

Walling Off Crime: An Analysis of the Local Deterrent Effects of a Border Fence

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the deterrent effects of the international border fence, installed along the U.S.-Mexico border between 1992 and 2015, on crime rates in U.S. cities located along the border. We find that increased fencing, within or near border cities, is associated with significant declines in both property and violent crime among the largest of the border cities. The results are robust to several model specifications. In addition, the avoided crime associated with these estimates represents a substantial economic benefit, ranging from from \$189 million to \$599 million, depending on the specific model employed. This analysis contributes to the current debate regarding the merits of devoting resources to increased border fencing, as well as more general insights regarding the effects of deterrence on criminal outcomes.

JEL Classification: D23, D74, H56, H8, K40, K42

Keywords: Border studies; crime; immigration; national security

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“El Paso used to have one of the highest crime rates in America. After that fence went up and separated Juarez, which still has an extremely high crime rate, the crime rates in El Paso now are some of the lowest in the country. So we know it works.” Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton (El Paso Times, Jan. 10, 2019)

“Mr. Paxton, like most people who purport to know anything about the border, is dead wrong. El Paso has long (and consistently) been one of the safest communities in American — even before the wall was built.” U.S. Rep. Veronica Escobar, D-El Paso (El Paso Times, Jan. 10, 2019)