

**Hot, Cold, and Cool Borderlines in the Americas:
Politics of Cooperation and Conflict in Frontiers**

ISA Venture Workshop

Co-Principal Investigators, April 2, 2013

San Francisco

Executive Report

May 2013

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INTRODUCTION

Porous frontiers and weak government capacity have long defined borders and borderlands in the Western Hemisphere. Since the end of the Cold War, globalization has accelerated and increased flows across the Western Hemisphere's borders, within both licit and illicit networks of organized crime. In this globalized context, dynamics of border and boundary disputes have varied substantially across the hemisphere. For instance, a considerable number of Latin American boundary and territorial disputes, including Argentina-Chile, Ecuador-Peru, and El Salvador-Nicaragua, have been settled peacefully. At the same time, previously peaceful borders recently have become the sources of increased interstate and intra-state conflict. The Venezuela-Colombia, Ecuador-Colombia, Guatemala-Belize, and U.S-Mexico borderlines, and the tri-border region of Argentina-Brazil-Paraguay, have witnessed increased conflict over peoples, resources, transactions, and political boundaries. Smugglers, contrabandists, tax evaders, ethnic minorities, indigenous populations, insurgents, and the military all can challenge state capacity and create potential sources of conflict and cross-border cooperation in borderlands. That is, Latin American borders have become "hot"—i.e., highly conflict-ridden—and "cold" in different ways. What explains variation in patterns of border conflict and cooperation? How has democratization, which has swept the hemisphere in recent decades, shaped institutional and political mechanisms for addressing border issues? What are the political, social, and economic consequences of the region's varied border attributes?

This workshop aimed to analyze borders as sites and sources of tensions and harmonies, identifying and exploring the consequences of different dynamics. We were particularly interested in the externalities and unintended consequences that arise when states attempt to dispute, contest, or settle boundary issues.

WORKSHOP METHODOLOGY AND FORMAT

This workshop built on a previous meeting, held at Stanford University in June of 2012, where a group of policymakers and experts convened to analyze border threats relevant to U.S. security interests.¹ The ISA workshop reconvened some of the participants of the 2012 meeting and brought together junior and senior faculty (from assistant professor to full professor) from diverse academic institutions in the U.S., Canada, Israel, and Latin America to present scholarly papers on critical cases regarding border conflict and resolution in the Americas. The experts were selected because of their deep knowledge of specific cases and for their theoretical expertise in international relations and comparative politics. Authors were each asked to write a 10,000 word paper focused on critical border cases.

¹ See Harold Trinkunas, Maia Jaskoski, and Arturo C. Sotomayor, "Borders and Borderlands in the Americas." Project Advanced Systems and Concepts for Countering (PASC) [Report No. 2012 009](#). Center for Contemporary Conflict, Department of National Security Affairs, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, December 2012. Available at: <http://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=723088>

The workshop was organized in three panels, each of which consisted of three authors and one discussant. As a result, participants had ample opportunities to think about, address, and discuss border issues in a comfortable, collegial setting. Paper presentations were limited to 15 minutes to enable the discussant and other participants to provide feedback. In addition, a scheduled working lunch facilitated conversations among participants about their research, contributing to establish an informal network of scholars with common research interests in border questions.

The papers presented draw on insights from international relations and comparative politics, as they focused on borders and borderlands across and within the Americas. The cases analyzed in the workshop varied in terms of scope and method. Some of the papers looked backwards in history to identify trends and recurring phenomena that may offer insight into why some borders and borderlands remain particularly problematic for states in the region. Other papers relied on quantitative data analysis to identify relevant variable that can explain for the absence or recurrence of war within Latin American borders.

BACKGROUND

What are the purposes of a border? From the perspective of this project, borders are much more than geopolitical boundaries delimiting sovereignty. They may contribute to or detract from security; they may serve as a focus for national defense (or not); they can define identities both for national and local populations; they may be cash cows for local or national government, for instance as sites of huge investments in security technologies or the collection of tariff revenues; and they can create arbitrage opportunities for private actors by differentiating jurisdictions and regulating or facilitating flows of money, people, goods, and data.

Although there is no unifying lexicon across the social sciences for studying borders, the existing scholarship generally focuses on four dimensions: (1) borders as an external boundary delimiting sovereignty (geopolitics), (2) borders as a boundary of internal security and the rule of law (policing); (3) borders as an economic space affecting transactions between and among different forms of private and public actors; and (4) borders as an imagined community (identity).² These conceptualizations/approaches tend to draw on evidence from Europe and, to a lesser extent, North America for support, and yet if we look comparatively across the Western Hemisphere, we see a wide range of variation and deviation from standard explanations across a number of the dimensions.

Borders in the Americas present a particularly intriguing set of puzzles because they point out the inherent contradictions between dynamics of economics, security, and identity, and between national border policy interests, on the one hand, and the interests of actors within borderlands on the other. From a geopolitical perspective, there are

² See, for instance, Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, "Theorizing Borders: An Interdisciplinary Perspective," *Geopolitics* 10 (2005): 633-649; and Joachim Blatter, "From 'Spaces of Place' to 'Spaces of Flows'? Territorial and Functional Governance in Cross-border Regions in Europe and North America," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 28, no. 3 (September 2004), 530-548.

multiple international territorial and maritime border disputes in the Western Hemisphere, but few states are willing to fight militarily over contested boundaries.³ On the other hand, from a policing perspective, borders in the Americas have become highly contested. In spite of the lack of interstate wars, or perhaps because of it, conflicts in borders zones are escalating as a result of piracy, border banditry, and smuggling of peoples, drugs, and guns, creating tensions both between countries and among actors in borderlands.⁴ From an economic perspective, increasingly open borders have traditionally been associated with economic and demographic growth. However, opening borders in the Western Hemisphere has tended to undermine border security due to a collateral increase in smuggling, human migration, tax evasion, and trafficking. Finally, unlike borders in Europe and elsewhere, borders in the Western Hemisphere have not always generated strict “us versus them” identities. Instead, in some borderlands inhabitants on either side of the international border have shared ethnic – often indigenous – identities that are stronger than state-centered identities and/or have shared economic and security interests that differ starkly from the interests of the broader national populations.

SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

The following section presents the key findings from this project explaining the evolution and present status of borders and borderlands in the region, organized along the dimensions of international relations and domestic politics.

International factors

One key insight presented during the workshop was a cautionary note about thinking that in earlier times borders in the hemisphere were enforced or enforceable. Historically, smuggling was critical to economic development in countries throughout the Western Hemisphere. U.S. history is full of examples in which smuggling was essential for economic development and survival, such as during the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Civil War, and Prohibition. Other borders where contraband pioneered illicit trading routes and “dark” networks include the Colombia-Venezuela, Ecuador-Colombia, Bolivia-Argentina, Argentina-Brazil-Paraguay, and Chile-Peru borders. Contraband goods in these examples are understood to be licit goods rendered illicit by the form of their transport (smuggling) to avoid high tariffs. Examples include liquor, cigarettes, and domestic durable goods. This form of contraband has been replaced by the smuggling of goods that are illegal in and of themselves (narcotics), rather than because of the status in

³ A large amount of literature explores this empirical puzzle. See, for instance, Arie M. Kacowicz, *The Impact of Norms in International Society: the Latin American Experience, 1881–2001* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005); Miguel Angel Centeno, *Blood and Debt: War and the Nation-State in Latin America* (University Park: Pennsylvania University State Press, 2002); and Felix E. Martin, *Militarist Peace in South America: Conditions for War and Peace* (New York: Palgrave-McMillan, 2006).

⁴ For example, see David R. Mares, *Violent Peace: Militarized Interstate Bargaining in Latin America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); and Jorge I. Domínguez, David Mares, Manuel Orozco, David Scott Palmer, Francisco Rojas Aravena, and Adrés Serbin, *Boundary Disputes in Latin America*, Peaceworks Series (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2002).

which they were transported from one jurisdiction to another.⁵ Many of these goods move along traditional contraband routes used for centuries across the hemisphere.

Though perhaps a hard border may be mythical, nonetheless there are large variations in both border functions and the ability of states to use borders to enact these functions across the Western Hemisphere. This project found that some of the key elements driving this variability in borders were the ability of the state to support capabilities commensurate with its self-defined problem set; the relative legitimacy of border policy regimes within society at the local and national levels; and the state's relative tolerance for border porosity, understood here as the degree to which individuals and organizations are able to evade state policies at the border to achieve their preferred outcome.⁶

Borders not only define the limits of state sovereignty, but are also used as tools by states to manage critical functions, such as the maintenance of security and identity, defense of territorial integrity, and regulation of economic activity. This means that borders help states to define what is legal and what is illegal within certain territorial limits. In essence, states construct their own border "problem sets" by adopting certain definitions of what is permissible and impermissible.⁷ Although theoretically states can adjust the problem set that they face by changing these definitions, in practice, border policies tend to be quite "sticky" and difficult to change.

Border policies are rooted in a deep history of partial, problematic state building in the region. Historically, Latin American states have engaged in rivalry rather than war. Rivalry benefits these states because it enables the development of nationalism and nationality. Rivalry promotes state coherence and acts as an attractor for weak central governments, using nationalism to retain some loyalty and some authority over populations in their borderlands.⁸ Though rivalry impedes interstate cooperation to resolve border issues in some key cases in the Americas (Peru, Bolivia, and Chile; Venezuela and Colombia), it does not rise to such a level that it generates the cycle of international conflict, defense preparedness, taxation, and popular mobilization. This means that Central and South America did not experience the type of state building that led to the development of hard fiscal/military/industrial states in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries.⁹ This historically limited state capacity across much of the region to

⁵ Peter Andreas, "Illicit Americas: A Very Short History of Smuggling in U.S. Relations with its Neighbors," Paper presented at workshop *Hot, Cold, and Cool Borderlines in the Americas: Politics of Cooperation and Conflict in Frontiers*, International Studies Association, San Francisco, California, April 2, 2013.

⁶ Arie Kacowicz, "Territorial Norms, Regional Peace, and Unintended Consequences: The Peculiar Case of the Tri-Border Area of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay," Paper presented at workshop *Hot, Cold, and Cool Borderlines in the Americas: Politics of Cooperation and Conflict in Frontiers*, International Studies Association, San Francisco, California, April 2, 2013.

⁷ Andreas, "Illicit Americas".

⁸ Cameron Thies, "State Building in Latin America: How Borders Have Shaped National Identity, State Capacity and Regional Peace and Security," Paper presented at workshop *Hot, Cold, and Cool Borderlines in the Americas: Politics of Cooperation and Conflict in Frontiers*, International Studies Association, San Francisco, California, April 2, 2013.

⁹ Miguel Angel Centeno, *Blood and Debt: War and the Nation-State in Latin America*, University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002.

address border security issues unilaterally, but rivalry also limited the possibility for cooperation across borders to address security and other dimensions of borderlands.

This project found no cases in the Americas in which borders were seriously at risk of provoking international war, even in the cases that were most ideologically polarized, as was the case on the Colombian-Venezuelan and Colombian-Ecuadorian borders. While we still see the militarization of borders as vehicles for signaling during international disputes, we found that leaders in the contemporary Americas were constrained by domestic stakeholders and economic considerations. In fact, much of the violence identified in borderlands has occurred in precisely those spaces where international relations are smoothest, especially due to strong economic relations: in Central America, regional economic integration and cross-border flows are growing even as states struggle to maintain border security.¹⁰ The peaceful settlement of international disputes and *uti possidetis* (the legal concept that borders are based on those inherited from the colonial period) has become the norm across the region. In some cases, there is an increased tendency to legalize territorial claims, settling border disputes in international tribunals and through judicial arbitration.

Confidence-building and conflict resolution initiatives have been established in the region to minimize conflict in border areas. For instance, in the 1990s Argentina and Chile ended a century-long territorial rivalry that had brought them to the brink of war in the late 1970s. Crucial in the process of rivalry resolution was how governing leaders managed territorial issues in pursuit of a wider strategy of internationalism – while facing important opposition that manifested itself through formal and informal blockages by partisan and military veto players. The security and confidence building mechanisms pioneered in the relationship between Argentina and Chile have been adopted elsewhere in the region, including through UNASUR, as a means to build security cooperation among South American member states.¹¹ (KRISTINA MANI). This means that states do not necessarily view their borders as matters of existential import, but at most as subjects that may be negotiated.¹²

Trade liberalization may be undermining the rationale for conflict in once high-risk areas such as Central America, the Southern Cone, and the Colombia-Venezuela border. In particular, some experts suggested the desire to attract investment and promote development might be having an additional dampening effect on conflict. Colombia-Venezuela may be most extreme example of ideological and geopolitical rivalry

¹⁰ Harold Trinkunas, “Economic Interdependence and Conflict on the Colombia-Venezuela Border” Paper presented at workshop *Hot, Cold, and Cool Borderlines in the Americas: Politics of Cooperation and Conflict in Frontiers*, International Studies Association, San Francisco, California, April 2, 2013.

¹¹ Kristina Mani, “From Security Cooperation to the End of the Territorial Rivalry: Argentine-Chilean Relations during the 1990s”, Paper presented at workshop *Hot, Cold, and Cool Borderlines in the Americas: Politics of Cooperation and Conflict in Frontiers*, International Studies Association, San Francisco, California, April 2, 2013.

¹² Arturo Sotomayor, “International Judicial Settlement of Territorial and Maritime Border Disputes in Latin America,” Paper presented at workshop *Hot, Cold, and Cool Borderlines in the Americas: Politics of Cooperation and Conflict in Frontiers*, International Studies Association, San Francisco, California, April 2, 2013.

combined with massive trade growth. In all of the cases considered, international trade created domestic stakeholders that influenced national governments to choose to deepen economic ties and liberalize regimes, privileging development over security. Similarly, trade, fostered through NAFTA, has shaped and affected the U.S.-Canada bilateral agenda, leading to increased national, regional, and even local cooperation between both countries. But challenges persist, as North American cities and ports are challenged by security concerns in the post-9/11 environment. (EMMANUEL) Hence, increased trade may contribute to improved economic transactions and raise the costs of war, but it should not be considered a panacea in reducing tension and illegal transactions in borderlands. Interestingly enough, licit and illicit actors alike use trade regimes (routes, highways, means of transportation, and currencies) to exchange goods and services across borders; thus, as long as there is a market, trade will create incentives for legal and illegal transactions in common frontiers.

One final observation regarding international dimensions of borders that emerged from the workshop is the existence and relevance of varied definitions of the border “problem” across the region, including divergence between states sharing a common border. For example, the United States defines its borders in the wake of 9/11 as being predominantly about security and law enforcement, whereas for its neighbors, Canada and Mexico, borders are predominantly about economic development and trade.¹³ Venezuela’s leaders present their border with Colombia as primarily a security or even ideological problem, when in fact trade drives the actual border policies of both the Colombian and Venezuelan governments.¹⁴ In some cases, the states directly involved agree about the border reality, whereas other states do not. For example, Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay agree that the triple frontier region should be understood primarily in terms of economic transactions and tourism, but other international actors observe a significant security problem.¹⁵ These divergences have implications for how states talk to – or past – each other about managing common borders.

Domestic Factors

The papers presented during the workshop also analyzed the relationship between domestic politics, illicit actors and borders within states. For instance, in recent decades the Ecuador-Colombia border borderline has been defined less by the state and more by the very Colombian insurgents who have depended on easy border crossings. Insurgents, particularly the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), have relied on neighboring Ecuador’s borderlands for rest, recuperation, and supplies. To the extent that the Ecuadorian state has been present on the borderline, that presence seems only to have encouraged more entrenched guerrilla power there, as a means of guaranteeing easy crossings between the countries. This insurgent control mainly has taken the forms of rule

¹³ Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, “The Post 9/11 Canada-US Border, a New Border? A Canadian Perspective”, Paper presented at workshop *Hot, Cold, and Cool Borderlines in the Americas: Politics of Cooperation and Conflict in Frontiers*, International Studies Association, San Francisco, California, April 2, 2013.

¹⁴ Trinkunas, “Economic Interdependence and Conflict on the Colombia-Venezuela Border”

¹⁵ Kacowicz, “Territorial Norms, Regional Peace, and Unintended Consequences: The Peculiar Case of the Tri-Border Area of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay”

of FARC law, economic support, and infrastructure provision. The FARC have exercised little direct coercion on the Ecuadorian borderline, in a context in which the group has a strong incentive to avoiding triggering conflict in its neutral safe-haven. This case thus presents a story of how an insurgency relying on easy passage to a neighboring country's borderlands can in fact strengthen the international borderline, in a context of limited state presence. The case further shows the qualitative difference between the insurgents' operations on the borderline, where FARC power has been total in areas, and in the borderlands, where the FARC's influence has been largely economic and has not taken the form of territorial control. The analysis is based mainly on research conducted in Ecuador during 2005 and 2006 on the Ecuadorian army's performance of security missions.¹⁶

Indeed, an important finding of this workshop is that illicit actors also engage in jurisdiction shopping to minimize risk and maximize profits in borderlands. Treating borders and borderlands primarily as security concerns also creates problems for governments with important domestic stakeholders. Examples include smugglers (Paraguay), contrabandists (Bolivia), tax evaders (Argentina), ethnic minorities (Ecuador), indigenous populations (Andean Region), and the military (Venezuela and Ecuador).

Latin American governments have recognized the danger of securitizing borders. Some states in the region have resisted securitizing borders is the fear of empowering the militaries in fragile democracies. In fact, some Latin American governments, in an attempt to demilitarize disputed territorial and maritime borders have instrumentally opted for judicial settlements. This is a legacy reaction to the authoritarian periods that preceded contemporary democracies. When combined with economic integration and liberalization, this has produced a de-emphasizing of the security dimension along some borders, but has also generated unintended effects, including poorly funded militaries.¹⁷

The workshop also identified the intricate relationship between ethnicity and conflict in the borderlands. In fact, conflict between Latin American states and indigenous communities over communal rights, autonomy, access and decision-making power over "ancestral" and other community lands has been a salient political issue throughout the Andes, Amazon, and Central American regions since the colonial period. While indigenous communities have been at times during this period "left alone" on these lands, and at other times given protection by political and economic elites, until the late 20th century, there were few if any legal provisions that gave indigenous communities explicit state *control* over communal and borderlands, nor provisions for having a voice in the decisions over the ultimate habitation or use of those lands.

To a degree, indigenous communities legally gained such a voice with the introduction of the "ethno-development," or multicultural rights, approach to social and development

¹⁶ Maiah Jaskoski, "The Colombian FARC in Northern Ecuador: Borderline and Borderlands Dynamics", Paper presented at workshop *Hot, Cold, and Cool Borderlines in the Americas: Politics of Cooperation and Conflict in Frontiers*, International Studies Association, San Francisco, California, April 2, 2013.

¹⁷ Sotomayor, "International Judicial Settlement."

policy, which arose during the 1990s and early 2000s throughout Latin American countries with large indigenous populations. Created by indigenous intellectuals, social movement activists, and development specialists, this paradigm targets the disproportionate impoverishment of indigenous communities, with a focus on cultural sensitivity and more importantly, *participation*, on the part of intended beneficiaries. Applied to the realm of land, ethno-development policies mandated that representatives of indigenous communities become part of the decision-making apparatus when it came to ancestral and other communal lands, at the national and local levels. This new political and social dynamic has added a layer of complexity in the way borderlands are managed, in which ethnicity is a factor that shapes conflict and cooperation.

Moreover, the extent to which ethnicity affects conflict in the borderlands varies substantially within and across the region. For example, while in the 1990s, Ecuador and Peru both enacted fairly strong laws mandating indigenous community participation in decisions over land, of the two, only Ecuador saw strong implementation of these mandates. And while these two Andean countries both saw mandates to include indigenous representation on the national level, neighboring Bolivia's indigenous communities' representation was mandated instead at the local level through that country's well-known decentralized participatory decision-making bodies. Further, while these *Andean* states have responded to indigenous demands with ethno-development policies of some form, the fairly strong Guatemalan indigenous movement has seen little in the way of state responses to their demands for such reforms. Thus, as it is already clear, the degree to which Latin American states have responded to indigenous demands for autonomy and representation in the borderlands has varied widely.¹⁸

DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND NEXT STEPS

The workshop helped identify several next steps for this research. By the end of the ISA workshop we were able to identify enough excellent papers for two separate products. One of the projects includes the development of an edited volume. This volume considers many of the border challenges identified in this report along with several others, including those linked to immigration, exploitation of natural resources, and trafficking/smuggling in borderlands. A group of twelve experts, including some of the experts who participated in the workshop, are already developing and refining their chapters for the edited volume. The book project will employ both theme and case study-based research and analytical approaches to assess the evolving challenges of borders and borderlands in the Americas. During ISA, the co-PIs were able to contact several potential publishers who showed interest in the project, including the presses from Johns Hopkins, Georgetown and the University of Pennsylvania.

Likewise, a couple of participants recommended that we pursue putting together a special edition of a journal. We are now envisioning doing just that, in addition to an edited

¹⁸ Sarah Chartock, "Ceding State Control in Times of Threat: Participation and Access to Indigenous Lands and Territories in Ecuador", Paper presented at workshop *Hot, Cold, and Cool Borderlines in the Americas: Politics of Cooperation and Conflict in Frontiers*, International Studies Association, San Francisco, California, April 2, 2013.

volume, such that each paper would be part of one of the two publications. By the end of the summer, once final drafts are revised, we will have a better sense about how the papers will cluster.

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WORKSHOP AGENDA

9:00-9:15 Welcome

Introduction to event by co-hosts
Review of workshop logistics

9:15-10:30 Panel 1: Militarized and Demilitarized Borders

Kristina Mani (Oberlin College)□
Arturo C. Sotomayor (Naval Postgraduate School)
Harold A. Trinkunas (Naval Postgraduate School)
Discussant: David Scott Palmer (Boston University)

10:30-10:45 Coffee break

10:45-12:00 Panel 2: Sources of Conflict and Cooperation in Borderlines: Tensions and Harmonies□

Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly (University of Victoria)□
Sarah Chartock (The College of New Jersey)
Maiah Jaskoski (Naval Postgraduate School)
Discussant: Benjamin Lessing (University of Chicago)

12:00-1:30 Lunch

1:30-3:00 Panel 3: Hot and Cold Borders: Effects and Unintended Consequences

Peter Andreas (Brown University)□
Arie M. Kacowicz (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)
Cameron G. Thies (University of Iowa)□
Discussant: Anne L. Clunan (Naval Postgraduate School)

3:00-4:00 Wrap-up session□ **6:00 Dinner**
(tentative, informal gathering, paid via per diem)