveys indicate that fear of crime is rooted in factors other than the direct experience of victimization. Fear of crime is highest among the elderly, women, and residents of inner city neighborhoods. This fear affects lifestyles by restricting activities outside the home, including participation in community activities designed to reduce crime and increase the quality of community life. The alleviation of the fear of crime requires diverse strategies. Crime reduction is necessary but insufficient to reduce the fear of crime. Complementary measures include

Figure 1. Map 1 Grand Island, NY (Courtesy of US Census Bureau)
Best-Practice of Reducing Risk through a Culture of Total Quality Management

An Integrated Security Governance Framework for Effective PCI DSS Implementation
[www.igi-global.com/article/integrated-security-governance-framework-effective/58982?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/integrated-security-governance-framework-effective/58982?camid=4v1a)