

Memo on the US-Mexico Border

Does the existing US-Mexico border fence and the initiative to erect an even more imposing structure, reflect genuine anti-immigration sentiment? Although policy creation seems to cater to those passionate about preventing illegal immigration, other non-controversial concerns are what really get border defense legislation passed.

As Peter Skerry describes, it seems that the “U.S.-Mexico border has become the focus of a symbolic struggle over how Americans see themselves in the world” and not really a by product of strong anti-immigration sentiment. In fact, if the goal of the US-Mexico fence was truly only to keep immigrants out, real steps would be taken to beef up security and make the fences harder to scale. Really, it seems that US anti-immigration concerns ebb and flow over the years, and, though they are currently slightly elevated in our post 9/11 environment, the media and public officials overstate its importance. But, other US concerns that happen to involve border security, in cooperation with the immigration concern, however, have fueled conversations and initiatives to increase border security and defense.

Other superseding reasons for border protection include drug trafficking interception and, more recently, counterterrorism. While these legitimate concerns offer cause for border security concerns, they are often overlooked by the media and average US citizen. Border defense legislation, in many Americans’ minds, therefore is synonymous with illegal immigration control and that association can be a very dangerous one for diplomatic and discrimination sentiments.

Source: Skerry, Peter. “How Not to Build a Fence,” *Foreign Policy*. September/October 2006, 64-67.