



Undocumented Migration, Cross Border Crime and The Role of Technology in Securing Borders: A South African Reflection

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Abstract

This study examined the challenges and complexities of border management in South Africa with a special focus on the Golela Border (bordering Swaziland) and the Kosi Bay border post (bordering Mozambique) concerning reducing undocumented migration, cross-border crime, and the use of technology in securing the border space. 15 experts from various institutions were purposively sampled based on their knowledge of migration and border studies. From the data collection, it became observable that South Africa's borders were suffering from policy misalignment and years of under investments. It was revealed that even though technology can play a role in border security, there was a need for South Africa to address issues such as poverty, inequality, and unemployment before spending billions on border technology that may not yield the desired outcomes. Moreover, South Africa does not have the money to spend on border technology, and the best option in addressing undocumented migration and cross border crime would be extended cooperation with neighboring states. Border securitisation rather cooperation is needed to ensure that South Africa does not harm its regional interests.

Key words: Border, Development, Security, Migration

Introduction

South Africa has underestimated the positive role that can be played by technological innovation in dealing with everyday border challenges such as cross-border crime and undocumented migration. In South Africa, Longo (2017), argues that the major issue is that the country has not prioritised the development and adoption of a tech-centric border system mainly because the country has over the past 20 years relied heavily on traditional ways of border management, which have included the militarisation of the border owing to the vast deployment of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and the South African Police Service (SAPS). The use of unmanned flying vehicles (UAV's), infrared cameras, long-range cameras, and motion detectors among other technological systems have greatly aided border agencies in countries and regions such as the United States and the European Union in dealing with cross-border crime and undocumented migration. Baker and Jordaan (2010) state that it is simply inadequate to entrust the South African army and police to effectively manage a land border stretching more than 4100 kilometers, hence the urgent need for the use of technology, innovations, and automated systems to aid in this regard. Bassey and Oshita (2010) argue that managing undocumented and cross-border crime in South Africa has become a

matter of urgency because traditional methods have failed, the development and implementation of a tech-centric border has become a matter of necessity to help better manage South Africa's borders. Glatzer & Rueschemeyer (2004) argue that globalisation has brought countries closer, hence the increase in undocumented migration and cross-border crime, therefore this warrants the adoption and implementation of technological systems/innovations to better contribute towards effective border management. South Africa has an estimated 72 designated ports of entry - 10 airports; nine seaports; and 53 land ports. However, in the face of increasing undocumented migration and cross-border crime in South Africa, the government has been rather slow in rolling out a tech-centric border to aid in this regard. It is within this context, therefore, that the study aimed at exploring the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of utilising technology as a strategy in managing undocumented migration and cross-border crime within South Africa's land borders.

Research Objectives

This study is guided by the following research objectives:

1. To evaluate whether technological systems via a tech centric border (virtual border) would significantly contribute to a reduction in cross border crime and undocumented migration.
2. To determine the challenges faced by South Africa in implementing a tech centric border management system in the Golela and Kosi bay border post

Literature Review

Migration is a concept that is still very much debated and contested. Nevertheless, some have attempted to define migration. Kok (1999) defines migration as the crossing of a boundary of a predefined spatial unit by one or more persons involved in a change of residence. For Baldwin-Edwards (2008) it is a process that occurs outside of the legal-institutional frameworks established by states. For South Africa, the need to address the undocumented migration phenomenon has been premised on the need to curb xenophobia, corruption, cross-border crime, and the need to explore alternative ways of border management. Such needs, however, have failed to reflect on why South African borders are failing in the first place. Conversely, the current political discourse in South Africa has seen the emergence of two main schools of thought. Firstly, one school advocates for tighter border security, while the other argues that South Africa's unilateral border approach is flawed, rather the country needs to foster regional cooperation to efficiently manage issues that emerge from the border. Either way, both schools agree that South African borders have become a playground for crime syndicates and undocumented migrants. Moreover, the study argues that South Africa does not operate in a vacuum and cannot control the migratory patterns of neighbouring countries; hence any policy needs to foster cooperation. However, the study critiques the vagueness of the concept of cross-border cooperation concerning migration. For example, the concept misses the point by not reflecting on the lack of cooperation, even though South Africa has appealed for SADC states to do more towards regulating irregular border crossings, however, actions resembling cooperation have not been forthcoming. This was communicated by Nsereko (1997) who noted that South Africa's quest to tackle irregular migration cannot be viewed in isolation from the rest of the region rather; there is an urgent need for regional police agencies to engage in joint cross-border operations to address the criminal elements that have become associated with migration in the region. Organized crime or cross-border crime has become more diverse, and complex and will remain a considerable challenge for law enforcement going forward. These crimes include money laundering, terrorist activities, drug trafficking, human trafficking, corruption, and bribery of public or party officials. Just like migration, a definition of the concept is still very much debated and contested. Cross-border crime, as a concept, was

first defined by the United Nations in the 1970s as criminal activities that were connected and coordinated across borders of two or more countries. Boister (2003) defines cross-border crime as activities that have an actual or potential effect across national borders and crimes that are intrastate but offend fundamental values of the international community. Cross-border crime in South Africa has become highly debated and contested, for example, Shaw (1998) contended that a SAPS assessment in June 1997 estimated that 192 organised crime syndicates were operating in South Africa, with a combined total of 1,903 primary suspects. At least 32 syndicates were assessed to be operating internationally, while the criminal activities of 150 were restricted to countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. For Dodson (2000) South Africa's weak border controls are an indictment of a weak government with no plan and sadly cross border syndicates have become well entrenched. However, Nsereko (1997) agrees while borders are characterised by some form of operational deficiency, cross-border crime is a regional issue, hence the need for regional cooperation. The author also lamented the observation that in the SADC, very few joint operations take place between police agencies in the region.

Managing South African borders

Border security and management are undertaken by a combination of government departments and agencies (Department of Home Affairs (DHA), South African Revenue Service (SARS), South African Police Service (SAPS), The Department of Health (DoH), The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), The Department of Transport (DoT), the Department Of Trade and Industry (DTI), South African National Defence Force (SANDF), The State Security Agency (SSA), The Department Of Public Works (DPW) and The Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2011). However, the use of many agencies within the context of border management results in the duplication of tasks, corruption, and misalignment of duties. Moreover, such arrangements have proved incapable of addressing the systemic and structural management problems affecting border management and border security in the country as various national intelligence estimates have pointed to significant weaknesses, threats, and challenges in South Africa's border management approach. Khumalo (2014) adds that while legislation has been developed, the poor coordination between stakeholders responsible for border security and management means that the success rates of these legislations, therefore, become problematic to measure. Taking from the above, there seems to be a disjointed operational mechanism in the approach used to manage South Africa's land borders, therefore, for technology to integrate and work seamlessly within these borders, one cannot help but argue that the current disjointed operational mechanism ought to be addressed. Building on the above, Lennep (2019) argued that border management in South Africa needs a single operational framework as having too many agencies on the borders results in bureaucracy and inefficiency. Arguably, South Africa's need for technology at the border fails to reflect such challenges, how will the country create the much-needed synergy between current approaches and technology? South Africa realises the problematic approach of its current border management, a major internal challenge facing the government is changing the entrenched culture of "departmentalism/territorialism" or operating in 'silos' with narrow departmental self-interests. This lack of coordination militates against the coherence of cross-cutting programs and ultimately compromises the impact of joint programs (Taute, 2007).

South African National Defense Force and border security

In a post-apartheid South Africa, undocumented cross-border migration and cross-border crime have been categorized as fundamental issues hampering the army's ability to effectively

protect South Africa. It became clear that the South African Police Service was poorly equipped to effectively secure the borders, in 2009, the South African government overturned its initial decision and ordered the SANDF to resume the function of border security. The Constitution of South Africa (as per section 205 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996 and from the SAPS Act of 1995) alludes that the SAPS has a responsibility to maintain order and fight crime, however, within the framework of border security are the primary force on ensuring effective border security. On the other hand, the SANDF in terms of section (1) of the defence act, the role of the SANDF includes patrolling the land borders by foot and vehicles, establishing observation and listening posts, operating vehicle control points, conducting intelligence operations, and conducting roadblocks in conjunction with the SAPS (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2011). Moreover, the SANDF is responsible for border protection, which is defined as the protection of the international borders of the country against hostile attacks.

However, cross-border crime and undocumented migration have evolved today to become complex processes. The state of the country's borders was laid bare by the chief of the SA army lieutenant –general Lindile Yam-who explained that country's borders are weak; thousands of undocumented migrants come and go as they please. The lieutenant surprisingly, also expounded that during the apartheid era, the army was afforded sufficient resources to carry out its functions, however, in post-apartheid South Africa, this has not been the case (Ndlazi, 2018). Interpreting the above, perhaps South Africa does not view border issues as a threat to its national security and hence investing significant funds may be seen as unnecessary. For Kynoch (2013) the problem in South Africa is that SANDF is in a “critical state of decline” and is largely incapable of carrying out its constitutional duties. It lacks critical mobility and is “too poorly equipped and funded to execute the widening spectrum of tasks to the desired level. Engelbrecht (2009) argued that it is not a lack of technology in borders that is a problem but the lack of leadership, the author explained that we have soldiers without vehicles; we have ships without sailors; we have planes without pilots, and we have military hospitals without doctors, so the real problem with the defence force is that it is under-led. It becomes observable that policy issues are at the core of the inability of South Africa to effectively secure its borders. The South African Police Service (2016) further argued that challenges such as corruption; lack of cross-border cooperation and South Africa's under-investment in border modernization need to be addressed as they were serious barriers to effective border management. The South African Police Service (2016) reflects the numerous factors that drive undocumented migration and cross-border crime in South Africa. These range from weak borders, corruption, the inability of the SANDF to patrol long stretches of land borders, outdated border management systems, unofficial crossings points, weak institutional policy apparatus, lack of oversight, and degrading infrastructure.

The re-introduction of the army to South Africa's border architecture raises fears of border militarization and securitization which goes against regional interests. However, with a lack of regional cooperation, countries resort to unilaterally enforcing border policies. The SANDF is not sufficiently equipped to patrol the country's huge land borders, this is exacerbated by the inability of the country to sustain sufficient levels of economic growth to invest in the SANDF's modernization (Tati, 2008). Nonetheless, the literature fails to reflect on the changing patterns of migration and cross-border today. Secondly, while the literature takes into consideration how the SANDF is compounded by significant challenges, it neglects to reflect that policy issues and political indecisiveness are at the core of this failure rather than the political rhetoric that South Africa has been overwhelmed by cross-border crime and undocumented migration. This has therefore given rise to the need to capacitate the SANDF to enable it to perform optimally and promote cross-border cooperation.

Methodology

The study employed qualitative a research approach. Data specific for the study was collected through semi-structured interviews where a sample of 15 respondents was interviewed. The respondents included policy experts and senior researchers who had conducted studies on borders, migration, and cross-border crime from a South African perspective. Additionally, respondents had a profound understanding of the historical context of borders, their operation, and management. The respondents were selected using the nonprobability sampling technique in which purposive sampling was used to select the respondents based on their willingness to participate in the study by responding to the interview questions. The questions focused on the operation and management of borders, their challenges, whether these challenges were being addressed, how they have impeded effective border management and whether borders are equipped to handle the growth and complexity of undocumented migration and cross-border crime, and more importantly, the role that could be played by technology. The rationale for Semi-structured interviews was motivated by the context and background of the topic under study and the need to grasp the interviewees' interpretations. Thematic content analysis was employed to analyse the data, this involved reading through the data, identifying and classifying themes, and explaining the meaning of these themes by connecting them with the aim of the study. Table 1. Distribution of study participants.

Table 1.

Distribution of study participants.

Respondent(s)	Number
Federal University Otuoke	01
Africa Centre for Strategic Studies	01
Defence Web	01
Thabo Mbeki Institute of Leadership	01
Enhancing Africa's ability to Counter Transnational Crime (ENACT)	01
Institute for Global Dialogue	01
Institute of Security Studies	02
Mangosuthu University of Technology	01
Parliament of South Africa	01
University of the Western Cape	02
University of Johannesburg	01
University of Manchester	01
University of Zululand	01
Total sample size	15

Results

The data analysis process produced two main themes and subsequent sub themes. These are listed below.

1. Benefits and need for tech-centric borders
2. Challenges in implementing smart border technologies

The first theme of the study was about the various benefits that tech-centric borders were expected to have on South Africa. Respondent 1 believed that tech-centric borders will be effective in curbing undocumented migration, and this will be their main benefit. As said by Respondent 1 and Respondent 14, technology will be more stringent in screening immigrants forcing them to comply with the laws to avoid being detected.

There will be fewer undocumented migrants, forcing them to comply because of stringent policies making it impossible to survive without papers such as in countries like Canada. It will also enhance the honesty levels of the officials at the border – Respondent 1

It will contribute to better border security because it will be more effective in helping border agents to prevent, track, check, curb, and tackle challenges of the influx of undocumented migrants and illicit activities of cross-border criminals - Respondent 14

Respondent 9, like Respondent 1 also shared a view that tech-centric borders would help to control both undocumented migration and border crime. This benefit would however be realized in the long-term rather than in the short-term:

In the short-term, it would be expensive but in the long run, it would save resources and would be more effective if run properly – Respondent 9

Respondents 2 and 6 concluded that the government should implement tech-centric borders because of their advantages in curbing both undocumented migration and border crime:

We need this technology. SANDF is also asking for such technology, and they are best placed to tell us what they need to do the job – Respondent 2

The government should deploy technology and resources. The issue of technologisation of the border can help – Respondent 6

This theme had three sub-themes. These were:

Crime, corruption detection and prevention; potential positive effect on current human resources efficiency and potential positive effect on private contractor efficiency

The data analysis process conducted for the study produced the three themes listed below:

Sub-Theme 1: Crime, corruption detection and prevention

Sub Theme 2: Potential positive effect on current human resources efficiency.

Sub- Theme 3: Potential positive effect on private contractor efficiency.

Crime, corruption detection and prevention

Tech-centric borders were seen by some as possible solutions for border crime. Given that some elements of border technology were already deployed by the SANDF at borders,

technology could complement their crime-fighting efforts. Additionally, it would reduce excessive dependency on the army in controlling borders:

If we deploy technology, will this lower the dependency on SAPS and SANDF? Certainly, it will allow the country to better detect crime and undocumented movements, and it will certainly compliment SANDF – Respondent 2?

Tech-centric borders can be of benefit in curbing human error at borders as well as in detecting and therefore combating corruption. Respondent 9 stated that border technology can help mitigate wrongdoing of border officials:

They can play a major role by detecting the wrong activities carried out by some officials. These technologies could be used in surveillance – Respondent 9

Respondent 1 also shared the view that increased technology will reduce border crime:

It will reduce border crimes and undocumented migrants and economic relations will be improved – Respondent 1

Respondent 2 further discussed a view that crime-fighting was made difficult by the long and stretching nature of borders. Human resources alone will not be efficient in ensuring that there are no breaches along the long stretching frontiers. Technology like drones will however make it possible to patrol and monitor these borders:

Our borders are hundreds of kilometers. It is impossible to guard them by foot alone or horseback for that matter, technology will help with such patrol because and better detect syndicates and irregular movements– Respondent 2

Respondent 3 had a unique view on crime at borders. The extent of crime at the borders especially those that were patronised by black people, was overly misrepresented. The solution was to first resolve the factors that led to such misrepresentation, one of which was an identity crisis issue. Border officials, in Respondent 3's views associated black people like themselves with criminality:

Issues such as trafficking, terrorism and illicit trade are also constitutionally constructed. It is fellow Africans who are the main suspects of the crime. Whether it is drugs, trafficking etc., some major perpetrators are not even African. If you want to resolve these, you need to resolve the identity crises – Respondent 3

The above respondent therefore saw a need to remove the stigma that African migrants, especially blacks were potential criminals while migrants of other races were not.

Potential positive effect on current human resources efficiency

The interviews touched on the issue of human resources adequacy at the borders focusing on SANDF and SAPS personnel as well as contracted private companies. The first matter was that despite many private companies operating at the borders, there were reports of increasing undocumented migration and border crimes. There was, therefore, a question of whether tech-centric borders would call for more or fewer human resources on the ground. The above sub-theme was therefore built-up from response to two questions:

If we introduce smart borders, do we compliment the police and the army? We have about 25 companies working under operation Korona helping the army and the police at the borders. At the same time there is a lot of crime. How is this so?

Tech-centric borders, as seen by some, will complement human resources deployed there to fight crime rather than increase them. In the views of Respondent 6, with more technology, more human resources may be needed to respond to detected crimes and anomalies:

In quantitative terms yes. If we have drones, some army groups will be in the camp however if the drones detect a security threat, the dependency on the army will be higher because of the drones' detecting threats. You need an integrated system. You do not need the 14 companies; it will be a question of how you need the companies – Respondent 6

Respondents 4 and 15, however, believed that there may be a need for a fewer army personnel to complement the new technology:

The technology and the armed forces will work better together. The input from the army will reduce if the technology input is high but generally, we do need people – Respondent 4

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They will be needed albeit not as the core factors of the operations:

We need to train them for them to complement the smart border. We need to capacitate the police through technical training. We cannot deal with SANDF only, but they should use supervisory methods for them as well. As long as the supervisory element on humans is there, the technology will go a long way– Respondent 1

Potential positive effect on current human resources efficiency

Respondent 2 believed that without technology more and more human resources will be needed to securitize borders. The respondent stated that even with 15 private companies, many of the country's borders were still highly prone to both crime and undocumented immigration:

There were 15 private companies which were inadequate. They talked about increasing this number to 22. Twenty-five companies would however be adequate. We need fewer warm bodies at the border and more drones and technology. We also need dedicated young SANDF members and infra-red cameras that allow us to secure the borders – Respondent 2

Some respondents (3, 5, 7, and 11) pointed at the ineffectiveness of the current contractors as a challenge rather than at the shortage of technology at borders. Respondent 6 asserted that the reason why so many companies were there was because they were too small and too inefficient to deliver on their contracts:

It gives the impression that they deal with small companies. Why not deal with one big company whose contract can be terminated if they do not deliver– Respondent 6

Respondents 6 & 5 held another view that private companies do benefit from undocumented migration and crime at borders. These companies' contracts were only necessary if border crime and undocumented immigration were high. As such, they ensured there was always a certain level of illegality at the borders so that they remained relevant:

There is a vicious cycle. If border security is good and they are successful, then they do not have business and contracts. So, they kind of must keep a balance between things so they also remain in business. I am sceptical of such companies – Respondent 5

Respondent 5 reiterated that this behaviour was not only peculiar to South Africa but was evident in the global immigration and border control industry which the respondent further tagged as a multi-million-rand industry. Respondent 1 also stated that tech-centric borders will reduce dependency on private companies that offered compromised security services:

I refer to the previous answer. We need smart borders which are supervised, and sometimes private companies compromise the security. There is trusting people in securing borders. With smart technologies, there is the supervision of border officials. There is also the need for human surveillance. The human element compromises border security at times – Respondent 1

Respondent 12 however held a different view stating that more human resources were needed at the border despite in addition to the 15 companies mentioned. This was because borders, due to their expansiveness were not manageable by a comparatively few people:

The government alone may not be able to shoulder full responsibility in migration and border security. Private entities and communities may need to be engaged – Respondent 12

Theme 2: Challenges in implementing smart border technologies

The sample discussed the challenges that affected the implementation of a tech-centric border. These were discussed by both respondents who believed that tech-centric borders were a solution for undocumented immigration and cross-border crime and those who did not. Some of the responses related to the challenges of implementing tech-centric borders came out as respondents responded to the question:

In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge hampering the development and implementation of a tech-centric border system in South Africa?

Most challenges however came out in the general course of the interviews. Several classes of challenges were identified, and these were classified into sub-themes.

Sub-theme 1: Financial and resources challenges

Sub-theme 2: Technology-related challenges

Sub-theme 3: Unintended effects of border securitization

Financial and resources challenges

Almost all respondents talked about financial challenges as a limiting factor in the implementation of tech-centric borders. Respondent 6 and Respondent 1 below believed that finance was one of the two biggest challenges in tech-border implementation along with expertise:

The lack of resources to fully amend the borders and the technology fully comes to the fore – Respondent 6

The biggest challenge is finance and the expertise to implement the technology. If you pay for them there is a need to train people in using them and the lack of this finance hampers the implementation of a smart border – Respondent 1

Respondent 1 linked financial challenges with the need for high overheads for managing the technology, specific skills development and training. Respondent 4 associated the financial challenges that hampered the immediate implementation of tech-centric borders with the general economic situation of South Africa. With a poorly performing economy trying to recover from low growth, channeling resources towards tech-centric borders could be a challenge as many areas were competing for the same financial resources:

Government has been in economic decline especially during the Zuma years, so we are now in transition and resources are deployed away from such project. Current resources are so overstretched -Respondent 4

Respondents who viewed tech-centric borders as a non-necessity also referred to South Africa's economic situation as less conducive for such changes. Respondent 8 was highly detailed on the need to address other priority areas first:

South Africa has a ton of competing priorities. According to the WHO and UNICEF about 2.5 million people in the country lack reliable access to safe drinking water, another, while more than ten times that number (15 million) do not have access to improved sanitation facilities. The country's water infrastructure is in disrepair, see a paper from ISS here, and I probably do not need to go into detail about Eskom. Now, crime is certainly a serious issue in South Africa, and I do not mean to suggest that it isn't, but investing in a tech-centric border, along with the investment in personnel that it entails, may be difficult to justify in the face of those other needs – Respondent 8

In agreement, Respondent 3, who held a strong view that border-centric technology or excessively stringent border control was not a dire need, also believed that available financial resources should be channeled towards communities:

They do not have the money and we should not pre-occupy ourselves with such. Concentrate on providing social services – Respondent 3

At the same time, Respondents 2 and 15 also conceded to a common view that the South African government was facing financial resources challenges to implement tech-centric borders:

Now currently we are facing fiscal challenges in health, education and policing, hence where would we source the funds to go to border security – Respondent 2

Government priorities appear to be elsewhere – Respondent 15

The above forms of support met varying needs among the FSWs. Although there were commonalities in that they were not adequate in resolving the newly created income gaps, they were cited as acts of goodwill that helped them to cope to differing extents.

Technology-related challenges

Respondent 8 commented that from the experiences of the developed world, technology at borders had not always worked as planned. The respondent further broadened their view to technology at large at times gave problems that neutralized the benefits they might have brought to society:

Now I think the investment in personnel is an underappreciated cost. Technology is, almost by definition, a little complex. Learning how to use it well takes time and there are always hiccups. This is not just in Africa either. Developed countries struggle with adapting to technological change, a case in point being the U.S. – Respondent 8

Respondent 8 therefore perceived tech-centric borders as part of a technological trend that can have failure repercussions on South Africa. Respondent 8 further discussed that while technology could in some respects be a solution, there were risks in picking technologies that will not be there for long, generally because of the disruptive nature of technology or technologies that will work in the beginning and eventually crash:

But one also doesn't want to pick fringe technology that may not be around in 5 years. Saving a couple of million rands on a contract in 2020 may sound like a bargain, but if that company is out of business in 3 years when that system crashes, it will cost more than a couple of million rands to fix, I promise – Respondent 8

In Respondent 5's view, even if effective technology is implemented, there might not be any notable changes to undocumented migration. Technology will affect the paths rather than the volumes of migration hence would be ineffective:

It will not change it. If you put fences around it people will move in another direction. It is expensive. It just changes the direction. We have seen this in the US-Mexico border. It increases irregular migration and those in the country become trapped – Respondent 5

Respondent 8 also stated that:

I think if you look at the United States it is clear that no amount of technology can stop undocumented border crossings. You can minimize them, but the diminishing returns are incredible – Respondent 8

Respondents 5 and 8, therefore, viewed the cost of technology being far too high compared to its little benefit. This was in contrast to Respondents 14 and 15 below who foresaw higher benefits than costs of border technology in the long-term:

Yes, given the cost-benefit analysis, the benefit of technology driving border security management will outweigh the cost implications of using it in the long-run - Respondent 14

Equipment such as sensors and UAVs will provide better and more up-to-date intelligence for soldiers to act on. This will see savings in cost expended on vehicles, fuel and others enabling patrols to go “where the action is” – Respondent 15

Respondents 6 and 9 held views that technology would only work as part of a well-orchestrated strategy that included personnel on the ground:

Technology on its own will not work. But from what I said earlier on, people on the ground need motivation. Human cooperation is also needed – Respondent 6

Yes. However, it would not be a panacea – Respondent 9

Respondent 13 believed that lack of commitment towards technology implementation in general by the government was a challenge on its own:

Furthermore, the government has not shown its interest in technology development in general. For instance, government is lagging behind when it comes to cyber security which is a non-negotiable in the present day – Respondent 13

Unintended effects of border securitization

In the sample, there were informative discussions on the possible, unintended consequences of border securitisation, including through the introduction of tech-centric or smart borders. Respondent 5 held the view that excessive securitisation of borders through smart border technologies can seriously impede the smooth flow of trade. This can have a severe economic impact on South Africa, which constitutes a very large cost to bear for the benefit it will bring:

It has a huge cost and an economic impact. But South Africa needs trade and to move goods. These are just tiny enclaves they are not the major entry points and we still need trade; you cannot close things down – Respondent 5

Respondent 10 also mentioned the need to consider the impact of tech-centric borders on trade and integration:

There has to be a consideration for regional countries, South Africa is in the SADC, and other regional organizations hence that might be a problem to unilaterally implement a tech-centric border, furthermore, maybe a human resource issue and consideration for trade and integration – Respondent 10

Respondent 5 asserted that too much border control can also result in reduced efficiency at border posts:

If borders are watertight it becomes a blockade. That slows down trade resulting in the huge lines of waiting trucks you see in Uganda, Kenya. There should be more efficient ways to trade. It's also a discussion in the United Kingdom about the Irish border. The politicians support this but this affects trade – Respondent 5

Political views, as stated by Respondent 5 were supportive of such a move despite its economic impact. This view is related to previous comments and discussions that political forces sometimes saw advantages in ascribing economic problems to migration. This was discussed by Respondents 3 and 8 as well as Respondent 5 under an earlier theme

Discussion

While the findings of this study confirmed that borders in South Africa were in total disarray, the findings also argued that South Africa was not ready for a technology-laden border and that the money that can be invested to support sectors such as health, education, and social welfare. South Africa cannot expect to ensure optimal border security without cooperating with regional states. Stohr and Schneiderheinze (2017) support this and argue that even though the effects of undocumented migration and cross-border crime affects all countries around the world, South Africa should consider cooperation with regional states rather than taking unilateral action which might resort to border securitization and harm the country's interests. While technology on the border in the USA and the EU has proven to be of great assistance to border immigration services, the border landscape of these regions is different from that of the SADC and SA. Moreover, the financial capability of the USA and the EU means they can invest billions in research and development of border systems, something which South Africa cannot afford right now, especially looking at its economic growth trajectory.

The country cannot consider the possibility of technology at the border because there is a need to ensure a seamless operation of the many departments and agencies present at the border. For South Africa, the issues within its borders are observable, they are porous, lack sufficient human capital, and lack coordination among the many present departments and agencies and these have indirectly contributed to the consolidation of cross border crime and undocumented migration. Moreover, policymakers and politicians alike have argued that strengthening border capabilities will likely reduce those entering illegally. However, achieving this throughout South Africa's bureaucratic border management frameworks may be difficult, for example, the Department of Home Affairs is riddled with corruption and disorganization and has caused an immigration system backlog (Madia and Phakgadi, 2019). Respondent 5 also argued that while border control and security are important, too much border control can result in reduced efficiency in the border, which could affect trade integration in the region.

The lack of consistent growth in the South African economy has also been seen as a barrier to implementing technology at the border. The World Bank in South Africa (2020) reflected that the South African economy was already in a weak position when it entered the

pandemic after a decade of low growth and there was concern with budget allocations for sectors such as education, health, and social welfare, hence, to invest millions in border technology without addressing these issues was bound to cause social upheaval. Respondent 5 reflected that such investments were going to result in border securitisation and this was going to have a severe economic impact on South Africa, which constitutes a very large cost to bear for the benefit it will bring. This was supported by Jones, R. (2016) who asserted that no country in the world can stop the movement of people whether legally or illegal and cross border crime syndicates will always find ways to bypass walls that are meant to restrict their operations; hence cooperation is the best way to address the country's concerns relating to undocumented migration and cross border crime.

There was talk of the demise of the SANDF. While respondent 2 argued that technology in the border would assist the SANDF in patrolling South Africa's vast stretch of land border, years of under investments, lack of modern equipment and a demotivated work force has consolidated the view that the SANDF cannot ensure the protection of the country's sovereignty. In support, BusinessTech (2020) commended that "With the defence force in a state of decline, the country is losing its sovereign capability, something that will take many years to rebuild. Moreover (), notes that for the foreseeable future, defense spending will remain at about 1% of GDP. South Africa cannot afford the 2% of GDP that's accepted for defense spending across the world. Without addressing the internal challenges that have confronted the SANDF, technology alone will not help reduce the undocumented migration and cross border crime. While the Border Management Authority (BMA) which has been recently signed into law in parliament aims to remedy the fragmented border management model currently being utilized, its operation has not been fully implemented hence its effectiveness with regards integrating border management functions are yet to be seen. The fragmented model has resulted in a variety of challenges in controlling South Africa's borders. The bill seeks to establish a single implementing entity under a single executive authority.

Conclusions

The study was able to answer its main research question captured in its title. It concluded that tech-centric borders were a possible solution to the management of South African borders concerning undocumented immigration and cross-border crime. It however, emphasized that tech-centric borders were bound to work effectively if other contextual factors at borders are addressed these being corrupt behavior among border officials, low levels of staff commitment to the ethos of border management, limited knowledge on immigration policies among immigration officials and immigration policy challenges. Furthermore, tech-centric borders will work effectively if root causes of undocumented immigration and cross-border crime are also addressed. It was concluded that while addressing the root causes of the challenges would possibly serve as the ultimate solution to these border problems, South Africa had a constrained capacity to influence its neighbors and other regional countries to positively address their geopolitical and economic problems. This made tech-centric borders a more appealing option.

Recommendations

The following was recommended the following:

- South Africa should invest in border modernization, its systems and implement policies to eliminate elements of corruption and task duplication
- Consolidate regional cooperation on border management
- Improve the managerial and the operation of the agencies and departments present at the borders.

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