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Deterrence, Displacement, and Death: The Impact of the Border Wall on Undocumented Immigration

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Abstract

The debate over whether the U.S. should build a wall at its southern border with Mexico is not new, however, this debate hit a feverish pitch after the November 2016 presidential election. One of the main arguments for building a border wall is that it will deter undocumented immigration. The existing literature, however, suggests that physical barriers such as a border wall will not deter undocumented immigration, but rather, will displace unauthorized entry routes. In this study, we add new evidence to this debate by embedding an experiment in a survey ($n = 488$) drawn from a probability-based sample of undocumented immigrants. We find that the presence of a border wall does not decrease the likelihood that a respondent will attempt to return to the U.S. if deported. Moreover, even when respondents are told that the presence of a border wall will displace unauthorized entry routes to the Yuma desert, which means an increased probability of death while crossing the border, 64.1 percent remain committed to returning. Altogether, these results suggest a dangerous tradeoff: a border wall is unlikely to significantly deter undocumented immigration and, even if unauthorized entry routes are displaced to areas where border crossing deaths are a real possibility, large majorities of undocumented immigrants are still likely to attempt to return to the U.S. if deported.

Introduction

The debate over whether the U.S. should build a wall at its southern border with Mexico is not new, however, this debate hit a feverish pitch after the November 2016 presidential election. Then presidential candidate Trump made a border wall between the U.S. and Mexico one of his signature issues. Promptly upon taking office, President Trump signed an executive order, "Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements" (Executive Order 13767), which called for the "immediate construction of a physical wall on the southern border" and the hiring of an additional 5,000 Border Patrol agents, among other actions (GAO 2018).[1] Then, from December 2018 to January 2019, the federal government was partially shutdown because of an impasse over border wall funding, which ended with a $1.4 billion compromise (short of the $5.7 billion requested by President Trump). Shortly after the budget compromise, President Trump issued an emergency declaration, "National Emergency Concerning the Southern Border of the United States," in which he declared a national emergency at the southern border in order to redirect approximately $8 billion for border wall construction.[2]

Efforts by the current administration to build a wall along the southern border with Mexico and to expand border security funding renews a commitment by the U.S. government to a decades-old strategy of "prevention-through-deterrence." As Wong (2017) describes, "The logic of prevention-through-deterrence suggests that if the risks of apprehension are sufficiently high in a particular area, for example, by increasing the number of Border Patrol personnel monitoring the area, using improved equipment and technologies in order to detect unauthorized entries, and by erecting physical barriers, the number of unauthorized entry attempts in that area will decrease" (p. 59). Despite being the stated strategy of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) since at least 1994 (CRS 2010), as we discuss below, the academic literature suggests that prevention-through-deterrence border security policies generally do not deter, but rather, displace unauthorized entry routes among other unintended consequences. With a renewed commitment by the Trump administration to prevention-through-deterrence border security policies on the one hand, and a literature that is skeptical of the efficacy such policies on the other, we empirically examine the efficacy of the proposed border wall.

Will the proposed border wall deter undocumented immigration to the U.S.? We examine this question by embedding an experiment in a survey ($n = 488$) drawn from a probability-based sample of undocumented immigrants in San Diego County. This study is the fourth in the Undocumented in America project based at the U.S. Immigration Policy Center (USIPC) at UC San Diego. Our focus on undocumented immigrants who are *already* in the U.S. is important because a large percentage of individuals who are apprehended at the border are charged with illegal *re-entry* as

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[1] For full text of the executive order, see here https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-border-security-immigration-enforcement-improvements/.

[2] For full text of the emergency declaration, see here: https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/02/20/2019-03011/declaring-a-national-emergency-concerning-the-southern-border-of-the-united-states.

opposed to illegal entry. For example, in fiscal year 2015, illegal re-entry accounted for 48.6 percent of prosecutions and illegal entry accounted for 51.4 percent (TRAC 2016). Moreover, prosecutions for illegal re-entry exceeded prosecutions for illegal entry in ten of the twenty years between 1996 and 2015. In other words, undocumented immigrants who are deported from the U.S. will account for a sizable share of those that a border wall is intended to deter and the behavior of this population has not yet been systematically studied against our current political backdrop.[3]

We argue that the proposed border wall is unlikely to have its desired deterrent effect for two main reasons: incentives to return to the U.S. and the know-how to do so. Incentives related to returning to the U.S., particularly for undocumented immigrants who have lived in the country, were deported, and are attempting to get back to their lives, likely outweigh the increased costs of returning that a physical barrier such as a border wall would impose. Moreover, as they have already successfully entered the U.S. without authorization, undocumented immigrants who are deported from the U.S. likely will have the know-how to re-enter the country despite enhanced border security. We elaborate more on our arguments below.

We find that the presence of a border wall does not decrease the likelihood that a respondent will attempt to return to the U.S. if deported. However, when respondents are told that the presence of a border wall will displace unauthorized entry routes to the Yuma desert, which means an increased probability of death while crossing the border, we find that respondents are 38.6 percent less likely to attempt to return to the U.S. if deported, but 64.1 percent remain committed to returning. Altogether, these results suggest a dangerous tradeoff: a border wall is unlikely to significantly deter undocumented immigration and, even if unauthorized entry routes are displaced to areas where border crossing deaths are a real possibility, large majorities of undocumented immigrants are still likely to attempt to return to the U.S. if deported.

This article begins with a review of the existing literature focusing on the efficacy of prevention-through-deterrence border security policies. We then derive a set of hypotheses about whether the presence of a border wall or the displacement of unauthorized entry routes will affect the likelihood that an undocumented immigrant who is deported from the U.S. will attempt to return. We then describe the survey vehicle used to test our hypotheses and our survey experiment. We then discuss our findings and the implications of the results.

The Efficacy of "Prevention-Through-Deterrence"?

Prevention-through-deterrence is the idea that the "concentration of personnel, infrastructure, and surveillance technology along heavily trafficked regions of the border will discourage unauthorized migrants from attempting to enter the United States" (CRS 2016: 1). In 1994, the U.S. Border Patrol agency formally articulated its

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[3]Trends in prosecutions for illegal re-entry coincide with new patterns of net emigration of Mexican nationals. For example, Passel, Cohn, and Gonzalez-Barrera (2012) found, "After four decades that brought 12 million current immigrants—most of whom came illegally—the net migration flow from Mexico to the United States has stopped and may have been reversed" (p. 6).

strategy of prevention-through-deterrence. More specifically, in its "Border Patrol Strategic Plan: 1994 and Beyond," the agency described the strategy as follows: "The Border Patrol will improve control of the border by implementing a strategy of 'prevention through deterrence.' The Border Patrol will achieve the goals of its strategy by bringing a decisive number of enforcement resources to bear [...] Although a 100 percent apprehension rate is an unrealistic goal, we believe we can achieve a rate of apprehensions sufficiently high to raise the risk of apprehension to the point that many will consider it futile to continue to attempt illegal entry" (U.S. Border Patrol 1994: 6).[4] We note here that apprehensions have long been used by the agency as a proxy, though an imperfect one,[5] for unauthorized entry attempts. The U.S. Border Patrol agency further described several assumptions as part of its strategy of prevention-through-deterrence. Three of these assumptions are of particular importance: apprehensions at the southern border will decrease as control of the border increases (i.e., by bringing a "decisive number of enforcement resources to bear" to the southern border); unauthorized entry routes "will adjust to U.S. Border Patrol changing [its] tactics"; and "violence will increase as [the] effects of [the] strategy are felt" (U.S. Border Patrol 1994: 4). In other words, although the U.S. Border Patrol agency considered certain downstream effects, including the displacement of unauthorized entry routes, as well as violence, the agency assumed on balance that the strategy of prevention-through-deterrence would be efficacious.[6] The case of Operation Gatekeeper showed why this was not the case.

Phase I of prevention-through-deterrence included concentrating a "decisive level" of resources in the San Diego sector of the southern border—this was called Operation Gatekeeper, which began in 1994. One of the goals of Operation Gatekeeper was to bring the sixty-six-mile-long portion of the San Diego sector under control within five years (USDOJ/OIG 1998). Operation Gatekeeper thus provided resources for the U.S. Border Patrol agency to add Border Patrol agents and other support personnel, as well as increased funding for equipment and technology (e.g., infrared night scopes, seismic sensors, stadium-style lighting, etc.). Importantly, as part of Operation Gatekeeper, solid fencing constructed using steel landing mats was erected along the southern border. Indeed, Operation Gatekeeper helped set the stage for contemporary border security policies, that is, the imagery of Border Patrol agents using modern technology to detect and apprehend persons attempting to entry the U.S. without authorization against the backdrop of border fencing.[7]

Operation Gatekeeper was initially touted as a success, however, data on apprehensions from the U.S. Border Patrol agency do not point to a deterrent effect. More

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[4]Regarding a 100 percent apprehension rate, the U.S. Border Patrol agency further notes, "In its strategic planning process, the Border Patrol accepted that absolute sealing of the border is unrealistic" (U.S. Border Patrol 1994: 1).

[5]For example, see discussion in Cornelius (2001) and CRS (2016).

[6]The agency remains committed to the strategy of prevention-through-deterrence. After 9/11, which led to the creation of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the U.S. Border Patrol agency elevated the importance of the strategy of prevention-through-deterrence by tying it to efforts to combat potential terrorist threats (see National Border Patrol Strategy 2004).

[7]For more on Operation Gatekeeper, see Nevins 2010; see also Wong 2017.

specifically, Wong (2017) found that although apprehensions decreased in the San Diego sector by 66 percent from 1994 to 2000,[8] apprehensions increased in the Border Patrol sectors east of San Diego, including a 761 percent increase over the same period in the El Centro sector (immediately east of the San Diego sector), a 413 percent increase in the Yuma sector (immediately east of the El Centro sector), and a 342 percent increase in the Tucson sector (immediately east of the Yuma sector). In other words, the decrease in the San Diego sector was met by a ballooning of apprehensions—which to reiterate, is used by the U.S. Border Patrol agency as a proxy for unauthorized entry attempts—at other Border Patrol sectors.[9] As Cornelius (2001) writes, "An indisputable consequence of concentrated border enforcement operations has been the spatial redistribution of illegal entry attempts" (p. 667; see also Orrenius 2004; Massey and Riosmena 2010).

Operation Gatekeeper is not the only case that casts doubt on the efficacy of prevention-through-deterrence. Phase I of prevention-through-deterrence also included a similar, though smaller-scale effort in the El Paso sector of the southern border—this was called Operation Hold-the-Line, which began in 1993. In a report to the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, Bean et al. (1994) found that Operation Hold-the-Line mainly deterred "commuter migrants," meaning workers in the adjacent border city of Ciudad Juárez who walked to their jobs in El Paso, Texas.

Survey research has also cast doubt on the efficacy of prevention-through-deterrence. For example, in analyzing survey data on returned (i.e., deported) Mexican migrants and some prospective (i.e., first time) Mexican migrants from the Mexican Migration Field Research Program, Cornelius and Salehyan (2007) found that neither the perceived difficulty of evading Border Patrol agents nor the perceived danger of crossing the border were statistically significantly related to the intent to migrate to the U.S. This leads the authors to conclude, "tougher border controls have had remarkably little influence on the propensity to migrate illegally" (p. 139). Although tucked away in a footnote, the authors further note that only 23 percent of those surveyed who reported crossing the border after Operation Gatekeeper reported encountering Border Patrol agents, meaning that "even with tighter border enforcement, the vast majority of unauthorized migrants are able to cross with ever being detected" (Ibid: 151). In analyzing survey data from the Mexican Migration Project and the Latin American Migration Project, Massey, Durand, and Pren (2012) found that their "enforcement index" was not statistically significantly related to the likelihood of leaving on one's first undocumented trip to the U.S. In another study, the authors found similar (null) results when analyzing the relationship between the size of the total budget of the U.S. Border Patrol agency and the likelihood of leaving on one's first undocumented trip to the U.S. (Massey, Durand, and Pren 2016).[10]

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[8]This period gives Operation Gatekeeper time to take effect and excludes the post-9/11 period after new border security dynamics emerged.

[9]Moreover, the total number of apprehensions in these four Border Patrol sectors in 2000 was higher than the total number of apprehensions in these four Border Patrol sectors in 1994.

[10]We note here that in another article, Massey, Durand, and Pren (2015) do find evidence that the size of the total budget of the U.S. Border Patrol agency is negatively and significantly related to the likelihood that a person makes an additional undocumented trip to the U.S. following a return

Additionally, whether measured by the number of hours Border Patrol agents spend patrolling the border (Hanson, Robertson, and Spilimbergo 2002; Davilá, Pagán, and Soydemir 2002)[11] or the total budget of the U.S. Border Patrol agency (Wong 2017), research has not shown a systematic relationship between increased border security and decreased undocumented immigration.

One main reason why prevention-through-deterrence generally does not have its desired deterrent effect is that policies designed to control immigration tend often to neglect the motives that undergird migratory decisions (Wong 2015). Attempts to control immigration are thus invariably met by efforts to overcome these policies. Another main reason why prevention-through-deterrence border security policies are inefficacious is that research has shown that these policies incentivize the use of *coyotes*, or people smugglers (for example, see Andreas 2012). One estimate found that the percentage of people using professional people smugglers increased from around 15 percent in the early 1990s to just over 40 percent by the early 2000s (Consejo Nacional de Polación 2004, as quoted in Cornelius 2005). As Hollifield, Martin, and Orrenius (2014) describe, "The historical record is littered with the wreckage of government interventions [...] These interventions rarely dry up 'unwanted' migration flows or even significantly reduce them; more often, they simply rechannel the flows and create more opportunities for people smugglers to cash in on the traffic" (p. 27). Increased demand for people smugglers is consequential because their use decreases the probability of apprehension and increases the probability of successfully entering the U.S. without authorization (Cornelius 2001; Andreas 2012).

It is also important to note that research has shown that a consequence of prevention-through-deterrence is increased death at the border. Descriptively, the number of border crossing deaths has increased following the start of prevention-through-deterrence (Eschback, Hagan, and Rodríguez 2003). Moreover, research has also shown that the spatial distribution of border crossing deaths has followed a similar pattern to the apprehensions data described above, that is, as unauthorized entry routes have been displaced into more dangerous areas, border crossing deaths in these areas have increased (Cornelius 2001; Sapkota et al. 2006).[12] We note here that given data limitations (i.e., the ability to know how many people die while attempting to cross the border), the research here is sparse. However, existing studies almost certainly underestimate the prevalence of border crossing deaths.

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to Mexico. However, because the authors define a return to Mexico as a trip back to one's home community lasting at least three months, it is unclear how much of this result is driven by a deterrent effect as opposed to other factors that make returning to the U.S. more difficult as length of time in Mexico increases.

[11]We note here that although Davilá, Pagán, and Soydemir (2002) find some evidence of short-term deterrence effects, they conclude "These effects are short-lived as undocumented migrants seemingly adjust to new information. Moreover, the non-existent long-term effects are apparently the consequence of basic economic fundamentals" (p. 459).

[12]Indeed, the plurality of known border crossing deaths are now caused by heat exposure, which reflects the displacement of unauthorized entry routes to more dangerous terrain.

Incentives to Return and Know-How

In this section, we discuss two main reasons—incentives to return to the U.S. and the know-how to do so—for why the proposed border wall is unlikely to have its desired deterrent effect.

We argue that one reason why the proposed border wall is unlikely to have its desired deterrent effect is that incentives related to returning to the U.S., particularly for undocumented immigrants who have lived in the country, were deported, and are attempting to get back to their lives, likely outweigh the increased costs of returning that a physical barrier such as a border wall would impose. We assume that these incentives are generally commensurate in scope with the determinants of initial migratory decisions. Indeed, the literature on the determinants of initial migratory decisions is over a century old (e.g., see Ravenstein 1885). Rather than review this literature, we focus instead on two individual-level determinants that are particularly relevant for return migration: family reunification and integration in the U.S. With respect to family reunification, based on analysis of the most current publicly available Census microdata, an estimated 38 percent of undocumented parents who are 15 or older lives with at least one child under the age of 18 and an estimated 19 percent of undocumented immigrants who are 15 or older are married to U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents (LPRs) (MPI 2018). In other words, nearly 4 million undocumented parents live with a child under the age of 18 and nearly 2 million undocumented immigrants are married to U.S. citizens or LPRs.[13] To the extent that undocumented immigrants are deported from the U.S., reuniting with U.S. citizen or LPR family members will likely factor into their consequent migratory decisions.[14] With respect to integration in the U.S., the literature often distinguishes between economic incorporation (e.g., employment, among other indicators), societal incorporation (English language usage, among other indicators), and political incorporation (e.g., naturalization, among other indicators). These particular indicators (and many others) are significantly related to length of time in the U.S. For example, in our own analyses of Census microdata,[15] we find in a series of bivariate logistic regressions that length of time in the U.S. is positively and significantly related to employment ($p < .001$), positively and significantly related to the ability speak English "very well" ($p < .001$), and positively and significantly relate to naturalization ($p < .001$). We run these regressions to show evidence that length of time in the U.S. is a strong proxy for integration, which is affirmed in a recent National Academies compendium on immigrant integration in the U.S. (NAS 2016). With respect to the increased costs of returning, we note here that research has shown that *coyotes* increase their

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[13]The Pew Hispanic Center (2018) counts the number of children under the age of 18 who live with undocumented parents, which they estimate to be 5.6 million children.

[14]More generally, family reunification accounts for most immigration to the U.S. annually. According to the most recent publicly available data, of the 1.127 million people who were admitted into the U.S. in fiscal year 2017, 66.4 percent were family members of U.S. citizens or LPRs. 45.8 percent were immediate relatives of U.S. citizens, meaning spouses, children under the age of 18, and parents. An additional 20.6 percent were immediate relatives of LPRs and other family members (e.g., adult children, brothers and sisters).

[15]These data are the 2017 ACS 1YR microdata.

costs as border security tightens, with smuggling fees doubling, tripling, and even caudraupling (for example, see Cornelius 2005; Andreas 2012; Massey, Durand, and Pren 2016). The persistence of undocumented immigration despite increasing costs suggests that the desire to enter the U.S. without authorization is generally inelastic to price fluctuations.

We argue that a second reason why the proposed border wall is unlikely to have its desired deterrent effect, particularly for undocumented immigrants who are deported from the U.S., is that these individuals have already successfully entered the country without authorization and thus have the know how to do it again. The role of social networks in migratory decisions is well established (for example, see Massey et al. 1993). One of the main mechanisms attributed to social networks is information, which serves to decrease the uncertainty that people may have about the migratory process, as well as the risks and costs—from how to get from the country of origin to the country of destination to what to expect during transit to what to do once in the U.S. For our purposes here, information can come from knowing people who know how to cross the border. More concretely, particularly when it comes to undocumented immigration, research has shown that social networks help prospective migrants initially connect with *coyotes* and that those who have already used *coyotes* know how to hire a smuggler again if needed (Spener 2009; Andrews, Ybarra, and Miramontes 2002; Zavella 2011). Moreover, by virtue of their immigration status, undocumented immigrants who have been in the U.S. also have experience evading detection by immigration enforcement officials. Thus, undocumented immigrants who have been deported from the U.S. may not only be highly incentivized to return, but also have the know-how to do so.

Hypotheses

Consistent with the literature on the efficacy of prevention-through-deterrence, we hypothesize that the proposed border wall will not decrease the likelihood that an undocumented immigrant will attempt to return to the U.S. if deported (H_1). Moreover, as undocumented immigration has continued despite the displacement of unauthorized entry routes to more dangerous areas, we hypothesize that while some may be deterred, on average, undocumented immigrants will continue to attempt to return to the U.S. if deported even if this means an increased probability of death while crossing the border (H_2). Moreover, given persistent and, in some cases, increasing incentives to return, coupled with the apparent price inelasticity of entering the U.S. without authorization, we hypothesize that those with U.S. citizen family members (H_3) and those who have lived in the U.S. longer (H_4) are comparatively less likely to be deterred by the proposed border wall. Regarding know-how, we hypothesize that those with family members or close friends who have been deported may have an information advantage and are thus less likely to be deterred by the proposed border wall (H_5). Last, we hypothesize that those who have previously used *coyotes* to enter the U.S. without authorization (H_6) and those who have returned to Mexico after initially entering the U.S. (H_7) will also be less likely to be deterred by the proposed

border wall because of their increased know-how).

Data and Method

To test our hypotheses, we embedded an experiment in a probability-based sample of undocumented immigrants in San Diego. The survey vehicle used in this study is the Undocumented in America project based out of the U.S. Immigration Policy Center (USIPC) at UC San Diego.

Through a partnership between the USIPC and the Mexican Consulate in San Diego (the Consulate), Wong created a sample frame of undocumented Mexican nationals in San Diego County. The sample frame is comprised of individuals who receive consular services unique to those living in the U.S. without authorization. Consulates provide a broad range of services to their nationals abroad. The sample frame, which includes approximately 73,000 people, accounts for nearly the entire universe of undocumented Mexican nationals who currently live in San Diego County. The Center for Migration Studies (CMS), for example, estimates that there are currently 82,406 undocumented immigrants who were born in Mexico who live in San Diego County (CMS 2016). Working with staff at the Consulate, Wong assigned random ID numbers to each record and then cut the sample frame into random draws of approximately 5,000 records for each survey module in the Undocumented in America project. Call sheets with limited information about each respondent—the random ID number assigned to each record, first name, and phone number—are then printed out. Phone numbers are manually dialed by enumerators trained by Wong. Phone numbers are dialed once with no additional follow up. After each paper call sheet is completed, it is immediately reviewed and then destroyed. All surveys are conducted in Spanish, unless the respondent prefers to speak in English. In this study, 98.6 percent of surveys were conducted in Spanish. This study is IRB approved (UCSD IRB 180131).

This study represents the fourth in the Undocumented in America series. The survey was fielded between October 2017 and January 2018 and includes 488 respondents. In the survey, we embedded an experiment to better understand how the proposed border wall affects the likelihood of returning to the U.S. if deported. In the experiment, respondents were randomly assigned to one of three groups. In one group ($n = 186$), respondents were asked whether they would return to the U.S. if they were deported. In the second group ($n = 152$), the return question was prefaced by a description of the proposed border wall (henceforth referred to as the border wall condition). In the third group ($n = 150$), the return question was also prefaced by a description of the proposed border wall, but with added text about how unauthorized entry routes would be displaced to the Yuma desert where many migrants have died while attempting to cross the border (henceforth referred to as the Yuma desert condition).

The table below provides the exact text. An experiment such as this is superior to analyzing observational survey data (i.e., survey data that is not based on an experimental design) because asking respondents about one scenario is insufficient for

determining how their attitudes or behaviors may or may not change based on the second scenario; asking respondents about one scenario and then the second scenario would likely produce biased results because responses related to the first scenario would likely influence responses to the second scenario (e.g., "I said I would do one thing in the first scenario, so maybe I should say I would do the opposite in the second scenario"); random assignment to the experimental groups balances the groups across the broad range of covariates (e.g., age, gender, etc.) that need to be controlled for in observational analysis; and random assignment to the experimental groups means that differences in responses can be casually attributed to the variation in the scenarios we describe (i.e., the potential deterrent effect of the proposed border wall).

Table 1

c_0 "We understand that this may be difficult to think about, but if you were deported from the United States, would you attempt to come back?"
t_1 "There's been a lot of discussion about a border wall between the United States and Mexico. President Trump has described the border wall as being a 'great, great wall along our [entire] Southern border' that will be 'powerful,' 'impenetrable,' and will 'stop illegal immigration.' Prototypes, some almost 30 feet tall, have already been built near San Diego. We understand that this may be difficult to think about, but if you were deported from the United States, and assuming the border wall that President Trump is built, would you attempt to come back?"
t_2 "There's been a lot of discussion about a border wall between the United States and Mexico. President Trump has described the border wall as being a 'great, great wall along our [entire] Southern border' that will be 'powerful,' 'impenetrable,' and will 'stop illegal immigration.' Prototypes, some almost 30 feet tall, have already been built near San Diego. Imagine if the San Diego and El Centro region had a new border wall like the one President Trump is describing. This would mean that the closest option to cross into the United States on land would be through the Yuma desert. The Yuma desert is one of the harshest deserts in North America. It stretches for about 390 miles and temperatures during the summer can reach nearly 110 degrees. Many, many people have died trying to cross into the United States through Yuma. We understand that this may be difficult to think about, but if you were deported from the United States, and going through Yuma was the only way that you could come back, would you attempt to come back?"

Results

When asked, "if you were deported from the United States, would you attempt to come back?" 40.2 percent say "yes" and 59.8 percent say "no." First, when comparing the control condition to both treatment conditions, that is, receiving no prompt compared to receiving one of two prompts describing the proposed border wall, the data show that 43.5 percent say they would attempt to return to the U.S. if deported

in the control condition compared to 38.1 percent in the treatment conditions. This difference of -5.4 percent is not statistically significant ($p = .232$). Second, when comparing the control condition to only the border wall condition, the data show, somewhat counterintuitively, that 49.3 percent say they would attempt to return to the U.S. if deported in the border wall condition, which is +5.8 percent relative to the control condition. This difference, however, is not statistically significant ($p = .289$). Third, when comparing the control condition to only the Yuma desert condition, the data show that 26.7 percent say they would attempt to return to the U.S. if deported in the Yuma desert condition, which is -16.9 percent relative to the control condition. This difference is statistically significant ($p = .001$). Last, when comparing the treatment conditions, that is, receiving the border wall prompt compared to receiving the Yuma desert prompt, the data show that 49.3 percent say they would attempt to return to the U.S. if deported in the border wall condition compared to 26.7 percent in the Yuma desert condition. This difference of -22.7 percent is statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Table 2 summarizes the main results. As the table shows, the border wall condition is not statistically significantly related to respondents being less likely to say they would attempt to return to the U.S. if deported (t_1 - c_0). Whereas the border wall condition is not statistically significantly related to respondents being less likely to say they would attempt to return to the U.S. if deported, the Yuma desert condition is (t_2 - c_0). In the control condition, approximately forty-four out of every 100 say they would attempt to return to the U.S. if deported. In the Yuma desert condition, approximately twenty-seven out of every 100 say they would attempt to return to the U.S. if deported. In other words, this means that the displacement of unauthorized entry routes to the Yuma desert could lead 38.6 percent of those who say they would attempt to return to the U.S. if deported to reconsider; however, this means that 61.4 percent of those who say they would attempt to return to the U.S. if deported would do so even if this means an increased probability of death while crossing the border.

Table 2

	% Yes	t_1 - c_0	t_2 - c
c_0 ($n = 186$)	43.5%		
t_1 ($n = 152$)	49.3%	+5.8% ($p = .289$)	
t_2 ($n = 150$)	26.7%		-16.9% ($p = .001$)

Multivariate Results

The differences-in-means show that the border wall condition is not statistically significantly related to respondents being less likely to say they would attempt to return to the U.S. if deported, but that the Yuma desert condition is. But do these results hold when accounting for other factors? In particular, do the results hold when accounting for factors that may affect the likelihood of returning to the U.S. independent of the

proposed border wall? We estimate a series of logistic regression models that estimate the effect of our treatment conditions while accounting for whether a respondent has an immediate family member who is a U.S. citizen, the length of time a respondent has lived in the U.S., whether a respondent has an immediate family member, an extended family member, or a close friend who was deported, previous use of *coyotes* and whether a respondent has returned to Mexico after initially entering the U.S. The variable *U.S.C. Family* is equal to one if a respondent has an immediate family member who is a U.S. citizen and zero otherwise. The variable *Years in U.S.* is based on the question, "In what year did you first come to the United States?" The variable *Knows Someone Deported* is based on the question, "I know this may be a difficult question for you, but we want to know if any of your family members or close friends have ever been deported?" and is equal to one if yes and zero otherwise. The variable *Coyote* is based on the question, "Did you pay a smuggler/coyote to help you cross the border?" and is equal to one if yes and zero otherwise. Last, the variable *Returned to Mexico* is based on the question, "Have you returned to Mexico since you've been in the United States?" and is equal to one if yes and zero otherwise. Table 3 reports the descriptive statistics.

Table 3

	Mean $n=488$	Mean c_0 $n=186$	Mean t_1 $n=152$	Mean t_2 $n=150$
U.S.C Family	88.0%	90.6%	87.3%	85.5%
Years in U.S.	21.7	22.2	21.7	21.2
Knows Someone Deported	42.6%	45.1%	39.9%	42.5%
Coyote	51.4%	53.3%	50.0%	50.3%
Returned to Mexico	52.7%	53.1%	56.5%	48.4%

Table 4 reports the multivariate results. Model 1 estimates the likelihood that respondents say they would attempt to return to the U.S. if deported by the border wall condition and the Yuma desert condition (with the control condition as the reference group). Model 2 includes the variables that speak to incentives to return. Model 3 includes our know-how variable. Model 4 is the full model. As the table shows, the effect of the border wall condition is not statistically significant across all four models. The table also shows that the effect of the Yuma desert condition remains statistically significant when accounting for the variables that speak to incentives to return and know-how. Interestingly, the two variables that speak to incentives to return are not statistically significant. However, our know-how variables, *Coyote* and *Returned to Mexico* are statistically significant and in the expected direction. We note here that the total n decreases in models that include *Returned to Mexico* because many respondents declined to state.[16] However, the substantive results are unchanged when re-running the models without the *Returned To Mexico* variable (see Appendix Table 1).

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[16]Multiple unauthorized entries can make one ineligible for certain forms of immigration relief.

Table 4

|	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Border Wall	.233	.195	.281	.261
	(.219)	(.212)	(.253)	(.254)
Yuma Desert	-.752***	-.862***	-.662**	-.701**
	(.236)	(.212)	(.268)	(.270)
U.S.C. Family		-.308		-.265
		(.294)		(.319)
Years in U.S.		-.009		-.014
		(.015)		(.018)
Know Someone Deported			.347	.367
			(.218)	(.219)
Coyote			.606**	.573**
			(.217)	(.219)
Returned to Mexico			.637**	.679**
			(.218)	(.223)
Constant	-.259	.248	-1.122***	-.576
	(.148)	(.428)	(.255)	(.521)
Observations	488	474	393	392

$^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$

Figure 1 graphically depicts the effects of using a *coyote*. As the figure shows, previous experience using a *coyote* increases the likelihood that respondents say they would attempt to return to the U.S. if deported from 38.5 percent to 52.5 percent in the control condition, from 44.8 percent to 58.9 percent in the border wall condition, and from 24.1 percent to 35.8 percent in the Yuma desert condition.[17]. Figure 1 graphically depicts these results. The solid circles represent the predicted probabilities of returning to the U.S. among those who have used coyotes. The hollow circles represent the predicted probabilities of returning to the U.S. among those who have not used coyotes.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, we use a survey experiment embedded in a probability-based sample of undocumented immigrants to examine whether the proposed border wall would have its desired deterrent effect. As we describe above, undocumented immigrants who are deported from the U.S. will account for a sizable share of those that a border wall

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[17]U.S. citizen family member is set to its modal value of one. Years in the U.S. is set to its mean value of 21.7 years. Knowing someone who was deported is set to its modal value of zero. Returned to Mexico is set to its modal value of one.

Figure 1
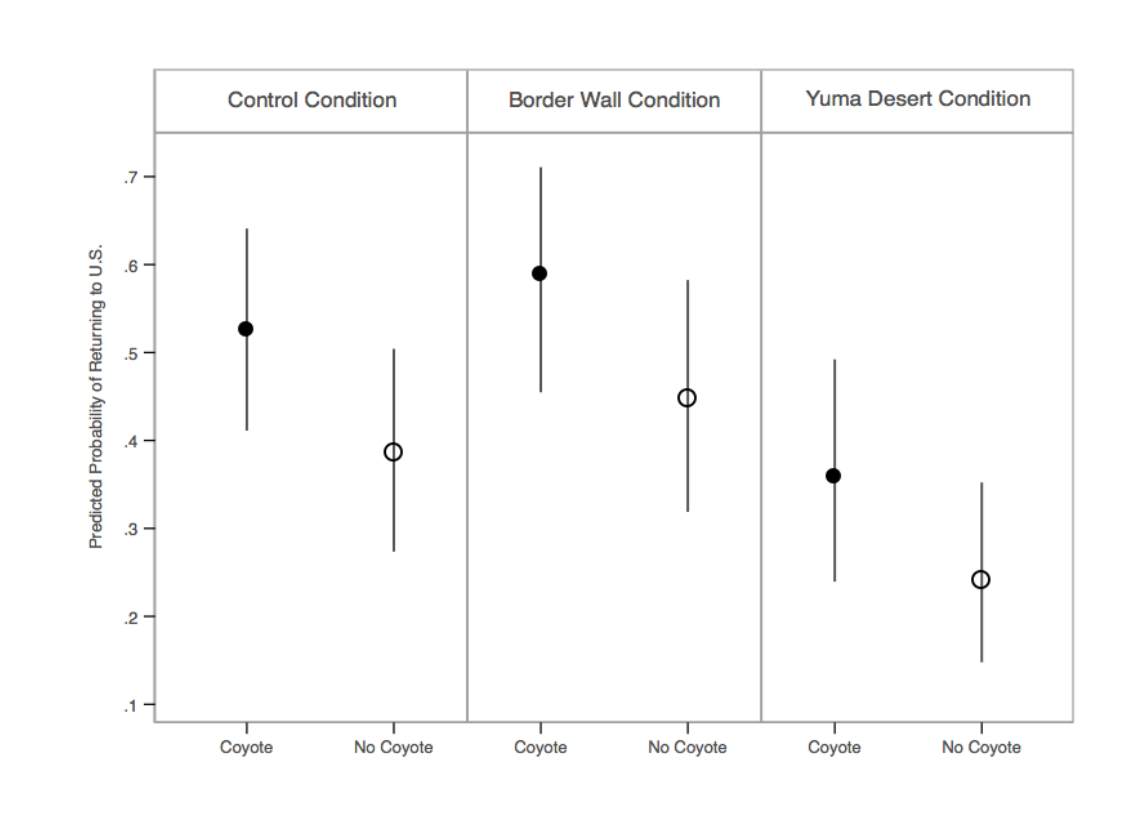
is intended to deter. This research thus provides an important new perspective in ongoing political and policy debates over border security.

Consistent with the literature on the efficacy of prevention-through-deterrence, we hypothesize that the proposed border wall will not decrease the likelihood that an undocumented immigrant will attempt to return to the U.S. if deported. The data confirm our hypothesis. Respondents are not statistically significantly less likely to say they would attempt to return to the U.S. if deported when comparing the border wall condition to the control condition. In fact, respondents are slightly more likely to say they would return to the U.S. if deported in the border wall condition.

Moreover, as the literature on the efficacy of prevention-through-deterrence highlights the displacement of unauthorized entry routes to more dangerous areas, we also hypothesize that, while some may be deterred, undocumented immigrants will continue to attempt to return to the U.S. if deported even if this means an increased probability of death while crossing the border. The Yuma desert condition allows us to empirically test this hypothesis. When comparing the control condition to the Yuma desert condition, the data show a 16.9 percent decrease in the percentage of respondents who say they would attempt to return to the U.S. if deported. Indeed, whereas we do not find evidence to suggest that the proposed border wall will have its desired deterrent effect, it does appear that the increased probability of death while crossing the border can be a deterrent. These findings, however, make vivid a danger-

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ous tradeoff. While the displacement of unauthorized entry routes to the Yuma desert could lead approximately four out of every ten of those who say they would attempt to return to the U.S. if deported to reconsider, this means that approximately six out of every ten would attempt to return even if this means an increased probability of death while crossing the border.

The data do not provide evidence to support our hypotheses related to incentives. With respect to having an immediate family member who is a U.S. citizen, we hypothesized that family reunification would be sufficiently motivating; however, while this may be the case for some, others may not attempt to return to the U.S. if deported in order to avoid the dangers of crossing and the additional hardships their families would have to endure should the worst happen during the journey. We are unable to push this result any further, but we look forward to future research that sheds light on this finding. With respect to length of time in the U.S., we suspect that our null finding may be the result of our inability to interact years in the U.S. with age. In order to ensure anonymity, we were not able to ask about the age of respondents, in addition to other potentially identifying characteristics. Those who have been in the U.S. longer and who are older (i.e., arrived in the U.S. at a later age) may be less likely to undertake a potentially dangerous and physically demanding journey in order to return to the U.S. than those have been in the U.S. for a similar length of time but who are younger (i.e., were brought to the U.S. at a young age). The data do, however, provide some evidence to support our hypotheses related to know-how. Indeed, those who have used *coyotes* are less likely to be deterred by either the proposed border wall or the increased probability of death while crossing the border. Moreover, those who have returned to Mexico after initially entering the U.S. are also less likely to be deterred.

As political and policy debates over border security will undoubtedly continue, more research will be needed to understand the implications of existing and proposed policies. Until then, our results provide evidence to suggest that the proposed border wall will not have its desired deterrent effect.

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	Appendix Model 1	Appendix Model 2
Border Wall	.288	.264
	(.229)	(.230)
Yuma Desert	-.829***	-.862***
	(.251)	(.253)
U.S.C. Family		-.304
		(.303)
Years in U.S.		-.006
		(.015)
Know Someone Deported	.445*	.463*
	(.199)	(.199)
Coyote	.586**	.562**
	(.199)	(.200)
Returned to Mexico		
Constant	-796***	-.376
	(.210)	(.472)
Observations	463	462

$^{***}p < 0.001, ^{**}p < 0.01, ^{*}p < 0.05$

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