

The Local Politics of Border Control: Transnationality, Resistance, and Accommodation

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ABSTRACT

States are increasingly hardening borders. Scholars have dedicated substantial attention to the causes and effects of this phenomenon, but contestation by local communities is less understood. This study takes up the challenge of theorizing borderlands as unique geopolitical spaces and the communities therein as central actors in order to explain why they sometimes resist border hardening. Transnational communities with cross-border ties depend on mobility, which disposes them to contest border hardening. Yet, when hardening makes exceptions accommodating local ways of life, resistance is less likely. This theory is tested and developed via a mixed-methods design leveraging the COVID-19 pandemic context in which most states closed borders. Global quantitative analysis finds that an original geospatial measure of transnationality predicts local protest against closures. Interviews in two deviant case communities that are highly transnational but did not resist the nearby border closure show that the policy's accommodation of border-related industries largely forestalled discontent. Such selective border hardening, which accounts for local flows, mitigates conflict. The results point to local communities as a key actor in border politics deserving more attention.

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Introduction

International border politics is transforming. States are building infrastructures like walls and reshaping sovereignty by co-governing with neighbors (Diener and Hagen, 2012; Longo, 2017). Discourse identifying threats at borders defines populism and the backlash against globalization (Simmons and Shaffer, 2024; Simmons and Goemans, 2021). Given these normative stakes, scholars have devoted substantial attention to border hardening. The literature has advanced from documenting the hardening trend toward explaining why it occurs (Carter and Poast, 2017; Hassner and Wittenberg, 2015; Avdan, 2018; Andreas, 2010; Linebarger and Braithwaite, 2022; Simmons and Kenwick, 2022) and unpacking whether and how it impacts cross-border flows (Avdan and Gelpi, 2017; Carter and Poast, 2020; Carter, Donahue and Williams, 2024; Getmanski, Grossman and Wright, 2019; Schon and Leblang, 2021; Kim and Tajima, 2022; Linebarger and Braithwaite, 2020).

This research is crucial for understanding the perennial challenge of facilitating beneficial flows while limiting harmful ones. However, it tells us little about border politics “on-the-ground.” Aside from scattered studies (e.g., Blair, 2024; Cortina, 2019; Whitaker, 2023; Gavrilis, 2008), the position of local border communities on global hardening is unclear. Yet local engagement is variable but often contentious. For example, local opposition to hardening is found in Finland against its 2023 partial closure of the border with Russia (Kristina Harazim, 2023), among Indian communities along the borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh (Majumdar, 2020), and in Argentina over a fence at the border with Paraguay (Andolina, 2020). In contrast, demands for hardening are found in increasingly right-wing Swiss border communities (Arababab et al., 2024), protests and vigilantism by South African communities near Mozambique (Matlala, 2018), and Greek community participation in hardening at the Turkey border (Tagle, 2022). These events illustrate variety in local demands, which can conflict with the generally popular trend toward hardening. The knowledge deficit on these dynamics is striking given that 1.8 billion people (23% of the human population) live within 50 miles of land borders.¹

To explain contestation, this study investigates, *why do some local borderland communities resist border hardening by the state?* The bottom-up story outlines when local interests will clash with state prerogatives and morph into collective action. Transnationality is the theoretical focus. Border control is salient for communities whose way of life revolves around interaction and exchange across borders. Such communities are incentivized and have the tools to overcome collective action problems and challenge the state, even over hardening that is nationally popular. Yet, the more that hardening accommodates transnationality, the less likely conflict is to emerge. Such selective bordering shows that states can meaningfully redesign their policies in ways that alter their local impact.

I evaluate and develop this theory via a mixed-methods design leveraging the COVID-19 pandemic context. Virtually all states with land borders closed them

¹This calculation uses global LandScan population data (Sims et al., 2022) and the borders data in this study.

during the pandemic, providing an opportunity to compare local reactions to a comparatively exogenous and “apolitical” form of border hardening. The first design component is a deductive global quantitative analysis of transnationality, captured with an original geospatial measure, and hand-coded secondary events data. The key finding is that transnationality predicts local protests/riots against border closures.

The second design component is case studies of two United States (U.S.) communities that are highly transnational but did not resist pandemic border hardening. Studying such “deviant cases” (Levy, 2008), or “off-the-line” observations (Lieberman, 2005), enables inductive theoretical refinement. Fieldwork interviews indicate that the closure’s impact was diminished because it made exceptions for key flows. This “selective” bordering undermined widespread and early collective action.

This study makes four contributions. The first is providing a theory for the border politics literature that explains local opposition to hardening. The second contribution is to spotlight the under-recognized tension between some local communities and national priorities. Hardening seen by national publics as a means of protection and security may be experienced by local populations as a fundamental threat. The proliferation of border control should be understood as a point of tension not only with the liberal international order (Simmons and Goemans, 2021) but with some populations in domestic politics. Third, addressing how to navigate that clash, I develop the phenomenon of selective bordering to conceptualize variation within border hardening that conditions local impacts. Finally, this study provides new and granular global data on cross-border ties while demonstrating the value of using qualitative data to inductively refine theory.

In what follows, I outline the concept of transnationality before linking it to resistance against border hardening. This is followed by the two empirical analyses and theoretical refinements. The conclusion then outlines broader implications.

Deductive Theory

Conceptualizing Transnationality

The theoretical framework treats borderlands as unique geopolitical spaces and the communities therein as central protagonists. Answering the call to better specify border effects (Braun and Kienitz, 2022), I conceptualize how life in borderlands varies. This effort emphasizes transnationality, defined as *the extent to which a borderland community is connected to society across the border*.² The concept focuses on communities in the areas both proximate to and bisected by an international land border. A borderland encompasses two national spaces, although nearby borderlands do occasionally overlap.

The distinctiveness of borderlands, relative to country interiors, is physical proximity to a border. Proximity affects communities in diverse ways (Idler, 2019; Braun and Kienitz, 2022). In one sense, proximity can have negative implications in the

²This conceptualization differs from migration studies that uses transnationality for migrants’ long-term ties with home countries (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007).

form of insecurity. Borders may enable and attract criminals and insurgents engaging in violence or evading states. Relatedly, border areas may be the target of state repression.

Yet proximity also generates beneficial opportunities for local populations to interact and exchange with people and institutions across borders. People outside of borderlands can travel, digitally communicate across borders, and consume international goods, but proximity enables deeper ties embedded in day-to-day life and personal experiences (Mirwaldt, 2010).

There are two dimensions to this positive aspect of border proximity, or transnationality. The economic dimension encompasses formal and informal trade, smuggling, work, shopping, and transhumant pastoral systems; the social dimension encompasses familial, ethnic, religious, and other interpersonal linkages. The two dimensions are not intrinsically bundled, and individuals within a community may vary in their cross-border engagement.

The extent to which transnationality characterizes communities varies both within and across borderlands (Wilson and Donnan, 1998). For example, high transnationality characterizes many communities in the U.S.–Mexico borderland in the forms of work, school, commerce, medical care, and friends and kin, as well as illicit flows (Martínez, 1994; Díaz-Barriga and Dorsey, 2020). Many residents articulate an interconnected identity (Dear, 2020; Stea, Zech and Gray, 2010). Conversely, communities on the Botswana side of the Botswana–Zimbabwe borderland generally exemplify low transnationality. Although Kalanga people live on both sides of this sparsely populated borderland (The New Humanitarian, 2005), most movement across this border is transitory and one-sided in the form of Zimbabweans migrating to the interior of Botswana for work and security. Xenophobia is widespread throughout Botswana, including in the border region (Campbell and Crush, 2015).

Transnationality is enduring but evolves over time. The diversity of forces that shape it underscores that transnationality is distinct from other forms of exchange and interaction across borders. On the one hand, states can influence transnationality in the long-run. This includes violently manipulating borderland demographics to eliminate the ethnic basis of social ties (McNamee and Zhang, 2019; Müller-Crepon, Schvitz and Cederman, 2025). Yet, states can also contribute to transnationality. For example, roads built to facilitate inter-country trade indirectly enable local populations to participate in cross-border economies over time, as has happened with the North American Free Trade Agreement (Stea, Zech and Gray, 2010). State intervention may also follow prior transnationality, such as attempts to formalize entrenched smuggling practices (Su, 2022).

As for bottom-up forces, local actors can use their agency to shape transnationality. They can work to foster trade and binational governance institutions to stimulate development and cooperation (Gallien, 2020; Matanzima, Helliker and Pophiwa, 2023; Miggelbrink, 2014; Markusse, 2011). People in borderlands may also pursue social linkages, especially for minority ethnic groups whose existence predates colonial-era borders (Ghosh, 2011; Moyo, 2016).

Overall, transnationality is a dynamic yet enduring trait. Borderland communities vary in their degree and forms of cross-border ties over space and time. These shape

the local politics of border hardening.

Resistance Against Border Hardening

The theory uses transnationality to explain how borderland communities, the primary unit of analysis, engage with border hardening. While classic scholarship highlights communities wielding agency in demanding the consolidation of borders ([Sahlins, 1989](#)), I focus on why communities would oppose otherwise popular hardening, and what states can do to mitigate conflict. The argument is that transnationality shapes interests and collective action processes. Highly transnational communities broadly favor the status quo. In turn, they are more likely than other borderland communities to perceive hardening as a disruptive threat. Community traits associated with transnationality enable them to overcome the collective action problem and mobilize. Extant theories miss these dynamics, homogenizing national public support for border hardening as driven by a shared sense of threat.

Transnationality and Interests

I draw from the [Baud and van Schendel \(1997\)](#) model of borderland–state relations to situate the community as the main unit/level of analysis. Communities further contain local/regional elites as well as a potentially heterogeneous public. The other key actor is the central state seeking to harden the border.

The positive regular interaction and exchange across borders associated with transnationality poses important implications for the prevailing interests in communities. This occurs along two dimensions. First, in economic terms, interaction and exchange create dependency on the status quo. These activities structure the local economy for citizens, firms, and elites, who become dependent on the revenue and thus develop a preference for policies that sustain this revenue. This logic follows work finding that people in areas benefiting from economic openness have a different orientation toward trade policy than people in areas harmed by import competition (e.g., [Jensen, Quinn and Weymouth, 2017](#)).

The second implication of transnationality is positive social sentiment. Contact with people across borders can fuel positive perceptions of outgroups ([Mirwaldt, 2010](#)) and increase support for fighting human rights abuses abroad ([Pauselli, 2024](#)). I consider these effects through the lens of contact theory ([Allport, 1954](#)). The framework posits that contact between groups under certain conditions engenders positive sentiment. The interaction and exchange embedded in transnationality connote the four conditions: equal status between the cross-border groups, shared goals, cooperation between these groups, and support in the local institutional context and customs ([Allport, 1954](#), 281; see also [Paluck, Green and Green 2019](#)).

Relatedly, people in highly transnational communities often develop a sense of cross-border belonging. Although the printing press and modern maps have propagated national and territorial conceptions of politics ([Anderson, 2006](#); [Branch, 2014](#)), living in a highly transnational community engenders conceptions of a cohesive social

world ([Ghosh, 2011](#); [Idler, 2019](#); [Mirwaldt, 2010](#); [Dear, 2020](#)). People in such settings often recognize complex, cross-cutting identities.

The Threat of Border Hardening

Given how transnationality shapes community interests, the potential clash with border hardening is apparent. The more transnational a borderland community, the greater the swathe of the public and elites who have an interest in policies that sustain contextually relevant interaction and exchange. New hardening is likely to be seen as a threat to the status quo. The concern is that established standing patterns of interaction and exchange will be obstructed.

In terms of economic ties, economic revenue generated from cross-border mobility may be lost. The concern is that border hardening will decrease formal trade, informal trade, and/or smuggling flows by slowing down or entirely inhibiting traffic across the border ([Blair, 2023](#); [Carter and Poast, 2020](#)). This would threaten livelihoods and the provision of goods.

As for social ties, the fear is of limitations to communication across borders. This applies to ties built around family, friends, ethnicity, religion, and more. Nationally oriented border hardening is seen as imposing an inflexible national identity over local, potentially more fluid, conceptions ([Cortina, 2019](#); [Díaz-Barriga and Dorsey, 2020](#); [Dear, 2020](#)).

For this clash to emerge, not all individuals or sub-groups within a transnational community need to directly participate in transnationality. Prior ethnographic work finds that subgroups engage with changing borders differently based on their histories, identities, and practices (e.g., [Pfoser, 2015](#)). Certain subgroups in a given community may even feel negatively about cross-border interaction and exchange. The inverse is true for low-transnationality communities, which may contain individuals or sub-groups that feel positively about society across the border. The key point, however, is that transnationality generates vested interests for key actors in the community that will manifest in community-level behavior. When a sufficient degree of the community's public, elites, and sectors perceive a threat, then a clash of interests that can turn into action develops.

This theory applies across borderlands with varying levels of prior hardening. Transnationality can exist where there are different degrees of prior hardening. Transnationality exists among communities encountering different levels of state presence, spanning the heavily securitized and militarized sites like U.S. or South African borders as well as areas with little state presence like many segments of the India–Bangladesh border. Moreover, the basis of transnational ties can emerge prior to the initial delineation of borders, as with colonial borders imposed on diverse societies. The key point is that new hardening always may upend the status quo way of life for transnational communities, regardless of prior hardening or lack thereof.

From Clashing Interests to Collective Action

Resistance refers to actions that demand the end or reduced intensity of a border hardening strategy. The exemplary form is social movements in which, drawing on shared purpose and identity, people collectively confront a state via boycotts, petitions, demonstrations, strikes, or legal action (Tarrow, 2011). Importantly, resistance does not inevitably develop. Displeasure among a sufficient degree of sub-actors within communities needs to aggregate. But the coordination of collective action is the classic challenge for human groups. Transnational communities, however, have traits that enable them to overcome these problems. This point applies across the three conditions that are jointly necessary for resistance to emerge: political opportunity, availability of mobilization resources, and framing processes of grievance (Tarrow, 2011; McAdam, 2017).

To start, political opportunity for mobilization is heightened when a border is in (potential) flux. It is easier to mobilize around imminent change than stagnancy. This is because there is a more meaningful opportunity for communities to shape the evolving outcome.

Second, transnational communities often possess or are capable of generating the resources needed to organize. The formal economic and social organizations involved in cross-border interaction and exchange provide resources to coordinate mobilization and to monitor participation. These include non-governmental organizations, unions, business groups, social organizations, and local government entities. Moreover, political or economic elites whose own interests are threatened or who wish to cultivate local support can lower the costs of resistance by encouraging dissent (Ying, 2021), refusing to punish illegal actions (Garfias and Sellars, 2022), and directly making demands themselves.

Third, the notion of being a misunderstood and disregarded borderland community provides a frame of reference for grievances (Kajta and Opiłowska, 2023). It taps into a shared meaning and cultural understanding of incursion from outsiders, creating the sense of grievance and optimism needed to challenge the threat. This framing is especially effective since it is linked to salient identities (Mulugeta and Wando, 2025).

Altogether, the convergence of opportunity, resources, and framing needed for resistance is especially likely for transnational communities facing border hardening. This bundle of traits helps communities overcome collective action problems and mobilize. The observable implication is as follows:

Transnational Resistance Hypothesis: *The more transnational a borderland community, the more likely it is to resist border hardening.*

I test this deductive expectation in the upcoming empirical analysis, but I follow it with an inductive refinement based on case studies. In brief, the logic is that “selective bordering” — efforts to control borders whose range of targets is scoped — is less likely to spark resistance. If selectivity accounts for local ways of life, more within-community interests associated with transnationality are preserved. Such ac-

commodation preempts conflict by entirely mitigating the impact on transnationality or, in having only a partial impact, by undermining collective action.

Learning from Pandemic Bordering

I test the general theory in the COVID-19 pandemic context. The border closures widely deployed during this time provide two inferential advantages, relative to other forms of hardening. First, the closures provide a “tough” test. They were inherently temporary, in contrast to comparatively enduring structures like walls, guard stations, and surveillance systems. Closures also targeted an “obvious” public health threat in the low-information, fear-ridden environment rather than more overtly politicized movement like immigration (Kenwick and Simmons, 2020). In fact, closures received broad national-level support (Lindholt et al., 2021; Chilton et al., 2023). Even transnational communities might be expected to have willingly accepted the temporary costs of closures. If border hardening sparks local opposition, this form should be the least likely to do so. Finding that transnationality drove resistance even against pandemic closures would provide robust evidence that the theory applies more generally, in a logic similar to “least-likely” case selection (Levy, 2008).

The second advantage of examining closures is their largely exogenous nature: the sudden threat of virus transmission prompted 89% of states with land borders to enact a closure (Shiraeef et al., 2022). This occurred even in the Schengen Area where such acts are rarely seen. Thus, the explanatory factors ascribed to the differential adoption of conventional border hardening approaches do not apply. Testing the influence of transnationality on resistance against closures is less susceptible to confounding.

Leveraging these features of pandemic border closures, my mixed-method design includes two elements. The first is a global quantitative analysis of transnationality and resistance events testing the deductive **Transnational Resistance Hypothesis**. The second component is a pair of case studies investigating communities that deviated from the theory in order to inductively refine the theory.

Quantitative Evidence

The phenomena of interest are the transnationality of borderland communities and whether they politically resisted border restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic. In order to quantitatively evaluate this relationship, I create a measure of *Transnationality* and hand-code secondary events data.

Measuring Transnationality

My original, cross-sectional, and geospatial measure of transnationality has global coverage. To my knowledge, it is the first measure of spatial variation in cross-border ties that operates at the community-level and that integrates information spanning economic and social forms of connection. It complements state-oriented

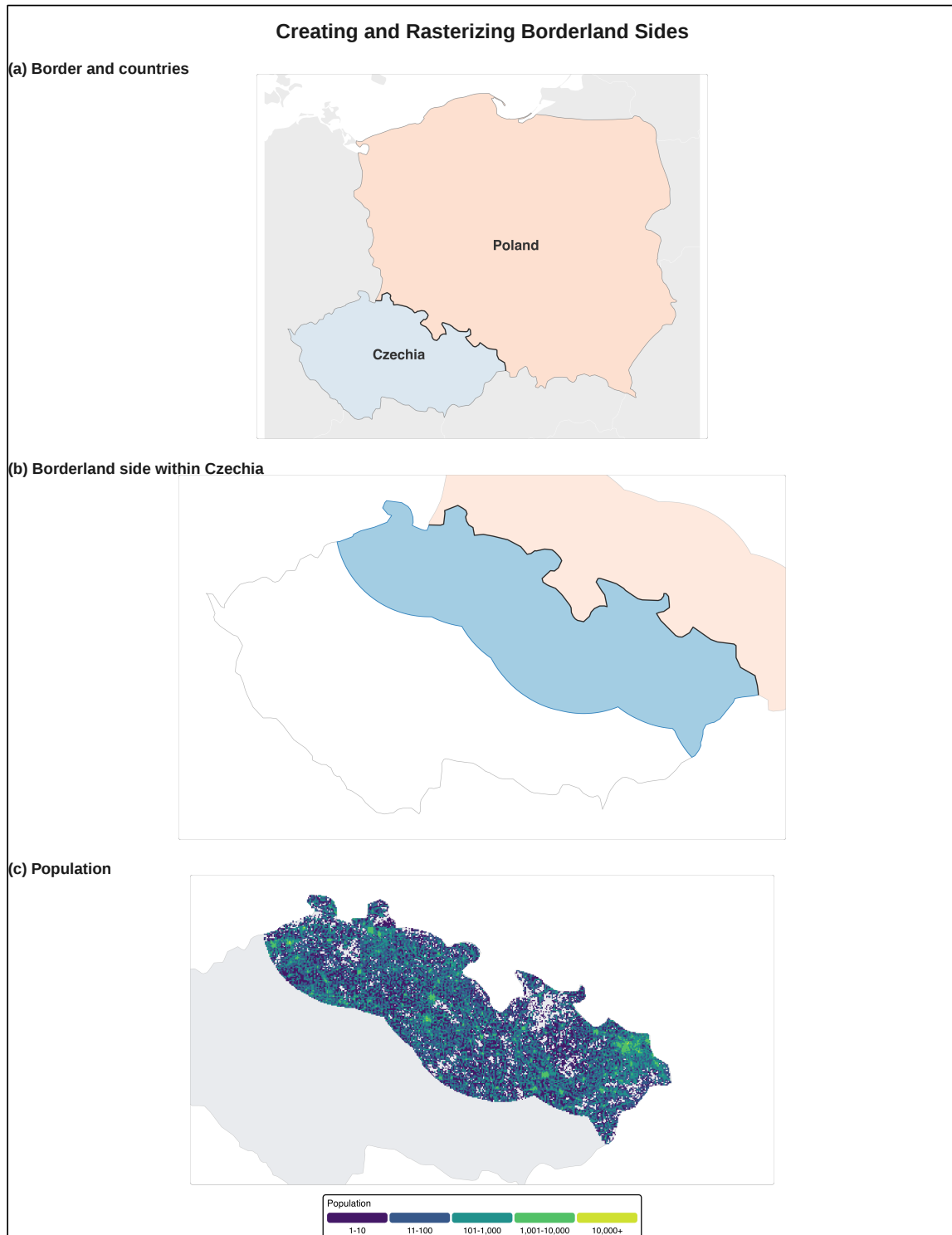
datasets (e.g., [Kenwick, Simmons and McAlexander, 2023](#); [Deutschmann, Gabrielli and Recchi, 2023](#); [Kenwick et al., 2025](#)) with a local, society-focused measure.

The unit of analysis is the borderland community. The dataset consists of 30x30 kilometer (KM) grid cells over all populated landmass areas within 50 miles, or approximately 80 KM, of all 305 international land borders. Each borderline was transformed to a two-sided borderland with the 50-mile buffers, and then each side’s shape was rasterized into multiple grid cell communities. The dataset contains 49,056 community cell observations. Treating populated cells as proxies for local communities, each is scored on an additive index for transnationality. It summarizes cells’ proximity to a set of items intersecting or reaching across the nearby border: roads, railroads, ethnic kin settlements, and sister cities. Community cells located more closely to these items receive a higher score on the transnationality index, which has 21 unique values between 0 and 5 (see the variable’s distribution in [Appendix 1.4](#)).

The transnationality index is designed around significant limitations with granular yet global datasets. The ideal information would be hyper-local and time-varying data on the frequency and direction of all types of flows across all borders. Such data, however, simply does not exist at a global scale. The next best approach is to identify, per community cell, its relative proximity to phenomena that signify transnational connection. Using variation in physical proximity to border-relevant items approximates variation in practiced transnationality. Being located in a borderland does not inherently mean that a community is transnational. However, being closer to a road that is known to reach a border, for example, is a reasonable indication that transnational interaction and exchange is more prevalent. Both roads and railroads are sites of movement, ethnic kin settlements represent areas with plausible social ties, and sister cities establish agreements and practices of cooperation. By contrast, communities that are farther from any of these items are more spatially isolated from cross-border interaction and exchange. Using relative distance, rather than binary “containment” of items, maximizes cell comparability. Relative distance, for example, avoids equating a road-less cell abutting a with-road cell to a cell located much farther away that is very distant from any border-intersecting road. Overall, the measurement strategy disentangles presence in a borderland context into meaningful gradations in cross-border connection strength.

Further detail on the measurement process and the data sources is provided in [Appendix 1](#) due to space limitations. But the maps below visualize the Czechia side of the Czechia—Poland borderland to illustrate the measure. The set of maps in [Figure 1](#) represent the first phase. Panel (a) shows the border derived from where the two country shapes intersect. In turn, panel (b) depicts the landmass areas within 50 miles becoming the borderland sides. In panel (c), the borderland sides are converted into the 1KMx1KM raster cells originally generated from LandScan population data ([Rose et al., 2020](#)), including only cells that contain people.

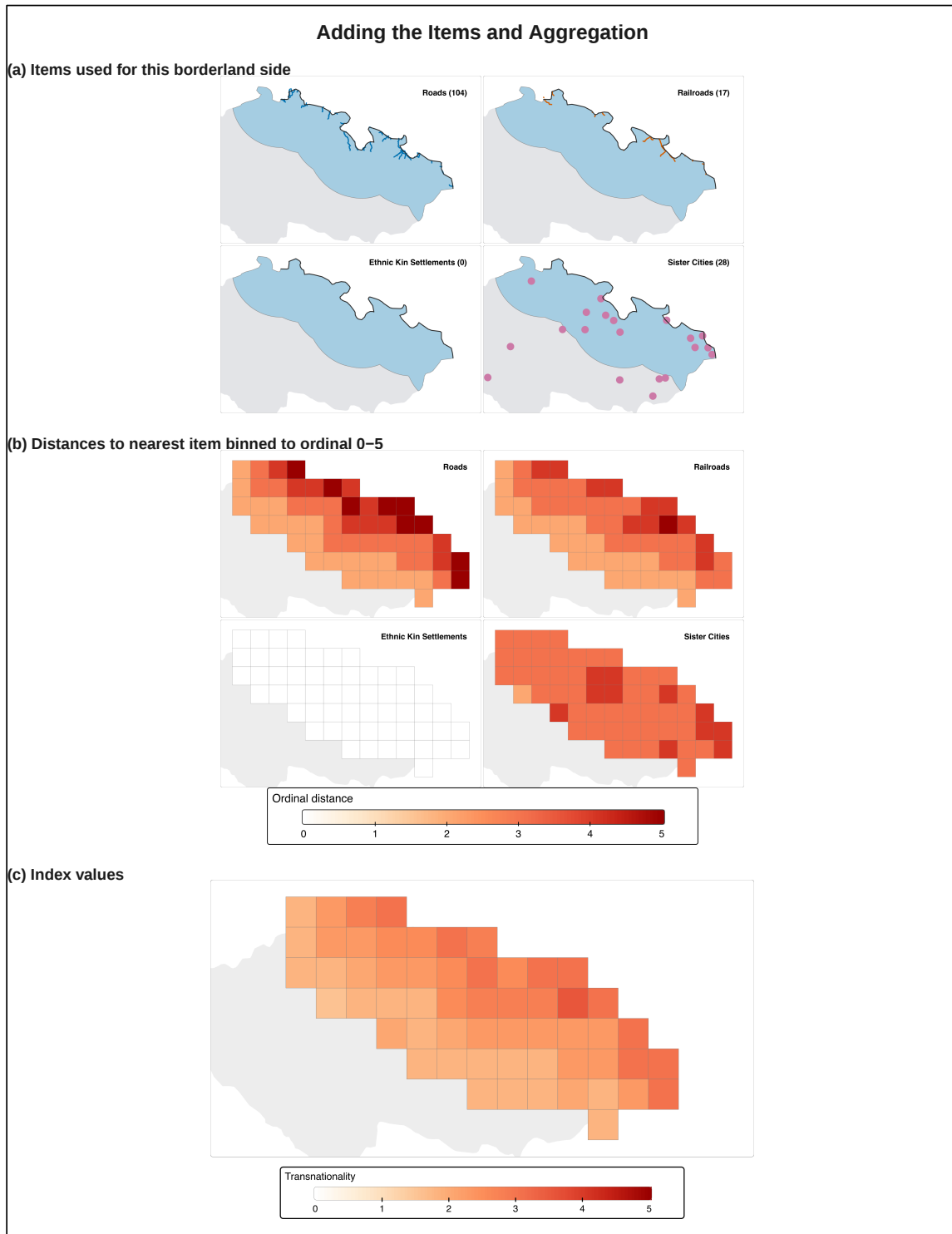
Figure 1: Measurement Process Example I



The second set of maps in Figure 2 depict the process of adding items information and converting the distance values into ordinal values that are summarized into the final index. In panel (a), the instances of the items used for this borderland side

are shown. In this particular case, roads, railroads and sister cities are present, but ethnic kin settlements are not. Distances to the nearest items are then calculated and converted to the ordinal scale as shown in panel (b), with larger values representing closer proximity and the lowest value being assigned when that item is not at all present in the borderland side. Finally, panel (c) shows the additive index scores for each community cell constructed by summing the ordinal item values and then dividing by four since there are that many items. The final panel demonstrates the granular variation that the measure provides: the multiple community cells within a given borderland side receive their own transnationality scores.

Figure 2: Measurement Process Example II



A series of validity tests presented in Appendix 2 provide evidence that the measure meaningfully operationalizes the concept of transnationality (Adcock and Collier, 2001). First, each item positively correlates with the index, while the items

themselves share weak to near-zero correlations (see Appendix 2.1). Each item thus contributes to the index while capturing a distinct facet of the concept. Second, affirming that transnationality goes beyond borderland-interior differences to capture between-community variation, transnationality and distance from the border are weakly correlated ($\rho = -0.13$, see Appendix 2.2). Finally, more stringent nomological validity tests detailed in Appendices 2.3 and 2.4 provide evidence that the measure behaves as it should in predicting both greater wealth and shorter travel time to border crossings. Altogether, these tests provide evidence for measurement validity.

Measuring Resistance

Resistance is a binary variable indicating whether a community protested or rioted against a closure by the community’s state of the nearby border between 2020 and 2021. The data is sourced from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). This widely used source produced the COVID-19 Disorder Tracker, or the subset of ACLED events specifically related to that pandemic ([Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, 2025](#)). The pandemic dataset includes approximately 63,000 geolocated events from 2020–2023 accompanied by brief qualitative descriptions. I use the 2020–2021 subset for alignment with the closures data detailed below.

Scholars have found biases in such media-sourced data concerning consistency and constancy of reporting both within and between contexts ([Parkinson, 2024](#)). However, the ACLED COVID-19 Disorder Tracker in particular has an advantage: demand for coverage of the pandemic was extremely high. ACLED extended data coverage to nearly all countries (see [Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, N.d.](#)).

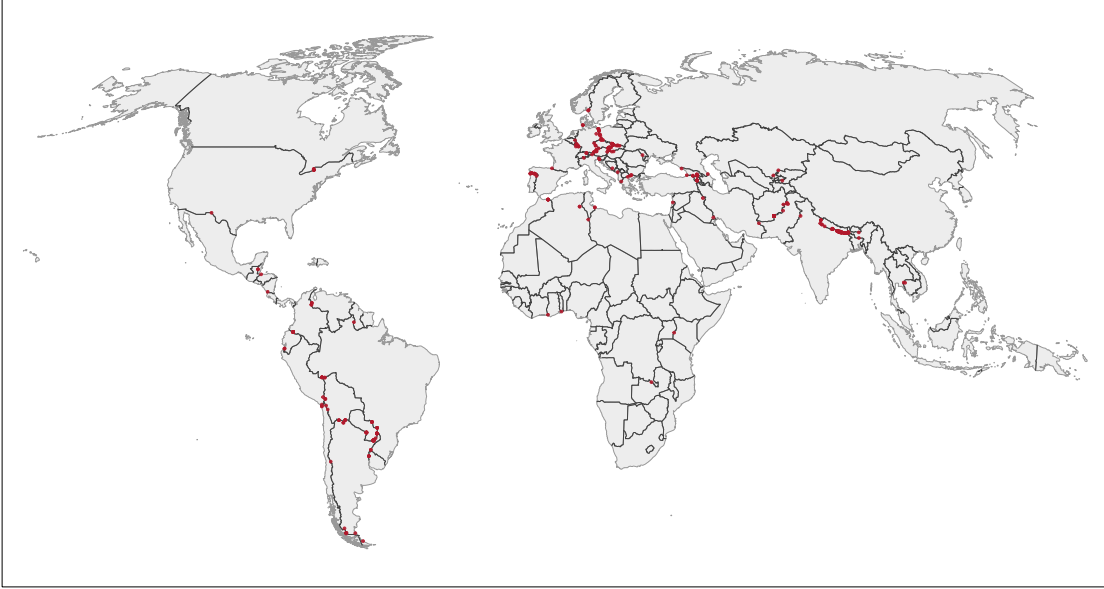
To operationalize Resistance, I first used border-related keywords to identify potentially relevant protests and riots.³ Undergraduate research assistants and I hand-coded this data to identify which events concerned closures and, of those, which events opposed restrictions and the specific borders of concern (see Appendix 6). The qualitative descriptions reflect the distinctly local concerns about closures. For example: “... workers protested in Vinhais, demanding the Portuguese- Spanish border’s reopening - closed to coronavirus-related restrictions.”

The process identified 457 relevant events from 2020–2021. 416 events (91%) occurred in borderlands, and most of these events opposed rather than supported closures (386 events, or 93%). These events’ locations are shown in Figure 3.

³ “[Bb]order*”, “[Bb]oumdar*”, “[Cc]rossing*”, “[Cc]heckpoint*”, “[Ii]nternational [Bb]ridge*”, and “[Ff]rontier*”.

Figure 3: Resistance Map

Borderland Resistance to COVID-19 Pandemic Closures



Sample and Models

To ensure theoretical relevance, the sample includes only community grid cells whose country actually enacted a border closure. For the minority of communities not exposed to this policy, there was no closure to potentially resist. Further, while the underlying theoretical logic might explain behavior by any community, the most meaningful chance for resistance was against a community's own state.

The closures data comes from the COVID Border Accountability Project, which tracked the number and content of border restrictions from 2020 to 2021 ([Shiraeef et al., 2022](#)). 135 out of 151 countries with land borders (approximately 89%) enacted a closure at least once. Limiting the sample to community grid cells among these countries reduces the size by about 10% to 43,929 observations. As asserted above, closures were unrelated to transnationality.⁴

Using the hand-coded resistance data, each community grid cell is coded for whether at least one event about the associated border transpired within the cell between 2020 and 2021. 121 cells experienced one or more events, indicating that community-level resistance was rare. Similarly, across all borderland sides exposed to closures, 69 of 526 (13%) experienced any resistance.

Community-level resistance is modeled as a function of Transnationality and other variables in logistic regression models. To account for unobserved confounding, models include fixed effects for the borderland side (Models 1-2), overall borderland (Models 3-4), and country (Models 5-6). Each specification is relevant, but the borderland

⁴In an aggregated analysis, there is little to no association between the average transnationality of a borderland side and closures ($\rho = -0.02$), or between the average transnationality of a country's borderlands and closures ($\rho = -0.1$).

side fixed effects model is the best suited since it uses the most granular unit in comparing communities on the same borderland side but that vary by transnationality.

To further mitigate potential confounding, all models include a series of control variables. The first is a continuous variable for logged *Population* from the original LandScan raster data (Rose et al., 2020). Recent work linking population size and protest (Thomson et al., 2023; Dorward and Fox, 2022) suggests that larger communities may be both more transnational and more capable of protesting due to having more people that could be affected by border policy and able to participate in mobilization. The next control is a dichotomous variable for the presence of *Natural Resources* (Denly et al., 2022), a proxy for communities that have more robust economies and associated institutions to contest the state. The third control is a continuous variable for terrain *Ruggedness* (Shaver, Carter and Shawa, 2019), which has been found to associate with contentious politics.⁵ The next control is a continuous variable for logged *Capital Distance* (Schvitz et al., 2022), which proxies the degree of incorporation into the national polity since more incorporated communities might be less susceptible to border-related shocks. Finally, additional specifications account for the potential spatial diffusion of Resistance. This involves adding a binary spatial lag *Adjacent Event* indicating whether at least one resistance event occurred in an adjacent grid cell (Models 2, 4, and 6).

Finally, all of the independent variables are rescaled as advised by Gelman (2008). This entails de-meaning all variables and then, for continuous variables, also dividing by two standard deviations. The advantage of this linear transformation is being able to compare the relative strength of predictors that are originally measured in different units. Rescaling does not change the actual effects or uncertainties estimated. Each coefficient represents the change in the log odds of the outcome when the independent variable, regardless of original scale, increases by two standard deviations. For clarity, equivalent results from models using non-rescaled variables are in Appendix 3.

Results

The expectation is that more transnational borderland communities were more likely than other borderland communities to resist border hardening. Overall, the results displayed in Table 15 support this **Transnational Resistance Hypothesis**. Across all model specifications, Transnationality positively and significantly associates with Resistance. Moreover, the magnitude of the coefficient across the models is consistently the largest or second-largest of all significant effects.

⁵Addressing multicollinearity concerns, Ruggedness does not meaningfully correlate with Transnationality ($\rho = 0.02$) or with the infrastructure items of road connectivity ($\rho = 0.07$) and railroad connectivity ($\rho = 0.00$).

Table 1: Transnationality and Resistance Against COVID-19 Border Closures

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Transnationality	4.608*	4.752*	3.982*	3.821*	1.826*	1.694*
	(0.465)	(0.477)	(0.399)	(0.408)	(0.287)	(0.292)
Population (Logged)	4.338*	4.332*	3.746*	3.801*	4.298*	4.285*
	(0.465)	(0.464)	(0.414)	(0.419)	(0.406)	(0.410)
Resources	-0.045	-0.035	0.023	0.012	0.056	0.022
	(0.132)	(0.132)	(0.121)	(0.122)	(0.117)	(0.118)
Ruggedness	-1.107*	-1.142*	-0.574	-0.578	-0.676*	-0.567
	(0.379)	(0.374)	(0.349)	(0.357)	(0.296)	(0.303)
Capital Distance (Logged)	0.751	0.716	-0.290	-0.142	0.625*	0.688*
	(0.438)	(0.434)	(0.267)	(0.276)	(0.290)	(0.297)
Adjacent Event		-0.084		0.157*		0.207*
		(0.063)		(0.054)		(0.056)
<i>n</i>	7805	7805	11204	11204	17596	17596
Borderland Side FEs	✓	✓				
Border FEs			✓	✓		
Country FEs					✓	✓

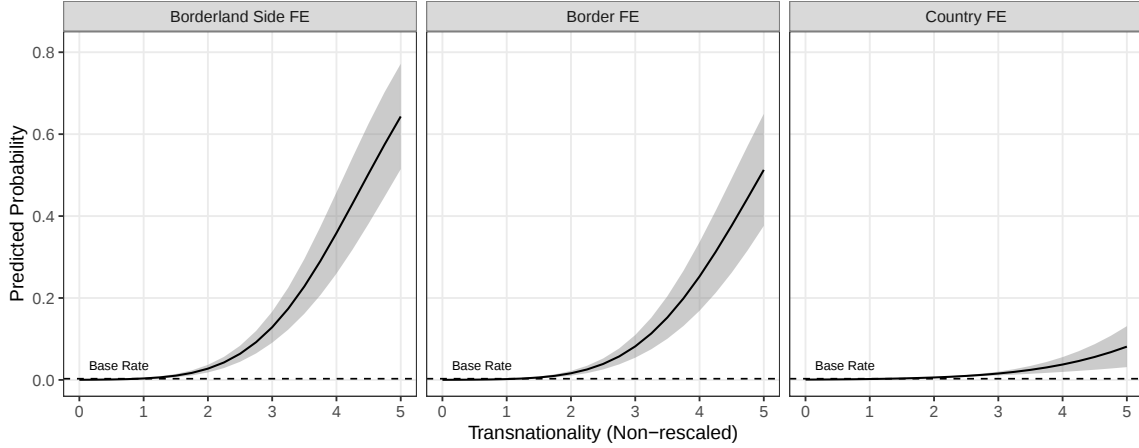
* $p < 0.05$

Additionally, the two spatial lag models suggest a spatial diffusion process. When comparing communities in the same borderland (Model 4) or in the same country (Model 6), but not the same borderland side (Model 2), resistance by a neighboring community (Adjacent Event) predicts resistance by the focal community. This occurs alongside the independent influence of Transnationality.

For a substantive interpretation, Figure 4 displays the predicted probabilities of Resistance at different values of Transnationality.⁶ These hold covariates at observed values. Each sub-figure corresponds to one of the models without a spatial lag.

⁶For ease of visual interpretation, the x-axis in these plots shows the original, non-rescaled values of Transnationality (0-5). The curves are identical to the plots using the rescaled values, shown in Appendix 3.

Figure 4: Predicted Probability of Resistance Against COVID-19 Border Closures



In each plot, moderately and highly transnational communities are meaningfully more likely to contest closures. These shifts are especially notable given the rarity of resistance. Across models, the predicted probability of resistance is effectively 0 for low transnationality, aligning with the base rate of 0.003. However, the estimates clearly exceed the base rate as transnationality increases, as illustrated by Model 1 with borderland side fixed effects. At the modal transnationality value of 2 (see Appendix 1.4), the predicted probability reaches 0.03 [95% CI: 0.02,0.04]. This probability is low in the absolute but nearly 10 times the base rate. In a starker shift, the predicted probability of resistance reaches 0.13 [95% CI: 0.1,0.2] when transnationality is 3, 0.36 [95% CI: 0.3,0.5] when transnationality is 4, and 0.64 [95% CI: 0.5,0.8] when transnationality is its max at 5. These estimates signal that increasing transnationality meaningfully moves the probability of resistance. Similar estimates emerge from Model 3 with fixed effects for borderlands.

Notably, the effect is smaller in Model 5 for country fixed effects. This specification is the least granular out of the three and the least suited to estimating the locally varying effect of transnationality between otherwise similar communities. Even so, the substantively meaningful increases exhibited relative to the extremely low base rate of resistance constitute additional evidence for the **Transnational Resistance Hypothesis**. For example, the predicted probability at the modal transnationality value of 2 reaches 0.006 [95% CI: 0.005,0.007], which is nearly twice the base rate. At maximum transnationality, the predicted probability of resistance reaches 0.08 [95% CI: 0.03,0.13], which is 28 times the base rate.

Robustness Checks and Subgroup Analyses

Overall, in support of the **Transnational Resistance Hypothesis**, transnationality associates with resistance during the COVID-19 pandemic. A series of robustness checks bolsters the evidence. First, transnationality is not found to predict protests and riots unrelated to border closures during the same time period, ruling out an unobserved confounder driving both transnationality and a general proclivity to chal-

lenge states (see Appendix 4.1). Second, when disaggregating the index into the individual items, road and railroad connectivity but not ethnic kin and sister cities associates with resistance (see Appendix 4.2). Economic concerns may have played a greater role than social concerns in driving resistance. Third, altering the Transnationality measure with an alternative ordinalization scheme for the underlying items yields the same result (see Appendix 4.3). Fourth, the positive finding also holds when using linear probability models that do not drop observations from fixed effects units without variation in resistance (Timoneda, 2021) (see Appendix 4.4). Fifth, the modifiable areal unit problem does not appear to bias results since the finding holds in analyses using alternate grid cell sizes (see Appendix 4.5). Finally, investigating whether variation in communities' distance to the border drives the transnationality-resistance relationship, models that add a control variable for border distance broadly yield a consistent result (see Appendix 4.6).

Appendix 5 also presents subgroup analyses. First, the positive transnationality-resistance relationship holds among communities in borderlands both with and without walls (see Appendix 5.1). The theory may explain resistance across contexts with varying policy histories. Second, transnationality continues to predict resistance to border closures among subsamples differentiated by state capacity (see Appendix 5.2). Finally, regime type does not moderate the relationship, which still holds in both democracies and autocracies (see Appendix 5.3).

Overall, the consistent result underscores the centrality of transnationality to local resistance against COVID-19 border closures. In the absence of meaningful transnational ties, resistance essentially never took place. Transnationality was a key factor driving the resistance that transpired.

Qualitative Evidence

The quantitative evidence indicates that more transnational communities were more likely to resist COVID-19 border closures. However, exceptions defy the pattern. For example, the U.S. closed the border with Mexico for nearly two years (Department of Homeland Security, 2020; Federal Register, 2021), yet none of the highly transnational communities throughout the area protested or rioted.

These outliers suggest limits to the theory. Why would border hardening not produce conflict? I investigate this anomaly with evidence gathered within communities. Investigating “deviant cases” (Levy, 2008) or “off-the-line” observations (Lieberman, 2005) is an established practice for inductively refining theory.

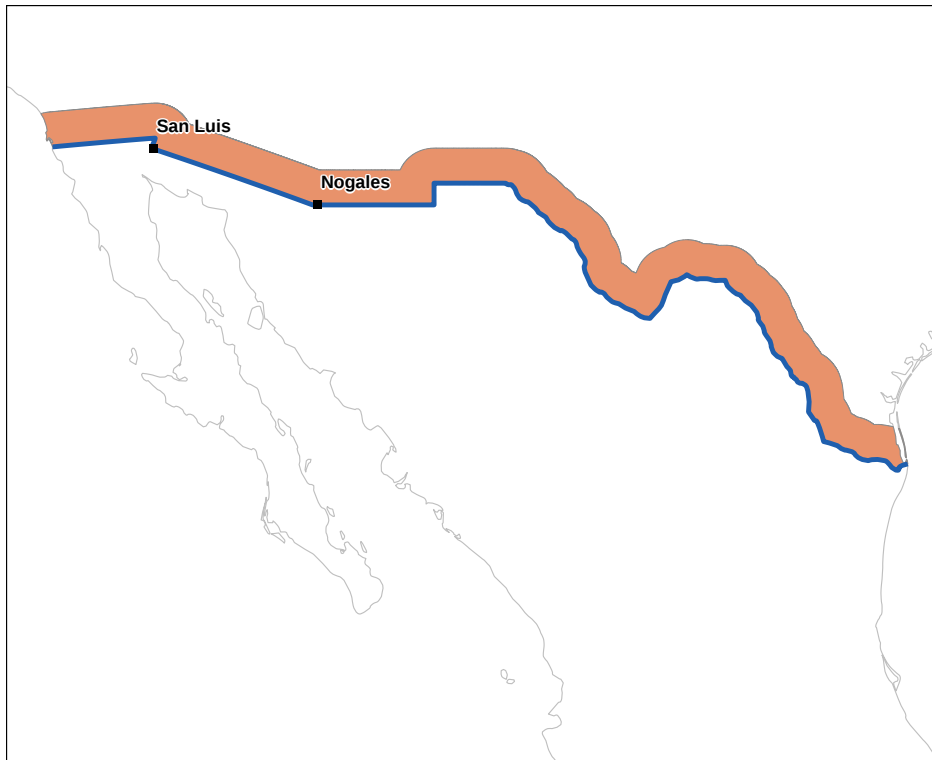
Cases

I examine Nogales and San Luis in Arizona, small cities on the border with Mexico (see Figure 5), as my deviant cases. Two external validity traits are notable here (see Gerring, 2017). First, they should be treated as representative specifically of highly transnational communities. This reflects the established assessment of scholars (Romo

and R. Márquez, 2010; Stea, Zech and Gray, 2010), and my quantitative measure scores both Nogales and San Luis at 3.75, which is in the 98th percentile.

Second, these communities should be treated as representative of democratic contexts in which protest is comparatively feasible. Although democracies on the whole have less hardened borders than autocracies (Simmons and Kenwick, 2022), many states like the U.S., South Africa, and those at the edge of the European Union show that the trend toward hardening involves states of all regime types. The cases speak to this type of context.

Figure 5: Case Studies



Interviewee Sampling

To access the perspectives and knowledge of local stakeholders, I conducted semi-structured interviews during a three-week fieldwork trip across Nogales and San Luis, as well as the surrounding area, in October-November 2024. The best sampling strategy was a mix of purposive and snowball sampling, sometimes with the assistance of an interlocutor at a lobbying firm, for individuals in public and private sectors with knowledge about border issues (Kapiszewski, 2015).⁷ The sampling process yielded 18 interviews across Nogales and San Luis as well as Yuma (see Table 2). Most

⁷The interlocutor worked across party lines, and interviewees expressed a range of political affiliations and beliefs.

interviewees worked in local government, while others were members of the local port authorities, business owners, and activists involved in humanitarian work.

Table 2: Interview Data Sample

Category	Number
Mayor	2
City Administration	2
City Council	1
Port Authority Member	6
County Supervisor	2
State Agency	1
State Congressperson (Former)	1
Businessperson	5
Activist	3

Note: Some individuals in the 18-person sample overlap multiple categories.

In the semi-structured interviews, I asked open-ended questions from questionnaires (see Appendix 7). This approach generated comparable data across interviews while permitting unexpected topics. See Appendix 8 for ethical considerations.

Case Study Findings

First, it is confirmed that Nogales and San Luis are highly transnational. Second, interviewees recounted decades of political efficacy advocating for ports of entry. Third, the closure made exceptions for a substantial breadth of movement, largely sustaining the borderland economy. Yet, fourth, leaders made public criticisms about the harm to downtown storefronts more than a year into the closure. This constituted a limited and much-delayed form of opposition whose emergence reflects the limitations of collective action in the face of a broadly accommodating border closure.

After presenting these findings, I advance the concept of selective bordering. The more narrow the set of actors and flows a hardening strategy targets, the more selective it is. Selective bordering imposes fewer costs on transnational communities. This entirely forestalls a clash of interests or, if affecting only a narrow slice of interests, undermines collective action. Thus, state accommodations can reduce conflict.

Finding 1: Confirming Transnationality

The manner in which every interviewee characterized local life reflects the concept of transnationality. They chronicled deep and long-lasting cross-border ties throughout history. Nogales first emerged in the area that became part of the U.S. via the Gadsden Purchase from Mexico in 1853 after a pair of Russian-Jewish immigrants opened a trading post in 1880. The first border rail crossing opened there in 1882, heralding the growth of Nogales as a city. San Luis was founded later in 1930 alongside

a port of entry and was eventually incorporated into Yuma County in 1979 after an explosion of border-related economic growth. Today, Nogales and San Luis number approximately 20,000 and 40,000, respectively. They neighbor the larger cities of Nogales and San Luis Río Colorado in Sonora, Mexico. Both are more than 90% Hispanic ([United States Census Bureau, N.d.](#)) and lean Democratic.

The centrality of transnationality to local life is exemplified by a long-time city government employee and official in Nogales remarking that “We live, die, and breathe everything associated with the border.”⁸ On the economic dimension, cross-border exchange is hugely significant. First, many downtown shops have existed for nearly 100 years primarily because of cross-border shoppers instead of the small U.S. customer bases.⁹ Second, the most significant source of government revenue for both cities is sales tax generated predominantly by cross-border shoppers.¹⁰ This revenue is so significant that neither community has historically had a property tax. Finally, international trade through the ports of both communities is tremendous. For example, nearly \$29 billion USD in imports and exports traversed Nogales in 2022 ([Greater Nogales Santa Cruz County Port Authority, 2024](#)). Interviewees consistently referred to such trade as critical, saying for example that “All of our existence supports or is related to cross-border trade.”¹¹

San Luis also benefits from cross-border shoppers and trade.¹² But its economy is “entirely dependent” on an agricultural industry whose workforce consists primarily of *campesinos*, or Mexican seasonal and migrant farmworkers.¹³ A few thousand people cross over daily throughout the year to work throughout the region.¹⁴

Based on these economic dependencies, interviewees repeatedly expressed that a community like Nogales “needs the border” to survive¹⁵ or, “If the border wasn’t here, you’d have nothing.”¹⁶ This idea reflects the unique opportunities that borders can provide to local populations. While the “border effect” identified by economists concerns borders hindering macro-level trade (e.g., [Anderson and van Wincoop, 2003](#)), borders simultaneously enable *local* economic exchange that would not exist otherwise. Local commerce cannot take place without a border. Borderland communities, especially those that are marginalized in the domestic economy, benefit from price differentials at borders ([Baud and van Schendel, 1997](#)).

In addition to economic exchange, interviewees consistently described a collective social world. As one mayor put it, “We’re the same people.”¹⁷ Nogales, Arizona, and Nogales, Sonora, in fact, are articulated as being part of a broader *Ambos Nogales* (“both Nogales”). Visiting family or friends is a common reason that people

⁸Interview 3, 10/28/2024.

⁹Interview 8, 10/31/2024.

¹⁰Interview 3, 10/28/2024; Interview 9, 11/01/2024; Interview 12, 11/05/2024; Interview 15, 11/07/2024.

¹¹Interview 3, 10/28/2024.

¹²Interview 15, 11/07/2024.

¹³Interview 11, 11/04/2024.

¹⁴Interview 12, 11/05/2024; Interview 16, 11/07/2024.

¹⁵Interview 5, 10/29/2024.

¹⁶Interview 9, 11/01/2024.

¹⁷Interview 18, 11/20/2024.

cross the border.¹⁸ Interviewees repeatedly referred to “cultural benefits,”¹⁹ “being binational,”²⁰ “culture and diversity,”²¹ being “one community,”²² a “culture of the border,”²³ and “cultural interconnectedness.”²⁴ Matching this sentiment, both communities cooperate with municipalities across the border. Nogales is a sister city of the contiguous Heroica Nogales (Paulina Pineda, 2017), and San Luis is a sister city of San Luis Río Colorado right across the border as well as of Navolato and Magdalena de Kino further into Mexico (Rodríguez and McClain, 2023).

Notably, transnationality has predominated over time. Historically, hundreds of children would enter the U.S. for Halloween and Christmas in Nogales.²⁵ Both an official and an activist in San Luis recounted their grandparents or parents having once worked as *campesinos*.²⁶ These accounts of enduring transnationality are reinforced by materials in the local Pimería Alta Historical Society Museum that document years of binational celebrations and collaborations.

Finding 2: Port Authorities and Political Efficacy

Transnational ties in Nogales and San Luis have profoundly shaped prevailing interests concerning border policy. The communities have engaged in decades of activity to demand attention and funding to improve efficiency at ports of entry. This action is exemplified by two organizations: the Greater Nogales Santa Cruz County Port Authority and the Greater Yuma Port Authority.

These port authorities are all-volunteer entities comprised of community political and economic leaders. They interface between local, state, and federal government authorities as well as fellow border communities on both sides about policy and day-to-day management of the ports of entry. Their ultimate mission has been to shorten crossing wait times by improving efficiency via road infrastructure, staffing, and detection technologies. These were repeatedly described as the most important border-related issues for the communities.²⁷

However, according to local leaders, federal action on community needs has lacked. Interviewees repeatedly attributed federal neglect or the poor choices made when they do intervene to physical and political distance.²⁸ Local leaders thus created the port authorities to support their “forgotten” communities.²⁹ These activities have included communicating with lawmakers and officials, hiring lobbyists, and applying for grants.

¹⁸Interview 5, 10/29/2024.

¹⁹Interview 1, 10/24/2024.

²⁰Interview 2, 10/25/2024.

²¹Interview 3, 10/28/2024.

²²Interview 8, 10/31/2024.

²³Interview 13, 11/05/2024.

²⁴Interview 15, 11/07/2024.

²⁵Interview 2, 10/25/2024.

²⁶Interview 16, 11/07/2024; Interview 18, 11/20/2024.

²⁷Interview 3, 10/28/2024; Interview 5, 10/29/2024; Interview 8, 10/31/2024; Interview 9, 11/01/2024; Interview 11, 11/04/2024; Interview 12, 11/05/2024; Interview 15, 11/07/2024.

²⁸Interview 9, 11/01/2024; Interview 13, 11/05/2024; Interview 15, 11/07/2024; Interview 17, 11/11/2024.

²⁹Interview 1, 10/24/2024.

Early successes include the \$250-million USD renovation of the Nogales-Mariposa Port of Entry in the 2010s and the construction of a new fully commercial port of entry in San Luis in the late 2000s. According to interviewees, such developments would not have happened without bottom-up drive and collaboration.³⁰

These accounts speak to the strained relationships that Nogales and San Luis leaders have had with higher-level authorities. They also reflect proactive engagement on border policy, informed by the transnational way of life. Situating the pandemic closure in this historical context, it is especially perplexing that dramatic and immediate resistance against a closure did not emerge.

Finding 3: The Mitigating Effect of Accommodations and Exceptions

Nogales and San Luis are highly transnational and politically efficacious. Why did they not strongly mobilize against the COVID-19 border closure? The hand-coded ACLED event data used earlier did not document any events, and interviewees confirmed the absence of such events while emphasizing that the communities broadly accepted the closure.

The evidence points to the selective nature of the closure. The primary restriction adopted by the U.S. at the border, starting on March 20, 2020, was to differentiate people by citizenship and, in turn, “essential”/“non-essential” status. Citizens could traverse the border as before, but non-citizens could only enter for essential reasons like work, attending school, and cross-border trade ([American Immigration Council, 2020](#)). Non-citizen entry that was “tourism or recreational”, such as shopping and visiting family or friends, was disallowed ([Department of Homeland Security, 2020](#)). This policy applied to the entire border with Mexico (and the border with Canada) rather than particular crossings. The motivation articulated by federal officials was to preserve the trade on which the U.S. economy relied (e.g., [White House, 2020](#)). The closure was repeatedly extended until November 20, 2021 ([Federal Register, 2021](#)).

The exceptions made for trade and workers limited the closure’s negative impact. Interviewees consistently reported that these proved critical to the well-being of the local economies. Put simply by one interviewee, “We didn’t slow down on the border.”³¹

Local economic operations reportedly largely continued despite the closure. In the words of one mayor, the closure “hardly affected our economy... Trade kept going.”³² A Nogales city official similarly reported that the economic situation remained roughly the same since border industries could still operate.³³ An official in San Luis characterized the category of essential workers as “relatively broad” since it helpfully encompassed agricultural workers.³⁴ The closure’s diminished impact surprised both officials.

³⁰Interview 1, 10/24/2024; Interview 2, 10/25/2024; Interview 3, 10/28/2024; Interview 11, 11/04/2024; Interview 12, 11/05/2024; Interview 17, 11/11/2024.

³¹Interview 17, 11/11/2024.

³²Interview 18, 11/20/2024.

³³Interview 3, 10/28/2024.

³⁴Interview 12, 11/05/2024.

Multiple interviewees emphasized that tax revenue remained relatively constant, dipping only temporarily. They variously attributed this outcome to U.S.-side shoppers doing their usual cross-border shopping within the communities, to the permitted non-citizens still crossing, to a financial influx from construction workers visiting for an unrelated infrastructure project, and to citizens shopping on behalf of family and friends in Mexico.³⁵

Finding 4: Barriers to Collective Action

Overall, the closure's impact was relatively minimal, making important exceptions for multiple dimensions of the borderland economy. Major tenets of transnationality in this setting were not threatened by the comparatively accommodating closure.

Nevertheless, the closure did pose some negative ramifications. For example, while the ports of entry in San Luis remained open at all times, the Mexico-side ports limited evening hours. *Campesinos* working in Arizona or California were thus sometimes stranded overnight in San Luis and slept outside.³⁶ Additionally, one interviewee referred to the closure as a “very unnatural” period that harmed social ties across the border.³⁷

Clear victims of the closure were downtown stores. The reduced customer base due to the ban on “tourist” travel induced financial strain. For instance, one merchant in Nogales reported that other local businesses eventually had to close.³⁸ On this front, local leaders did eventually criticize the closure in May–June 2021, more than a year after the policy had been in place. Public letters to the federal government were sent by the Greater Nogales Santa Cruz County Port Authority, the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors, the City of Nogales, and the City of San Luis, and a City of Nogales resolution made the same expression (Chamberlain, 2021; Nogales International, 2021; Newman, 2021; Jimenez, 2021). They requested that the federal government permit entry by non-citizen shoppers, stating that the negative impact on downtown storefronts was no longer acceptable since COVID-19 rates had declined.

These statements constituted collective action, but its form precisely reflects the mitigating impact of the closure. The demand narrowly centered downtown storefronts, an important but limited subset of the broader borderland economy; it emerged only a year into the closure's existence and only once COVID-19 rates had declined; and it was a largely symbolic public communication. The negative impact on downtown businesses had been apparent since the outset. But it was not severe and cross-cutting enough to prompt earlier action. Observing the counterfactual is not possible, but action may have emerged in the starker form of protest had the closure been more restrictive and disrupted more sectors.

³⁵Interview 3, 10/28/2024; Interview 12, 11/05/2024; Interview 17, 11/11/2024; Interview 18, 11/20/2024.

³⁶Interview 15, 11/07/2024.

³⁷Interview 8, 10/31/2024.

³⁸Interview 8, 10/31/2024.

Refining the Theory with Selective Bordering

Integrating the findings from these deviant case studies enables a useful refinement of the theory for how local communities react to border hardening. The core logic still holds: transnational communities are broadly vested in policies that facilitate existing cross-border flows. In the face of new hardening, they are also equipped with the opportunity, resources, and grievances to coordinate collective action.

However, the case studies spotlight an important scope condition. For resistance to occur, hardening needs to harm a sufficiently broad swathe of within-community actors involved in contextually relevant transnational flows. The threat's extent depends on which actors and flows a specific policy affects. When targets are scoped, hardening can allow key aspects of transnationality to remain intact.

In turn, contestation by transnational communities over border hardening is less likely to emerge. First, selective bordering may simply not threaten any contextually relevant interests, precluding any impetus for collective action. Second, selective bordering can undermine collective action by threatening only some interests in a transnational community. The disruption is not extreme enough that political opportunity emerges, that actors are willing to use their resources to organize, and that grievance framings are appealing to a broad enough audience. In either path, a transnational community facing selective border hardening will not resist. A formal hypothesis summarizing this idea, which can be tested further in future work, is as follows:

Selective Bordering Hypothesis: *The more selective a border hardening strategy, the less likely transnational communities are to resist it.*

The selective bordering concept, developed inductively with evidence from the U.S.–Mexico borderland context, helps to provide a more nuanced understanding of local border politics. However, future analysis deploying evidence from other settings is needed to further specify the concept's implications. Three further questions are especially pertinent.

The first question concerns whether the economic dimension of transnationality plays a larger role than the social dimension. This might be the case for multiple reasons. First, disruptions to important features of the local economy may pose a broader threat via spillover. Second, this threat could be more universally salient since it relates to people's economic survival. Third, for local elites with their own significant stakes in economic exchange, they may be especially capable of leveraging their resources to mobilize resistance. The converse point of these dynamics is that bordering whose selectivity encompasses important pillars of the economy may be sufficient to prevent resistance.

Next, if selective bordering minimizes pushback, why are states not always selective? First, states often simply do not care enough about the preferences of borderland communities to change course. State actors accrue alluring benefits from performing border security for national audiences (Andreas, 2010; Linebarger and Braithwaite, 2022), which can override the preferences of already marginalized local populations (Idler, 2019). Regime type may shape this dynamic, but the quantitative subgroup

analysis (see Appendix 5.3) did not find that regime type moderated the transnationality–resistance relationship. Second, states cannot be selective at the outset if they do not sufficiently understand local preferences due to uneven state capacity. Although states learn about their populations when expanding territorial control over previously unreachable areas (Blair, 2024), this knowledge may be lacking at the outset. Finally, it is worth noting more broadly, selective bordering does not necessarily intend to accommodate local communities. The U.S.’s selective closure, for instance, was motivated by dyadic trade. Such a fortuitous outcome may be less likely where community ties are robust but inter-country dependence is weak.

The final question is whether resistance affects border hardening itself. For a cursory comparison, the hand-coded ACLED data does identify 6 resistance events in New York state near the border with Canada in mid-2021, a little over a year into the border closure. Media reports of these events, along with criticism by politicians, emphasized the closure’s disruption of social ties (News 4 Staff, 2021; Staff Reporter, 2021). It is not clear, however, that these events caused the closure’s end months later in November. It associated with declining COVID-19 rates, and local resistance in one location is unlikely to have shifted a federal policy for two entire borders. That being said, other cases suggest that more extreme resistance, especially in lower-capacity states, might alter border policy. For an example in the hand-coded ACLED data from Kasumbalesa, Democratic Republic of Congo in May 2020, “a group of local people and traders burned tires on the public road and vandalized public buildings... The demonstration was held against the FARDC’s new controls at the border, which have halted the normal transit of people and goods due to the coronavirus pandemic... The border was reopened the next day.”

Conclusion

States are increasingly endeavoring to display and exert control over borders. Scholars have uncovered important top-down aspects of this phenomenon, yet the sometimes resistant reaction of local communities is largely unexplored. This study advances a framework, centering the borderland as a unique geopolitical space, to explain the emergence of resistance.

Compared to country interiors, communities near borders have the unique opportunity to engage society across the border. Transnational ties alter incentives, generating support for policies that sustain whatever forms of interaction and exchange across the border prevail. In the face of disruptive border hardening, conflict may emerge as transnational communities overcome collective action problems to challenge the state. However, if hardening is calibrated in its targets and thus accommodates major local interests, conflict is less likely to emerge.

I demonstrate that these dynamics transpired over border closures during the coronavirus pandemic. The global quantitative analysis linked local resistance to transnationality. Deviant case studies of Nogales and San Luis in the U.S. uncovered selective bordering in which narrow hardening approaches undermine collective action.

This study empirically focused on COVID-19 pandemic closures but speaks to

border politics more generally. The borderland is a unique geopolitical space that deserves more attention from scholars and policymakers. Distinct processes play out in this setting, with substantial variation characterizing local orientations toward border life and policy. Contestation characterizes the politics of border hardening more than previous work typically recognizes or can explain. Yet, as indicated by the findings about selective bordering, conflict can be mitigated if transparent and predictable exceptions for locally salient flows are made.

This study opens up new areas of inquiry. One natural direction concerns empirically assessing how these dynamics travel across other forms of border hardening. Relatedly, under what conditions do states make accommodations, intentionally or unintentionally, for transnationality? And does resistance impact the “success” of salient and expensive hardening projects? Finally, why do local communities sometimes demand more border hardening? To pursue these questions, the border politics community would benefit from adopting a broad array of data sources and methodologies. Along with macro-level analyses, evidence like interviews in borderlands provide granular insight into micro-level processes. Overall, dedicating more theoretical and empirical attention to the politics of borders *within* border spaces will help to broaden knowledge on some of the most pressing issues of our time.

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1 Details on Measuring Transnationality

1.1 Constructing Base Data

My Transnationality measure is geospatial, cross-sectional, and global. The first task was to establish where borderlands are, which is difficult because perceptions of them are socially constructed across locales. One option is administrative districts contiguous with borders, but variation in their size and number is shaped by political factors. I opt to treat borderlands as zones within a standardized distance of a border, which is not influenced by politics. I started this step by generating all contemporary international land borders as the lines where country shapes intersect, using the CShapes 2.0 dataset (Schvitz et al., 2022). Borderlands were then generated with round-ended buffers as landmass areas within 50 miles, or approximately 80 kilometers (KM), of borderlines. This approach cannot account for contextual conceptions of borderlands' extents, but 50-mile zones provide a consistent means of capturing all areas in the world that are reasonably proximate to borders. I then split each borderland shape into two sides based on the borderline, which generated 610 unique borderland side shapes.

Communities within borderlands are the primary unit of analysis, yet there is no obvious way to identify them. Using officially designated settlements or subnational districts potentially introduces bias. I opt to use the grid cell, which is unaffected by politics, to approximate human communities. Overlaying the borderland side shapes with rasterized population data from LandScan divided each borderland side into 1x1 KM grid cells (Rose et al., 2020). Only cells containing at least one person are included since, by definition, transnationality cannot characterize a place without people. Each borderland side raster is projected to the best-fitting Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) zone in order to maximize the accuracy of the distance calculations outlined below. Rasters that extend across multiple UTM zones are split into corresponding sub-rasters.

1.2 Items

The ideal type of information for measuring the relative transnationality of these communities would be hyper-local and time-varying data on the frequency and direction of all flows across all parts of all borders for local residents, licit trade, and illicit smuggling, as well as granular information on local identities over time. Such data, however, simply does not exist at a global scale. The next best measurement approach is to identify, per community grid cell, its proximity to observable phenomena that somehow reflect local variation in exchange and interaction across borders. The four items described below are chosen because they indicate economic and/or social interconnection for local communities as well as because global, geolocated information on them are available. I aggregate information for each community cell on the physical distance between its centroid and the items in order to score each community cell on the Transnationality scale.

The first item is road connectivity. Roads are sites of infrastructural connection

that facilitate the movement of both people and goods, so communities that are closer to a border-reaching road can be treated as more transnational in both economic and social terms. I use the Global Roads Inventory Project to extract the 17,948 roads that intersect borders (Meijer et al., 2018). This dataset plausibly captures diverse forms of traffic across borders because it encompasses different types of roads, ranging from highways to local roads.³⁹ I then calculate the distance from each cell to the nearest border-associated road.

The next item is railroad connectivity. As with roads, the presence of a railroad indicates the infrastructure for the movement of people and goods between distant places. Railroads are especially useful for capturing where international trade is taking place, which can involve nearby communities in the economic exchange. I use Natural Earth data to extract the 537 railroads that geographically intersect borders (Natural Earth, 2017). I then calculate how far each grid cell is from the nearest railroad intersecting the border with which that cell is associated.

The third item is ethnic kin settlements. A large body of scholarship has found important effects of ethnic groups extending across political borders. For example, enduring forms of exchange can emerge since shared ethnic identity reduces the transaction costs of cross-border trade (Aker et al., 2014). In the domain of conflict, insurgents having ethnic support bases across borders influences the dynamics of civil wars (Gleditsch, 2017). Building on these findings, I treat borderland communities that are closer to an ethnic kin settlement that extends across a border as more transnational.⁴⁰ The data source is the Ethnic Power Relations-Transborder Ethnic Kin (EPR-TEK 2021) dataset, which contains shapes representing the major settlement patterns of politically relevant ethnic groups (Vogt et al., 2015; Wucherpfennig et al., 2011). This dataset also provides an identifier for the broader TEK unit to which multiple groups belong, as some groups fall under a larger umbrella. I use the TEK identifiers to aggregate individual group shapes captured in 2019 into 167 TEK shapes. I then calculate the distance from each community cell to the nearest part of a TEK shape, if there is one extending across the relevant border, that is on that cell’s side of the borderland.

The final item is “sister cities.” These are pairs of human settlements that officially engage in substantive economic and/or cultural exchange. This can take a wide variety of forms including, to list just a few examples, the import/export of local goods, tourism campaigns, sport tournaments, and student exchange programs. Modern people-to-people diplomacy via sister cities emerged in Europe as a post-World War Two reconciliation effort but has since spread worldwide (Cremer, de Bruin and Dupuis, 2001). While many sister city pairings exist between non-bordering countries, many communities separated by a border but that share ties establish this type

³⁹The dataset harmonizes information from numerous sources to capture all documented roads that existed by 2015. The data does contain information on road type, but I treat all types equally in my measurement because applying universal categories across diverse settings is problematic, especially when the qualities of roads themselves change over time in ways that may not be reflected in the type classifications.

⁴⁰This approach by no means suggests that there are spaces where people do or do not “truly” belong or that all individuals in such areas hold identical identities.

of designation. Sister city designations follow histories of connection and positive sentiment (Zelinsky, 1991; Sloan and West, 1976), and an abundance of scholarship highlights their important, beneficial effects on foreign direct investment, economic growth, and trust and cooperation (e.g., He, Tang and Wei, 2025; Hu, Natarajan and Delios, 2021; Brakman, Garretsen and Oumer, 2016; Nowicka, Sagan and Studzińska, 2018). In this sense, sister cities exemplify the very activities and sentiments at the heart of the transnationality concept. Thus, identifying sister cities in borderlands is useful for capturing sites of meaningful bottom-up interaction and exchange. Borderland communities with or proximate to a cross-border sister city pairing can thus be treated as more transnational. I operationalize sister cities using a previously web-scraped list of 15,225 geolocated sister city pairs gathered from Wikipedia (Kaltenbrunner et al., 2014).⁴¹ I calculate the distance of each cell to the nearest sister city on its side of the border that is paired with a city across that border. There are 3083 unique sister city pairings across neighboring country pairs.

1.3 Ordinalizing Distance Values and Rasterization

Combining the four items yields 610 raster grids, one per borderland side, with information on the distance from each cell to transnationality-relevant roads, ethnic kin, railroads, and sister cities. To better ensure that the measure captures meaningful differences between neighboring cells, I aggregate cell size from 1x1 KM to 30x30 KM.⁴² The end result is 49,056 grid cell observations.

I then combine the items into an additive index measuring Transnationality per cell.⁴³ Constructing the additive index first involves converting all of the raw distance values into an ordinal scale, with larger values indicating closer proximity. I use a six-point ordinal scale because the intention is to create categories that theoretically capture different degrees of connection based on meaningful differences in proximity. These categories should range from no proximity to immediate proximity, with gradation in between. Therefore, continuous distance values are recoded into ordinal categories as follows: 0 for when the item is not present in the borderland side at all, 1 for when the item is 100 or more KM away, 2 for when the item is between 50 and less than 100 KM away, 3 for when the item is between 15 and less than 50 KM away,

⁴¹To my knowledge, there is no other global dataset on sister city pairings. The original data source is English Wikipedia, which potentially has biased regional coverage favoring English-speaking Western countries. However, the dataset does capture sister cities across 209 countries, suggesting wide coverage. These include, for example, Russia, Guatemala, Venezuela, India, Japan, Liberia, and Papua New Guinea.

⁴²I choose this size because 30 KM is considered the distance that an able-bodied person can reasonably walk twice in a day as part of a roundtrip (Lamarque, 2023). This does not capture walkability for every person in every setting. But, for the purposes of a global measure, 30 KM is a useful reference point for capturing the extent of space over which people could reasonably reach each other. The aggregation function for the distance measures takes, per item, the mean distance of each cell set being aggregated.

⁴³The simple additive index is appropriate over other approaches like item response theory or principal components analysis because, first, the expected relationships between the items and the index are simple and, second, because there are only four items and the alternative approaches perform well only with a greater number of items.

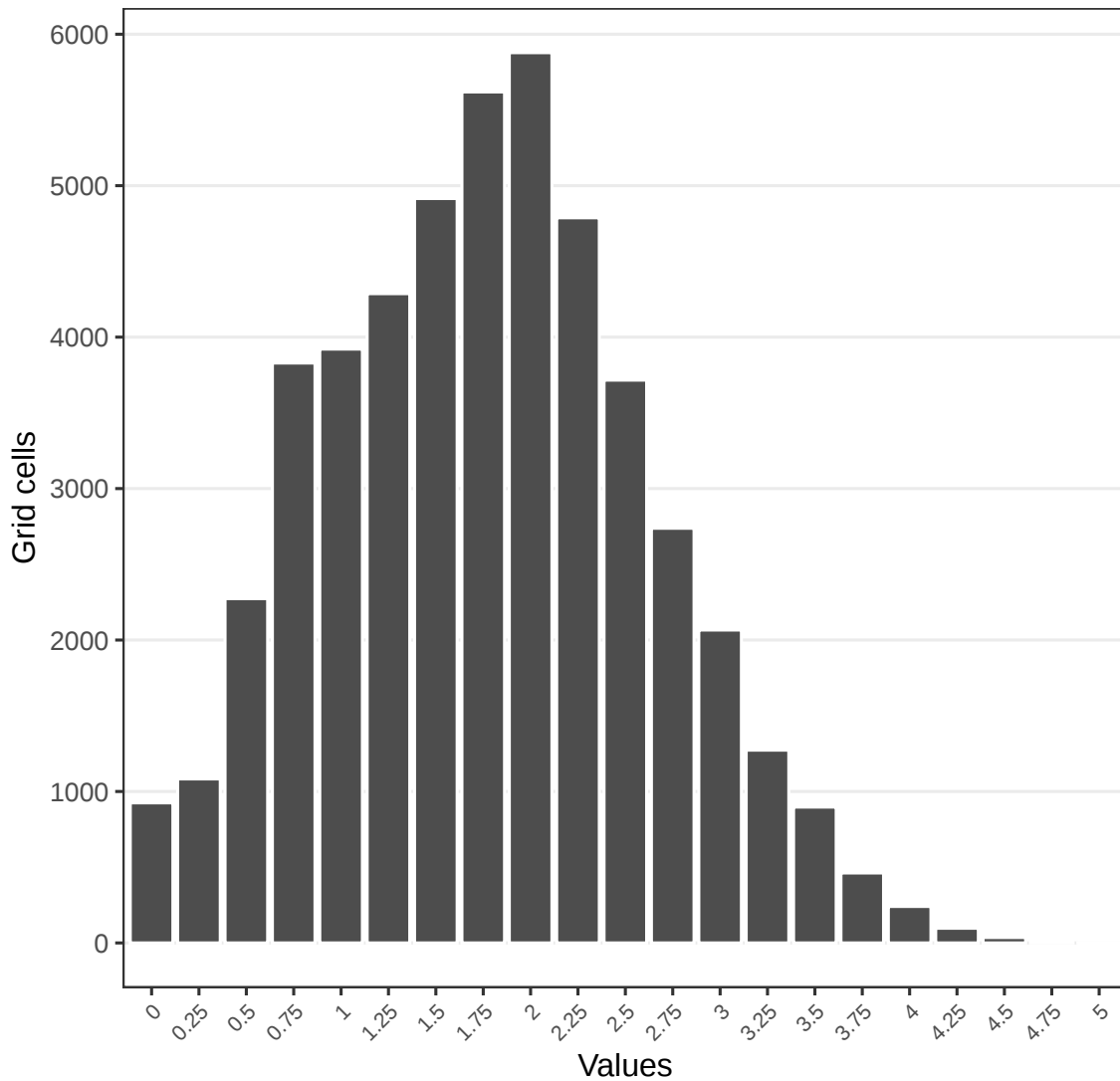
4 for when the item is between 5 and less than 15 KM away, and 5 for when the item is less than 5 KM away.

Using an ordinal rather than continuous measure of distance is necessary given that communities on the side of a borderland with no item present thus have no meaningful distance from that item. This point ties into the importance of the 0 value. It would not be sensible to compare the distances of all cells to a border-intersecting road, for example, when only some borderland sides have such a road in the first place. If side A of borderland A-B contains no segment of an ethnic kin settlement that reaches across the border, then all cells on side A will receive a value of 0 for that variable. But if side A contains at least one ethnic kin settlement reaching across that border, then the cells will receive a value that is greater than 0 which is determined by relative proximity to that settlement. This approach is necessary for allowing the measure to capture the total absence of a given manifestation of cross-border connection, and to place this absence on a scale along with other values. Using an ordinal measure of distance makes it possible to situate all communities on their relative proximity to a given item, whether or not that item exists in a particular borderland side.

After ordinalization, I score each cell by summing its values across the four items. To ease interpretation along the lines of the original ordinal items, I divide these summed values by the number of items (four). The final output is a scale with 21 unique values ranging between 0 (low transnationality, indicated by the absence of all items) and 5 (high transnationality, indicated by very close proximity to all items). The final values thus score each community grid cell on its relative level of transnationality.

1.4 Transnationality Distribution

Figure 6: Transnationality Distribution



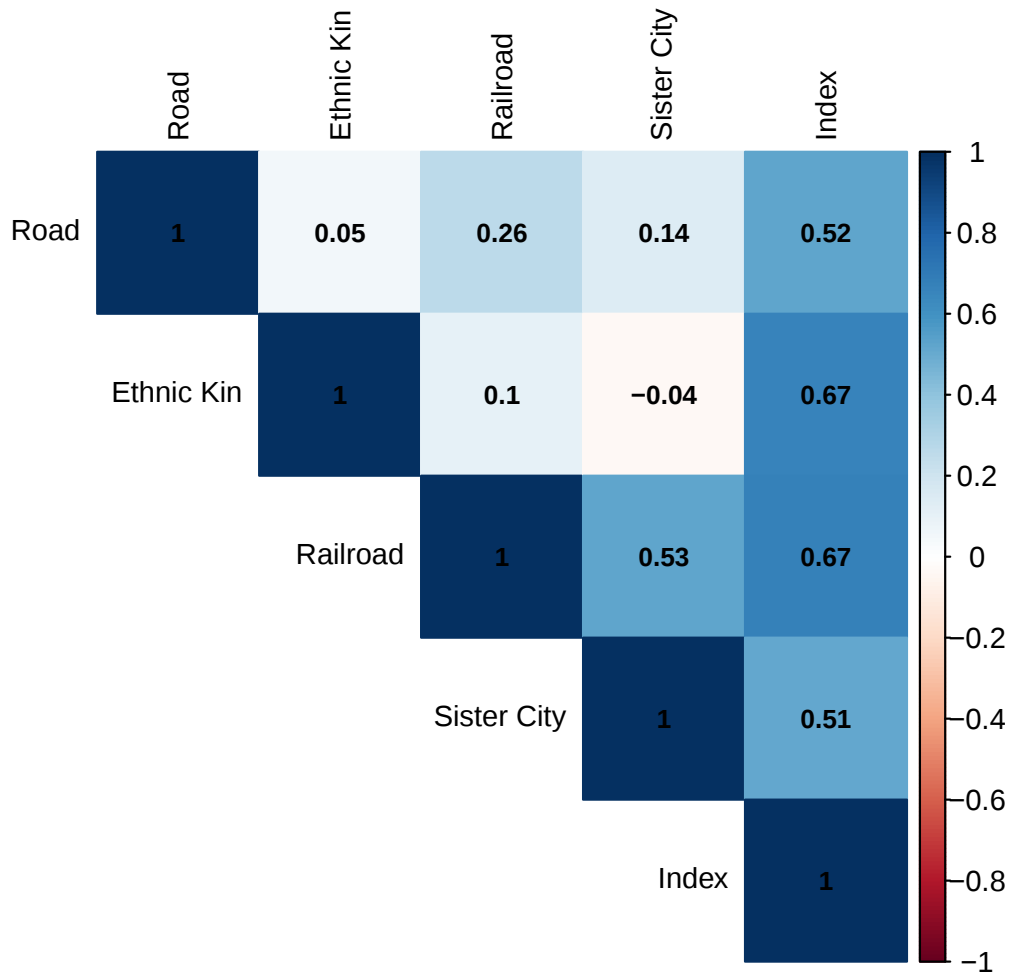
Note: 4.75 and 5 are observed but only rarely with 9 and 3 cells, respectively.

2 Validating the Transnationality Measure

2.1 Item-Total and Item-Item Correlations

This section assesses the relationships between the individual items and between the items and the index. Figure 7 displays the full set of correlations. Two key results emerge out of this plot. First, each item shares a moderate-to-strong positive correlation with the index. This finding bolsters confidence in the validity of the index, as each item relates to the underlying concept of transnationality. Second, as for inter-item correlations, it is notable that the items do not all strongly correlate with each other. Two item-pairs have a moderate positive correlation (sister cities and railroads, and roads and railroads) while all of the other pairs have near-zero correlations. This finding, in tandem with the consistently positive item-total correlations, indicates that the different components of the measure are each capturing a different aspect of transnationality. Combining these different sources of information thus makes for a richer index that integrates information on different economic and social facets of transnationality.

Figure 7: Item-Total and Item-Item Correlations for the Transnationality Index



2.2 Discriminant Validity using Distance from Border

Here, I assess the discriminant validity expectation that the transnationality measure captures something other than proximity to a border. If transnationality indeed meaningfully captures variation in borderland communities' ties across borders, it should not substantially relate to border proximity. Affirming the expectation, the association between a community cell's transnationality and its distance from the border is weak ($\rho = -0.13$). This result is further evidence for the validity of the transnationality measure.

2.3 Nomological Validity using Wealth

The first assumed hypothesis is that *The more transnational a borderland community, the wealthier it is*. Transnationality is conceptually defined in part on the basis of cross-border economic ties. Economic gains are a key motivator for sustaining transnational ties, especially in what are otherwise marginal borderland areas that receive little state investment (Idler, 2019; Gallien, 2020; Matanzima, Helliker and Pophiwa, 2023; Miggelbrink, 2014; Su, 2022). Thus, comparatively more transnational borderland communities should be wealthier.

I evaluate the association between Transnationality and wealth in an OLS framework. Wealth is measured using global raster data that has estimates of the gross domestic product (GDP) of each grid cell for the closest prior year of 2015 (Kummu, Taka and Guillaume, 2018). I changed the resolution of this continuous variable to match the Transnationality data by aggregating from the original 10x10 KM cell sizes via a summation function. Additionally, the GDP variable is logged because it is highly skewed. The models incorporate as independent variables Transnationality, Population, and the same fixed effects specifications used within analyses shared in the body of the paper (borderland side, borderland, and country). Following the approach adopted in the main body of the paper, all of the independent variables are rescaled to ensure that they are on a common scale (Gelman, 2008).

The results are displayed in Table 3. Overall, the results indicate that the measure passes this validity test. As assumed, Transnationality positively and significantly associates with wealth. This indicates that communities scored as comparatively more transnational by the measure tend to be wealthier.

Table 3: Transnationality and GDP (Logged)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Transnationality	1.068*	0.890*	0.639*
	(0.028)	(0.025)	(0.020)
Population (Logged)	2.360*	2.452*	2.878*
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.017)
<i>n</i>	49056	49056	49056
Borderland Side FEs	✓		
Border FEs		✓	
Country FEs			✓
R2	0.696	0.672	0.634

* $p < 0.05$

2.4 Nomological Validity using Travel Time

The assumed hypothesis for the second nomological validity test is that *The more transnational a borderland community, the less time it will take to travel from it to the nearest border crossing*. If Transnationality represents connection across borders,

travel to the nearest border crossing should be more efficient from comparatively more transnational communities. This is especially the case in terms of infrastructure like roads and railroads.

As with the first validity test, I use an OLS regression framework that includes a variety of model specifications and rescales the independent variables. The information on border crossings comes from the most comprehensive global dataset on where formal ports of entry are located (Kenwick, Simmons and McAlexander, 2023). In order to calculate travel time, I linked each cell to the physically nearest border crossing (for the relevant border) and then used the traveltime package to calculate driving time to that crossing (Ryan et al., 2025). The resultant driving time variable is logged because it is highly skewed.

The results are displayed in Table 4. Overall, the results provide evidence for the validity of the Transnationality measure. As assumed, Transnationality consistently predicts shorter travel time to the nearest border crossing. The coefficient is consistently negative and statistically significant, even when accounting for the actual distance of the cell to the nearest border crossing (Models 2, 4, and 6).

Table 4: Transnationality and Travel Time to Border Crossings

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Transnationality	-0.904*	-0.493*	-0.665*	-0.349*	-0.542*	-0.280*
	(0.010)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.006)
Population (Logged)	-0.548*	-0.399*	-0.572*	-0.418*	-0.713*	-0.476*
	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.005)
Crossing Distance		1.215*		1.243*		1.280*
		(0.006)		(0.006)		(0.006)
<i>n</i>	43614	43614	43614	43614	43614	43614
Borderland Side FEs	✓	✓				
Border FEs			✓	✓		
Country FEs					✓	✓
R2	0.739	0.865	0.714	0.850	0.632	0.823

* $p < 0.05$

3 Analysis with Differently Scaled Variables

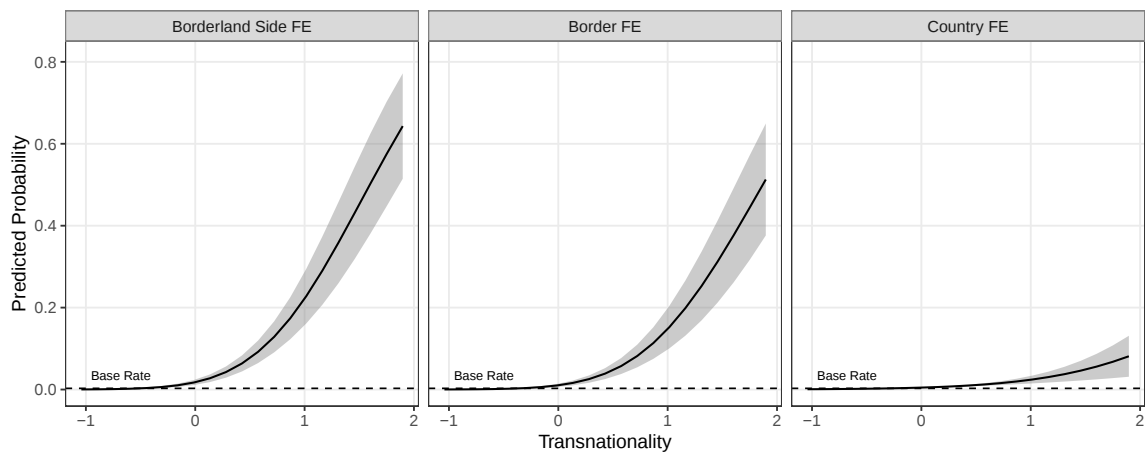
Table 5: Transnationality and Resistance Against COVID-19 Border Closures (Non-rescaled)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Transnationality	2.708*	2.793*	2.340*	2.246*	1.073*	0.995*
	(0.274)	(0.280)	(0.234)	(0.240)	(0.169)	(0.172)
Population (Logged)	0.738*	0.737*	0.637*	0.647*	0.731*	0.729*
	(0.079)	(0.079)	(0.070)	(0.071)	(0.069)	(0.070)
Resources	-0.139	-0.109	0.071	0.036	0.173	0.068
	(0.408)	(0.407)	(0.372)	(0.376)	(0.362)	(0.365)
Ruggedness	-0.003*	-0.003*	-0.002	-0.002	-0.002*	-0.002
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Capital Distance (Logged)	0.372	0.355	-0.144	-0.070	0.310*	0.341*
	(0.217)	(0.215)	(0.132)	(0.137)	(0.143)	(0.147)
Adjacent Event		-0.362		0.675*		0.890*
		(0.270)		(0.234)		(0.243)
<i>n</i>	7805	7805	11204	11204	17596	17596
Borderland Side FEs	✓	✓				
Border FEs			✓	✓		
Country FEs					✓	✓

* $p < 0.05$

All variables in original units.

Figure 8: Predicted Probability of Resistance Against COVID-19 Border Closures (Rescaled)



4 Robustness Checks of Transnationality–Resistance Analysis

4.1 Alternate Outcome Data

This section replicates the main analysis but, instead of using the hand-coded subset of ACLED COVID-19 Disorder Tracker data to operationalize resistance, it uses all other ACLED protest and riots. In other words, this analysis tests whether transnationality also predicts mobilization during the same period but on non-border issues. This new analysis is done on the same sample to maintain consistency. The key finding is that no model uncovers a significant association between transnationality and these resistance events. Thus, it appears unlikely that an unobserved confounder driving both transnationality and general opposition to the state explains away the original association found between transnationality and resistance against border hardening.

Table 6: Transnationality and Protests/Riots Unrelated to Border Closures

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Transnationality	0.119 (0.158)	0.093 (0.159)	0.098 (0.119)	0.089 (0.119)	-0.110 (0.078)	-0.112 (0.078)
Population (Logged)	8.431* (0.259)	8.478* (0.261)	7.636* (0.195)	7.674* (0.198)	7.725* (0.165)	7.764* (0.168)
Resources	0.083 (0.075)	0.082 (0.075)	0.175* (0.060)	0.173* (0.060)	0.162* (0.049)	0.162* (0.049)
Ruggedness	0.797* (0.095)	0.814* (0.095)	0.687* (0.074)	0.693* (0.074)	0.772* (0.061)	0.781* (0.062)
Capital Distance (Logged)	0.457* (0.183)	0.432* (0.184)	0.294* (0.096)	0.290* (0.096)	0.730* (0.097)	0.728* (0.097)
Adjacent Event		-0.141 (0.099)		-0.094 (0.080)		-0.085 (0.072)
<i>n</i>	7805	7805	11204	11204	17596	17596
Borderland Side FEs	✓	✓				
Border FEs			✓	✓		
Country FEs					✓	✓

* $p < 0.05$

4.2 Disaggregating the Transnationality Index

This section replicates the main analysis but in a series of models replacing the Transnationality index variable with each constituent item (roads, railroads, ethnic kin settlements, and sister cities). The consistent result across the models is that the road and railroad items have a positive and significant association with resistance, but that the ethnic kin and sister cities items do not. It is possible that the items

do not cleanly and perfectly differentiate the two dimensions. But this is suggestive evidence that the economic dimension of transnationality played a greater role than the social dimension in driving local opposition to COVID-19 border closures.

Table 7: Road Connectivity and Resistance Against COVID-19 Border Closures

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Road	3.112*	3.170*	2.707*	2.604*	2.757*	2.648*
	(0.300)	(0.305)	(0.265)	(0.271)	(0.275)	(0.281)
Population (Logged)	5.174*	5.185*	4.510*	4.540*	4.784*	4.751*
	(0.488)	(0.487)	(0.436)	(0.441)	(0.430)	(0.433)
Resources	-0.054	-0.050	0.028	0.019	0.047	0.028
	(0.132)	(0.131)	(0.120)	(0.121)	(0.121)	(0.122)
Ruggedness	-1.000*	-1.017*	-0.517	-0.528	-0.697*	-0.645*
	(0.362)	(0.359)	(0.337)	(0.344)	(0.297)	(0.304)
Capital Distance (Logged)	0.387	0.351	-0.248	-0.120	0.438	0.471
	(0.422)	(0.422)	(0.267)	(0.274)	(0.295)	(0.300)
Adjacent Event		-0.062		0.149*		0.135*
		(0.061)		(0.054)		(0.057)
<i>n</i>	7805	7805	11204	11204	17596	17596
Borderland Side FEs	✓	✓				
Border FEs			✓	✓		
Country FEs					✓	✓

* $p < 0.05$

Table 8: Railroad Connectivity and Resistance Against COVID-19 Border Closures

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Railroad	2.791*	2.840*	2.489*	2.350*	1.855*	1.747*
	(0.309)	(0.316)	(0.273)	(0.280)	(0.221)	(0.226)
Population (Logged)	4.771*	4.784*	3.789*	3.827*	4.370*	4.341*
	(0.475)	(0.476)	(0.411)	(0.415)	(0.415)	(0.417)
Resources	-0.095	-0.093	-0.029	-0.033	-0.008	-0.028
	(0.132)	(0.132)	(0.121)	(0.122)	(0.119)	(0.120)
Ruggedness	-0.914*	-0.940*	-0.448	-0.429	-0.664*	-0.568
	(0.344)	(0.344)	(0.325)	(0.333)	(0.300)	(0.305)
Capital Distance (Logged)	1.239*	1.224*	-0.213	-0.063	0.613*	0.676*
	(0.441)	(0.439)	(0.261)	(0.269)	(0.295)	(0.301)
Adjacent Event		-0.044		0.172*		0.170*
		(0.062)		(0.055)		(0.057)
<i>n</i>	7805	7805	11204	11204	17596	17596
Borderland Side FEs	✓	✓				
Border FEs			✓	✓		
Country FEs					✓	✓

* $p < 0.05$

Table 9: Ethnic Kin Settlements and Resistance Against COVID-19 Border Closures

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Ethnic Kin	0.985	0.955	0.414	0.488	-0.263	-0.268
	(0.598)	(0.600)	(0.485)	(0.493)	(0.244)	(0.253)
Population (Logged)	4.845*	4.815*	4.058*	4.091*	4.631*	4.554*
	(0.453)	(0.454)	(0.407)	(0.415)	(0.406)	(0.411)
Resources	-0.081	-0.084	-0.011	-0.022	-0.005	-0.028
	(0.126)	(0.126)	(0.116)	(0.118)	(0.117)	(0.118)
Ruggedness	-1.073*	-1.017*	-0.466	-0.481	-0.983*	-0.787*
	(0.325)	(0.330)	(0.301)	(0.314)	(0.292)	(0.297)
Capital Distance (Logged)	0.714	0.742	-0.238	-0.065	0.624*	0.678*
	(0.401)	(0.405)	(0.254)	(0.264)	(0.286)	(0.295)
Adjacent Event		0.088		0.263*		0.255*
		(0.056)		(0.051)		(0.054)
<i>n</i>	7805	7805	11204	11204	17596	17596
Borderland Side FEs	✓	✓				
Border FEs			✓	✓		
Country FEs					✓	✓

* $p < 0.05$

Table 10: Sister Cities and Resistance Against COVID-19 Border Closures

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Sister City	-0.009 (0.343)	-0.035 (0.345)	0.110 (0.330)	0.029 (0.335)	-0.270 (0.277)	-0.299 (0.286)
Population (Logged)	4.840* (0.475)	4.819* (0.476)	4.009* (0.422)	4.069* (0.430)	4.762* (0.428)	4.697* (0.433)
Resources	-0.093 (0.126)	-0.096 (0.126)	-0.014 (0.116)	-0.026 (0.118)	0.005 (0.117)	-0.020 (0.118)
Ruggedness	-1.031* (0.320)	-0.972* (0.325)	-0.468 (0.299)	-0.478 (0.312)	-0.893* (0.290)	-0.715* (0.297)
Capital Distance (Logged)	0.689 (0.397)	0.719 (0.402)	-0.212 (0.253)	-0.042 (0.263)	0.645* (0.288)	0.712* (0.297)
Adjacent Event		0.091 (0.056)		0.261* (0.051)		0.256* (0.054)
<i>n</i>	7805	7805	11204	11204	17596	17596
Borderland Side FEs	✓	✓				
Border FEs			✓	✓		
Country FEs					✓	✓

* $p < 0.05$

4.3 Alternate Ordinalization Schemes

This section replicates the main analysis but with an alternative coding scheme for the transnationality items. This step addresses the concern that the particular ordinal scale chosen for the items in the original index affects the results. The original coding scheme for each cell range from 0-5, but for the analyses here, the coding scheme is shrunk to: 0 for when the item is not present in the borderland side at all, 1 for when the item is 75 or more KM away, 2 for when the item is between 15 and less than 75 KM away, and 3 for when the item is less than 15 KM away. The items are then aggregated in the same fashion to construct the additive index of Transnationality.

Using this version of the index yields substantively similar results for the analysis. Transnationality continues to hold a positive and significant association with resistance.

Table 11: Transnationality and Border Resistance (30km, ordv2)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Transnationality	4.745*	4.803*	4.247*	4.058*	1.831*	1.704*
	(0.492)	(0.502)	(0.431)	(0.438)	(0.301)	(0.305)
Population (Logged)	4.128*	4.122*	3.557*	3.630*	4.267*	4.251*
	(0.469)	(0.468)	(0.416)	(0.423)	(0.408)	(0.412)
Resources	-0.075	-0.072	0.002	-0.008	0.041	0.008
	(0.132)	(0.132)	(0.121)	(0.122)	(0.117)	(0.118)
Ruggedness	-1.056*	-1.073*	-0.537	-0.534	-0.697*	-0.572
	(0.367)	(0.366)	(0.340)	(0.349)	(0.294)	(0.301)
Capital Distance (Logged)	0.742	0.726	-0.234	-0.076	0.605*	0.662*
	(0.433)	(0.432)	(0.267)	(0.276)	(0.289)	(0.296)
Adjacent Event		-0.038		0.175*		0.218*
		(0.061)		(0.054)		(0.056)
<i>n</i>	7805	7805	11204	11204	17596	17596
Borderland Side FEs	✓	✓				
Border FEs			✓	✓		
Country FEs					✓	✓

* $p < 0.05$

4.4 Linear Probability Models

This section replicates the primary analyses of Transnationality and Resistance presented in the main body of the paper but with a linear probability modeling approach involving ordinary least squares that includes the entire sample across the fixed effects specifications. Robust standard errors are calculated using the Huber-White correction in order to account for heteroskedasticity. The results for Transnationality are substantively similar to the primary analyses in terms of being both positive and statistically significant, indicating robustness to this alternative modeling approach.

Table 12: Transnationality and Resistance Against COVID-19 Border Closures (Linear Probability Models)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Transnationality	0.013*	0.012*	0.009*	0.008*	0.005*	0.004*
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Population (Logged)	0.005*	0.005*	0.005*	0.005*	0.006*	0.006*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Resources	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Ruggedness	-0.004*	-0.004*	-0.003*	-0.002*	-0.003*	-0.003*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Capital Distance (Logged)	0.001	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.002	0.001
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Adjacent Event		0.006*		0.009*		0.011*
		(0.002)		(0.002)		(0.002)
<i>n</i>	43929	43929	43929	43929	43929	43929
Borderland Side FEs	✓	✓				
Border FEs			✓	✓		
Country FEs					✓	✓
R2	0.051	0.054	0.036	0.043	0.027	0.037

* $p < 0.05$

4.5 Cell Sizes and Modifiable Areal Unit Problem

This section replicates the main analysis but using alternate grid cell sizes: 20x20 KM and 40x40KM instead of 30x30. Doing this addresses the modifiable areal unit problem concern that analytical results will differ based on the type of arbitrary grid cell size used. Assuaging this concern, the results are substantively similar to the primary analysis showing a positive and significant association between transnationality and resistance.

Table 13: Transnationality and Resistance Against COVID-19 Border Closures (20x20KM Cells)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Transnationality	4.510*	4.785*	4.039*	3.871*	2.013*	1.907*
	(0.427)	(0.449)	(0.367)	(0.378)	(0.275)	(0.279)
Population (Logged)	4.361*	4.391*	3.723*	3.742*	4.368*	4.335*
	(0.416)	(0.416)	(0.371)	(0.373)	(0.366)	(0.367)
Resources	0.113	0.122	0.144	0.142	0.162	0.150
	(0.095)	(0.095)	(0.088)	(0.088)	(0.086)	(0.087)
Ruggedness	-0.710*	-0.822*	-0.310	-0.288	-0.502	-0.391
	(0.337)	(0.340)	(0.317)	(0.321)	(0.275)	(0.279)
Capital Distance (Logged)	1.029*	0.959*	-0.155	-0.053	0.861*	0.907*
	(0.417)	(0.413)	(0.249)	(0.255)	(0.276)	(0.279)
Adjacent Event		-0.104*		0.088*		0.108*
		(0.049)		(0.044)		(0.047)
<i>n</i>	15605	15605	22442	22442	34293	34293
Borderland Side FEs	✓	✓				
Border FEs			✓	✓		
Country FEs					✓	✓

* $p < 0.05$

Table 14: Transnationality and Resistance Against COVID-19 Border Closures (40x40KM Cells)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Transnationality	4.384*	4.612*	3.781*	3.657*	1.735*	1.633*
	(0.486)	(0.495)	(0.419)	(0.426)	(0.287)	(0.291)
Population (Logged)	3.879*	3.924*	3.121*	3.148*	3.840*	3.797*
	(0.457)	(0.459)	(0.405)	(0.406)	(0.400)	(0.402)
Resources	0.248	0.267	0.262*	0.246	0.311*	0.278*
	(0.141)	(0.140)	(0.125)	(0.126)	(0.125)	(0.127)
Ruggedness	-0.776*	-0.801*	-0.234	-0.257	-0.571*	-0.524
	(0.334)	(0.328)	(0.294)	(0.300)	(0.277)	(0.281)
Capital Distance (Logged)	1.055*	1.031*	-0.128	-0.030	0.873*	0.902*
	(0.474)	(0.467)	(0.277)	(0.284)	(0.312)	(0.319)
Adjacent Event		-0.167*		0.153*		0.196*
		(0.075)		(0.064)		(0.067)
<i>n</i>	5079	5079	7357	7357	11242	11242
Borderland Side FEs	✓	✓				
Border FEs			✓	✓		
Country FEs					✓	✓

* $p < 0.05$

4.6 Border Distance

This section replicates the main analysis but additionally includes a control variable *Border Distance* measuring how far from a cell is from the border. This analysis tests, among borderland communities which are already all within 50 miles of an international border, whether the result linking transnationality and resistance against border closures is driven by distance to the border. The key finding is that the positive and statistically significant result for Transnationality is largely robust to this new specification. The result continues to hold in Models 1-4 with Borderland Side or Borderland fixed effects, and the effect remains positive in direction but loses statistical significance in Models 5-6 with Country fixed effects. These results are broadly consistent with those of the primary analysis, with only statistical significance changing in just the models using the fixed effects specification that is the least granular and thus the least suitable for the hypothesis test.

Table 15: Transnationality and Resistance Against COVID-19 Border Closures

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Transnationality	1.903*	2.053*	1.578*	1.541*	0.523	0.496
	(0.528)	(0.531)	(0.439)	(0.442)	(0.305)	(0.306)
Population (Logged)	6.069*	6.107*	5.339*	5.364*	5.506*	5.482*
	(0.552)	(0.554)	(0.477)	(0.480)	(0.453)	(0.454)
Resources	-0.014	0.005	0.015	0.008	0.056	0.043
	(0.141)	(0.142)	(0.131)	(0.131)	(0.127)	(0.127)
Ruggedness	-0.809*	-0.857*	-0.695	-0.673	-0.350	-0.332
	(0.400)	(0.395)	(0.376)	(0.378)	(0.296)	(0.299)
Capital Distance (Logged)	-0.059	-0.163	-0.558*	-0.469	0.357	0.378
	(0.482)	(0.476)	(0.281)	(0.289)	(0.313)	(0.314)
Border Distance	-5.204*	-5.283*	-5.037*	-5.009*	-4.888*	-4.840*
	(0.638)	(0.637)	(0.588)	(0.592)	(0.534)	(0.536)
Adjacent Event		-0.167*		0.088		0.078
		(0.066)		(0.056)		(0.060)
<i>n</i>	7805	7805	11204	11204	17596	17596
Borderland Side FEs	✓	✓				
Border FEs			✓	✓		
Country FEs					✓	✓

* $p < 0.05$

5 Subgroup Analyses

5.1 Border Policy History

In this section, I investigate the possibility that prior hardening history (or the lack thereof) shapes the long-term development of transnationality such that policy history ultimately affects how transnational communities respond to any given instance of hardening. For this test, I repeated the quantitative evidence with a subgroup analysis by border policy history in terms of walling, the starkest form of hardening. I divided the initial sample of borderland community grid cells exposed to pandemic border closures into those in borderlands with a wall (on either side) in 2019 and those in borderlands without a border wall at that time, using geolocated walls data from [Kenwick, Pauselli and Simmons \(Working Paper\)](#). Assessing whether the positive association between transnationality and resistance does not hold within either of these different historical contexts helps to unpack whether later responses to pandemic border closures depended upon earlier border policies—and then later changes in those policies. Notably, the initial result widely holds in both groups: across essentially all of the new models run among either the walled or non-walled subsamples, transnationality has a positive and significant association with resistance. The one set of models this relationship does not hold in is in the walled borders subsample with the country fixed effects models (5 and 6), which as discussed earlier is the least suited fixed effects specification for estimating the locally varying effect of transnationality since it uses the least granular spatial unit of country. The otherwise consistently positive and significant association indicates that the prior history of state governance in a borderland in terms of walling did not shape future responses to pandemic border closures.

Table 16: Transnationality and Resistance Against COVID-19 Border Closures: Wall Subgroup

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Transnationality	3.370*	3.736*	2.170*	2.256*	1.117	1.120
	(1.084)	(1.111)	(0.950)	(0.965)	(0.812)	(0.813)
Population (Logged)	4.474*	4.650*	4.581*	4.653*	4.390*	4.395*
	(1.015)	(1.022)	(0.952)	(0.959)	(0.964)	(0.964)
Resources	-0.533	-0.418	-0.372	-0.336	-0.291	-0.286
	(0.332)	(0.327)	(0.307)	(0.307)	(0.299)	(0.302)
Ruggedness	-1.340	-1.290	-0.974	-0.970	-0.171	-0.171
	(1.011)	(0.997)	(0.886)	(0.881)	(0.644)	(0.644)
Capital Distance (Logged)	-0.012	-0.168	0.023	-0.002	-0.385	-0.392
	(0.941)	(0.904)	(0.618)	(0.614)	(0.747)	(0.748)
Adjacent Event		-0.307		-0.104		-0.017
		(0.181)		(0.174)		(0.168)
<i>n</i>	2115	2115	3176	3176	3340	3340
Borderland Side FEs	✓	✓				
Border FEs			✓	✓		
Country FEs					✓	✓

* $p < 0.05$

Table 17: Transnationality and Resistance Against COVID-19 Border Closures: No Wall Subgroup

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Transnationality	4.954*	5.014*	4.458*	4.269*	2.451*	2.306*
	(0.529)	(0.539)	(0.453)	(0.465)	(0.337)	(0.342)
Population (Logged)	4.414*	4.403*	3.664*	3.816*	4.523*	4.531*
	(0.530)	(0.529)	(0.464)	(0.474)	(0.462)	(0.467)
Resources	0.107	0.108	0.138	0.138	0.163	0.139
	(0.149)	(0.149)	(0.133)	(0.135)	(0.131)	(0.132)
Ruggedness	-1.127*	-1.145*	-0.595	-0.594	-0.834*	-0.739*
	(0.417)	(0.415)	(0.390)	(0.403)	(0.343)	(0.353)
Capital Distance (Logged)	0.786	0.775	-0.518	-0.291	1.076*	1.132*
	(0.500)	(0.498)	(0.304)	(0.314)	(0.362)	(0.371)
Adjacent Event		-0.037		0.197*		0.190*
		(0.068)		(0.059)		(0.063)
<i>n</i>	5690	5690	8028	8028	11342	11342
Borderland Side FEs	✓	✓				
Border FEs			✓	✓		
Country FEs					✓	✓

* $p < 0.05$

5.2 State Capacity

In terms of state capacity, resistance may not emerge in the borderlands of low-capacity states that cannot meaningfully enforce rules like pandemic closures. However, in a series of subgroup analyses across the subsamples of communities in Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and communities in non-OECD countries, Transnationality continues to hold a positive and significant association with Resistance.

This section replicates the primary analyses of Transnationality and Resistance presented in the main body of the paper but after dividing the sample into cells in either OECD countries or non-OECD countries. The first set of tables includes models among OECD countries, and the second set of tables includes models among non-OECD countries. All results are substantively similar to the primary analyses.

Table 18: Transnationality and Resistance Against COVID-19 Border Closures: OECD Subgroup

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Transnationality	5.859*	5.830*	5.692*	5.624*	2.580*	2.409*
	(0.716)	(0.722)	(0.675)	(0.687)	(0.437)	(0.450)
Population (Logged)	2.707*	2.720*	2.572*	2.609*	2.789*	2.811*
	(0.641)	(0.644)	(0.617)	(0.620)	(0.571)	(0.579)
Resources	-0.045	-0.052	0.069	0.051	0.179	0.064
	(0.240)	(0.241)	(0.232)	(0.234)	(0.210)	(0.213)
Ruggedness	0.310	0.307	0.162	0.166	0.486	0.392
	(0.578)	(0.580)	(0.571)	(0.574)	(0.429)	(0.435)
Capital Distance (Logged)	-0.666	-0.670	-0.802	-0.802	0.090	0.131
	(0.659)	(0.661)	(0.550)	(0.556)	(0.470)	(0.481)
Adjacent Event		0.028		0.107		0.309*
		(0.081)		(0.080)		(0.075)
<i>n</i>	3000	3000	4180	4180	4720	4720
Borderland Side FEs	✓	✓				
Border FEs			✓	✓		
Country FEs					✓	✓

* $p < 0.05$

Table 19: Transnationality and Resistance Against COVID-19 Border Closures: Not OECD Subgroup

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Transnationality	3.136*	3.544*	2.537*	2.437*	1.068*	1.056*
	(0.651)	(0.684)	(0.550)	(0.555)	(0.374)	(0.378)
Population (Logged)	6.015*	6.105*	4.867*	4.904*	5.701*	5.695*
	(0.687)	(0.698)	(0.581)	(0.586)	(0.592)	(0.593)
Resources	-0.071	-0.041	0.000	-0.008	0.015	0.013
	(0.162)	(0.163)	(0.154)	(0.155)	(0.145)	(0.145)
Ruggedness	-2.076*	-2.367*	-1.258*	-1.234*	-1.507*	-1.484*
	(0.593)	(0.605)	(0.545)	(0.554)	(0.458)	(0.469)
Capital Distance (Logged)	1.305*	1.026	-0.511	-0.285	0.857*	0.868*
	(0.619)	(0.614)	(0.344)	(0.363)	(0.392)	(0.396)
Adjacent Event		-0.291*		0.160*		0.022
		(0.108)		(0.076)		(0.092)
<i>n</i>	4805	4805	6633	6633	12876	12876
Borderland Side FEs	✓	✓				
Border FEs			✓	✓		
Country FEs					✓	✓

* $p < 0.05$

5.3 Regime Type

Regime type shapes the risk of contesting state policy. As a result, transnational borderland communities in autocracies may not have resisted even threatening closures. To test this possibility, I use Regimes of the World data by the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project ([Herre, 2021](#)) to divide the sample into borderland communities in democracies (either electoral democracy or liberal democracy) or borderland communities in non-democracies (either a closed autocracy or electoral autocracy). The consistent finding among both subgroups is still that Transnationality has positive and significant association with Resistance.

This section replicates the primary analyses of Transnationality and Resistance presented in the main body of the paper but after dividing the sample into cells in either democracies or non-democracies. The first set of tables includes models among democracies, and the second set of tables includes models among non-democracies. The note in each table indicates the grid cell size. All results are substantively similar to the primary analyses.

Table 20: Transnationality and Resistance Against COVID-19 Border Closures: Democracy Subgroup

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Transnationality	5.032*	5.120*	4.828*	4.786*	1.997*	1.829*
	(0.534)	(0.544)	(0.496)	(0.504)	(0.327)	(0.333)
Population (Logged)	4.326*	4.322*	4.234*	4.234*	4.260*	4.234*
	(0.507)	(0.506)	(0.494)	(0.494)	(0.447)	(0.452)
Resources	-0.128	-0.120	-0.088	-0.090	-0.013	-0.059
	(0.170)	(0.170)	(0.156)	(0.156)	(0.152)	(0.154)
Ruggedness	-1.141*	-1.168*	-1.127*	-1.107*	-0.903*	-0.785*
	(0.429)	(0.426)	(0.408)	(0.413)	(0.341)	(0.352)
Capital Distance (Logged)	0.621	0.616	0.041	0.061	0.464	0.531
	(0.474)	(0.470)	(0.348)	(0.352)	(0.336)	(0.345)
Adjacent Event		-0.053		0.035		0.202*
		(0.068)		(0.065)		(0.062)
<i>n</i>	5779	5779	7278	7278	9233	9233
Borderland Side FEs	✓	✓				
Border FEs			✓	✓		
Country FEs					✓	✓

* $p < 0.05$

Table 21: Transnationality and Resistance Against COVID-19 Border Closures: Autocracy Subgroup

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Transnationality	3.170*	3.393*	3.304*	3.425*	1.235	1.275*
	(0.978)	(1.009)	(0.987)	(1.008)	(0.641)	(0.642)
Population (Logged)	4.725*	4.745*	5.082*	5.150*	4.770*	4.711*
	(1.213)	(1.203)	(1.195)	(1.195)	(0.980)	(0.982)
Resources	-0.023	0.007	-0.037	-0.024	0.107	0.097
	(0.237)	(0.236)	(0.237)	(0.237)	(0.208)	(0.208)
Ruggedness	-0.956	-0.963	-0.837	-0.837	0.423	0.405
	(0.851)	(0.851)	(0.862)	(0.863)	(0.534)	(0.546)
Capital Distance (Logged)	1.475	1.054	2.281*	2.191*	1.330*	1.370*
	(1.234)	(1.240)	(0.965)	(0.933)	(0.664)	(0.677)
Adjacent Event		-0.241		-0.144		0.188
		(0.178)		(0.170)		(0.157)
<i>n</i>	1999	1999	2710	2710	8314	8314
Borderland Side FEs	✓	✓				
Border FEs			✓	✓		
Country FEs					✓	✓

* $p < 0.05$

6 ACLED COVID-19 Disorder Tracker Data Codebook

Codebook for Coding ACLED Events

Version: December 13, 2023

Variable Description (column name)

This document describes instructions for coding the content of descriptions about protest and riot events that have been documented by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED).

ID of the Row (row_id)

The ID of the row.

ID of the Event (EVENT_ID_CNTY)

The ID of the event.

Date of the Event (EVENT_DATE)

The date on which the event took place.

Country of the Event (COUNTRY)

The name of the country in which the event took place.

Administrative Region 1 (ADMIN1)

The name of the largest subnational administrative region in which the event took place.

Administrative Region 2 (ADMIN2)

The name of the second largest subnational administrative region in which the event took place.

Administrative Region 3 (ADMIN3)

The name of the third largest subnational administrative region in which the event took place.

Name of the Coder (coder)

The last name of the coder.

Text of the Event Description (NOTES)

The text of the event description.

Relevant to Border Control (relevant)

Is the event relevant to one or more border control efforts? An event is relevant to border control efforts when the fundamental purpose of the event directly relates to

border control. Here, border control efforts are defined as any effort by a state at or around its international land borders to facilitate or prevent the entrance of people or goods into its territory. Border control efforts in this variable encompass different types, including but not limited to the construction of physical infrastructure near a border such as walls; the deployment of guards to a border area; and restrictions on authorized movement through official crossings at land borders, including more stringent requirements to pass through a crossing and the temporary closure of individual crossings or an entire border. Note that the focus of this variable is on efforts by *states* at *international* borders on *land*. Thus, this variable excludes events that are about otherwise similar actions at subnational borders, maritime borders, and international airports, or that are taken by non-state actors like rebel groups and vigilantes.

Finally, note a few features of this variable. First, the participants of an event being part of a state agency or social group that is indirectly connected to or impacted by border control efforts does not in and of itself mean that the event is relevant to border control. The fundamental purpose of the event has to directly concern border control efforts in order for the event to be considered relevant. This criterion means that events like the following should *not* be treated as relevant to border control: people from a different country gather at an embassy of their home government to demand that they be repatriated; migrants in a detainment center protest against the conditions in which they are being held; or truckers demonstrate in frustration about delays when traversing borders because too few personnel work border crossings. Second, an event taking place near a border does not in and of itself mean that the event is relevant to border control. Third, an event could be relevant to border control efforts by either one state or joint efforts by multiple states. Fourth, an event that is simultaneously relevant to border control and other issues should still be coded as relevant to border control. Fifth, events that are related to movement restrictions in Cyprus or between Israel and Palestine should not be treated as relevant to border control.

- Code 1: the event is relevant to border control.
- Code 0: the event is not relevant to border control.

Relevant to Border Control Confidence ([relevant_conf](#))

This variable denotes the degree of confidence that the coder has in their coding of this variable.

- Code 3 (high): this evidence is very strong, alternative interpretations are unlikely, and you are quite sure that others would agree with your assessment.
- Code 2 (medium): there is good evidence for the judgment, but alternative interpretations are possible.
- Code 1 (low): you are almost guessing.

Relevant to Crossing Restrictions ([relevant_restrictions](#))

If the event is relevant to border control (relevant = 1), is it relevant specifically to restrictions on formal movement through official border crossings? The purpose of this variable is to identify, among all events that are relevant to any kind of border control, those whose fundamental purpose directly relates to restrictions at official border crossings. Not all events that are generally relevant to border control are specifically relevant to crossing restrictions, but all events that are relevant to crossing restrictions are generally relevant to border control. Thus, restrictions at official crossings do *not* encompass other types of border control efforts (e.g. walls or armed patrols in other locations to target unauthorized/“illegal” movement). Note that an event can be simultaneously relevant to crossing restrictions and other types of border control efforts.

Restrictions can apply to people or goods. They can take two forms. The first form is the implementation of more stringent requirements to pass through a border crossing. An example of this is mandating the possession of a medical document. The second form of limitation is the temporary closure of official border crossings, spanning from a particular site to those along an entire border. Leave this variable blank if the event is not relevant to border control (relevant = 0).

- Code 1: the event is relevant to restrictions on formal movement through official border crossings.
- Code 0: the event is not relevant to restrictions on formal movement through official border crossings.
- Leave blank: relevant is 0, meaning that the event is not at all relevant to border control.

Relevant to Crossing Restrictions Confidence (relevant_restrictions_conf)

This variable denotes the degree of confidence that the coder has in their coding of this variable.

- Code 3 (high): this evidence is very strong, alternative interpretations are unlikely, and you are quite sure that others would agree with your assessment.
- Code 2 (medium): there is good evidence for the judgment, but alternative interpretations are possible. An example description for which a coder might have moderate confidence is that a group of people march to an international border crossing in protest of “coronavirus-related restrictions”, but without specifying the type of restriction.
- Code 1 (low): you are almost guessing.

Specific Border(s) Referenced (specific)

If the event is relevant to border control (relevant = 1), does its description refer to one or more particular international land borders? Some event descriptions refer to specific borders explicitly by name, while others use indirect references. These indirect references can take two forms. One form is referring to specific elements of a

border such as the name of a port of entry, checkpoint, or bridge. The other form of indirect reference is broad terms such as “nearby border”. When an event description potentially contains an indirect reference, search for additional information online to confirm whether this is the case. If the online search supports interpreting the language as an indirect reference, then the event description should be treated as referring to a specific border. Note that references to specific borders should all be treated the same, whether or not the referenced border is a border of the country in which the event took place. Leave this variable blank if the event is not relevant to border control (relevant = 0).

- Code 1: the event description refers to at least one international land border.
- Code 0: the event description does not refer to any international land borders.
- Leave blank: relevant is 0, meaning that the event is not at all relevant to border control.

Specific Border(s) Named Confidence (*specific_conf*)

This variable denotes the degree of confidence that the coder has in their coding of this variable.

- Code 3 (high): this evidence is very strong, alternative interpretations are unlikely, and you are quite sure that others would agree with your assessment.
- Code 2 (medium): there is good evidence for the judgment, but alternative interpretations are possible. In general, select this level of confidence when an event is coded as referring to one or more specific borders (*specific* = 1) based on an indirect reference.
- Code 1 (low): you are almost guessing.

Specific Border(s) Referenced Free-responses (*specific_free_1*, *specific_free_2*, *specific_free_3*, *specific_free_4*)

If the event references one or more specific borders (*specific* = 1), which *neighboring countries* are associated with those borders? These variables are intended to capture, if possible, the neighboring country linked to the specific borders involved in the event. Start by noting the entry in the COUNTRY column, which is the name of the country in which the event took place. Then, for the *specific_free* variables, input the name of the country on the side of the border in which the event did *not* occur. For example, if an event in Country A is relevant to border control efforts at the border with Country B, then the free-response should contain the name of Country B in *specific_free_1*. Only input the name of the neighboring country rather than the name of more specific references like border crossings, checkpoints, and bridges. Fully spell out the name of the country, and keep that spelling choice consistent across events. In case an event description references more than one border, multiple columns are provided. Enter only one country name per column, and only fill as many columns as there are countries to specify. For example, if an event in Country A is relevant to

border control efforts at the borders of Country A with both Country B and Country C, then the free-responses should contain the name of Country B in `specific_free_1` and the name of Country C in `specific_free_2`. Note that, if a referenced border is not a border of the country in which the event took place, still input the name of each country associated with the reference. Leave all of these variables blank if the event is not relevant to border control (`relevant = 0`), or if the event is relevant but does not refer to any specific borders (`relevant = 1` and `specific = 0`).

- Free-response: enter the name of each bordering country.
- Leave all blank: `relevant` is 0, meaning that the event is not relevant to border control, or `relevant = 1` and `specific = 0`, meaning that the event is relevant to border control but does not refer to specific borders.

Position on Border Control (`position`)⁴⁴

If the event is relevant to border control (`relevant = 1`), does it express opposition or support? This variable is intended to capture the position expressed by the event on all of the border control efforts to which it is relevant. The position is indicated by the stated demands of the event and/or the actions taken by event participants. An event opposes border control if it demands the end or reduction of, or takes action to obstruct or defy, one or more border control efforts. An event supports border control if it demands the initiation or intensification of, or takes action to support, one or more border control efforts. Leave this variable blank if the event is not relevant to border control (`relevant = 0`).

- Code 2: the event opposes border control.
- Code 1: the event supports border control.
- Leave blank: `relevant` is 0, meaning that the event is not at all relevant to border control.

Position on Border Control Confidence (`position_conf`)

This variable denotes the degree of confidence that the coder has in their coding of this variable.

- Code 3 (high): this evidence is very strong, alternative interpretations are unlikely, and you are quite sure that others would agree with your assessment.
- Code 2 (medium): there is good evidence for the judgment, but alternative interpretations are possible. An example description for which a coder might have moderate confidence in coding an event relevant to border control as opposed or supportive is that a group of people in a border town drive in a motorcade demanding “authorities take measures to reactivate the border’s economy” in the context of a closed border, but without specifying the type of measures.

⁴⁴The codebook originally instructed a coding of 3 for events that simultaneously opposed and supported different forms of border control. But I have removed this from the codebook in the interest of brevity since no events fell under that category.

- Code 1 (low): you are almost guessing.

Position on Crossings Restrictions ([position_restrictions](#))⁴⁵

If the event is relevant to restrictions on formal movement through official land border crossings (`relevant_restrictions = 1`), does it express opposition or support? This variable is intended to capture the position expressed by the event specifically on the one or more crossings restrictions to which it is relevant. The position is indicated by stated demands and/or actions taken by event participants. An event opposes restrictions if it demands the end or reduction of, or takes action to obstruct or defy, one or more restrictions. An event supports restrictions if it only demands the initiation or intensification of, or takes action to support, one or more border restrictions. Leave this variable blank if the event is not relevant to restrictions on formal movement through official land border crossings (`relevant_restrictions = 0`).

- Code 2: the event opposes restrictions on formal movement through official land border crossings.
- Code 1: the event supports restrictions on formal movement through official land border crossings.
- Leave blank: `relevant_restrictions` is 0, meaning that the event is not at all relevant to restrictions on formal movement through official land border crossings.

Position on Crossings Restrictions Confidence ([position_restrictions_conf](#))

This variable denotes the degree of confidence that the coder has in their coding of this variable.

- Code 3 (high): this evidence is very strong, alternative interpretations are unlikely, and you are quite sure that others would agree with your assessment.
- Code 2 (medium): there is good evidence for the judgment, but alternative interpretations are possible.
- Code 1 (low): you are almost guessing.

⁴⁵The codebook originally instructed a coding of 3 for events that simultaneously opposed and supported different restrictions on formal movement through official land border crossings. But I have removed this from the codebook in the interest of brevity since no events fell under that category.

7 Interview Questionnaires

Note that the open-ended nature of the questions and some interviewees occupying multiple positions led some discussions to vary in question order, scope, and topic.

7.1 Government Officials

1. Name, birthplace, and current place of residence?
2. What is your background?
3. How did you come to your position?
4. Could you describe your community's relationship to the border?
5. In what ways is your community connected to society across the border?
6. For your community, what is good about being near the border?
7. For your community, what is bad about being near the border?
8. Which border policies have been the most significant for your community? For each mentioned policy:
 - (a) How does the policy impact the community?
 - (b) Does the policy affect everyone equally?
 - (c) Who supports the policy?
 - (d) Who opposes the policy?
 - (e) What political activism or pressure have occurred over the policy?
 - (f) How have government authorities responded to these activities?
9. If COVID-19 border policy was not mentioned:
 - (a) How did COVID-19 crossing restrictions impact people in your community?
 - (b) Did the restrictions affect everyone equally?
 - (c) Who supported the restrictions?
 - (d) Who opposed the restrictions?
 - (e) What political activism or pressure occurred over the restrictions?
 - (f) How did government authorities respond to these activities?
10. Could you describe the local government's relationship with state and federal authorities regarding border issues?
11. Could you describe any conflicts that have occurred between local government and the other authorities?

12. What do people from outside the border area get right and get wrong about border issues?
13. Additional interviewees?

7.2 Businesspeople

1. Name, birthplace, and current place of residence?
2. What is your background?
3. How did you come to be involved in the business?
4. Could you describe your business's relationship to the border?
5. For your business, what is good about being near the border?
6. For your business, what is bad about being near the border?
7. Which border policies have been the most significant for your business?
8. For each mentioned policy:
 - (a) How does this policy impact your business?
 - (b) In what ways have you engaged with government officials about this policy?
9. If COVID-19 border policy was not mentioned:
 - (a) How did COVID-19 crossing restrictions impact your business?
 - (b) In what ways did you engage with government officials about the restrictions?
10. What do people from outside the border area get right and get wrong about border issues?
11. Additional interviewees?

7.3 Activists

1. Name, birthplace, and current place of residence?
2. What is your background?
3. How did you come to be involved in your organization?
4. When and where did your organization form?
5. Where does your organization currently operate?
6. Which border policies have been the biggest priority for your organization?

7. For each mentioned policy:
 - (a) How does the policy impact people in border area communities?
 - (b) Does the policy affect everyone equally?
 - (c) What is your organization's stance on the policy?
 - (d) What kinds of political action has your organization taken over the policy?
8. If COVID-19 border policy was not mentioned:
 - (a) How did COVID-19 crossing restrictions impact people in border area communities?
 - (b) Did the restrictions affect everyone equally?
 - (c) What was your organization's stance on the restrictions?
 - (d) What kinds of political action did your organization take over the restrictions?
9. What kinds of people and groups make up your organization's support network?
10. What strategies do you find to be the most effective when trying to mobilize the public?
11. Could you describe your organization's experiences with engaging local, state, or federal officials?
12. What do people from outside the border area get right and get wrong about border issues?
13. Additional interviewees?

8 Ethics and Research Practices

The interview component involving human research subjects fully adheres to the Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research established by the American Political Science Association Council. Each component is addressed below.

Informed and voluntary consent of research participants and others directly engaged by the research process, including continuing consent if needed: All interviewees provided informed and voluntary consent to participate in the research. I obtained this verbally at the beginning of each interview. Each interview began with me discussing and providing a printed copy of the consent form mandated by my home institution's Institutional Review Board. Consent was meaningful and sufficient because I detailed the nature of the research, provided the physical form, took care to affirm that their anonymity would be protected, and ensured that I received a clear, verbal affirmation of consent.

Deceptive or covert research should be avoided: No deception or covert research was used in the course of the interview data collection.

Harm (traumatization, social, economic or physical) should be avoided, minimized when avoidance is not possible, and research suspended if excessive: Because the in-person interviews occurred at a time and place of subjects' choosing and because virtual interviews took place on a computer, participation posed no physical risks to subjects. None of the information obtained about the subjects could lead to social, economic, legal, or informational harm if released, and as the information will be collected anonymously, the risk of disclosure is mitigated in any case. All statements individuals are exposed to are similar to those encountered in standard news reports and social media.

The confidentiality of participant identities, or, in some settings, the higher standard of anonymity: I took multiple steps to safeguard subjects' information. To ensure that I could keep track of subject interviewees, I maintained a password-protected spreadsheet in an encrypted file on my personal computer. In this spreadsheet, I assigned all of these subjects an ID number that I used as a link to names. In my personal notebook that I used in interviews, I wrote down subjects' ID numbers made via this method rather than their names to track which notes associate with whom. This ensured that accidentally losing the interview notebook would not reveal subjects' names or interview responses in case an unauthorized individual accessed the notebook. Overall, the names, contact information, and ID numbers will not be made publicly available or shared with someone other than myself.

Compromising the integrity of broad political processes either at the time of the research process or on publication without the consent of those directly engaged by the research process should be avoided: The research did not compromise the integrity of broad political processes, and would not do so upon publication. The research involving human subjects consisted only of asking the subjects for their opinions on and experiences with a set of political issues.

Review by relevant ethics boards to approve the research protocol, confirm exempt status, or confirm that the research is Not Human Subjects Research (NHSR) (Note that this also includes local review when required by host community or host country.): The Institutional Review Board of my home institution confirmed exempt status of the research and approved all research procedures.

Awareness of relevant laws and regulations governing research and related activities: The research did not involve violating any laws or regulations governing research and related activities.