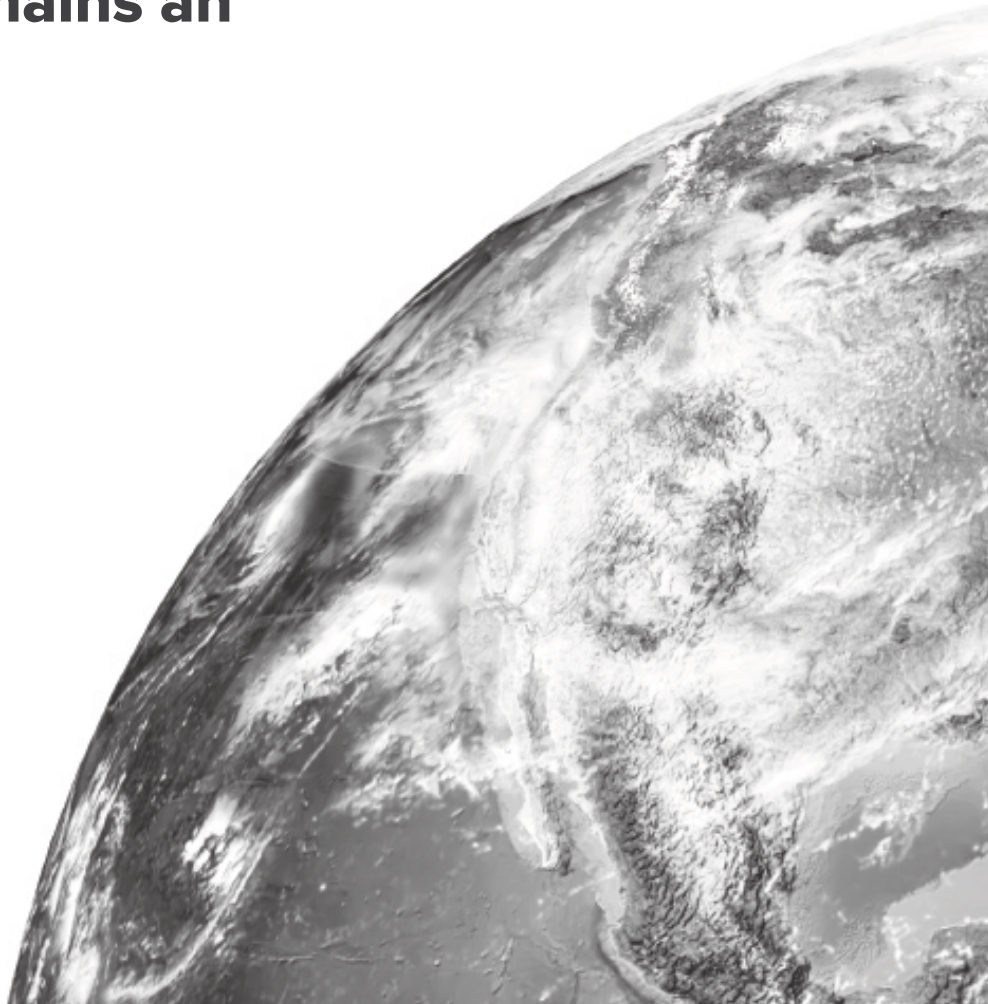




**BORDERS IN  
GLOBALIZATION**

**BIG POLICY BRIEF  
Vol. 1 No. 5 June 2019**

# **For North American commerce, the border remains an impediment**



# For North American commerce, the border remains an impediment

Despite recent negotiations, the border between Canada and the United States remains a costly barrier for North American trade. The presence of border checks and security clearance, as well as delays as goods wait to cross all impact the bottom line of businesses of all sizes, on both sides of the border.

## THE RESEARCH

Thanks to the work of researchers with the Borders in Globalization project (BIG), a clearer picture of border-related issues has emerged. Research has identified five key areas of concern for policy makers, each of which represents a significant challenge for cross-border cooperation.

First: the explosive growth of cross-border trade under the various free trade agreements between Canada, the United States and Mexico have resulted in lengthy delays at the border. Since the increased cross-border trade still needs to move through the same restricted number of points of entry, border infrastructure is working against economic interests.

The growth of cross-border trade and development has also changed the culture of the borderlands. Policy makers can no longer think of the borders as clear-cut lines dividing nations, but rather as regions where cultures flow, interact, and adapt to one another. Changing physical infrastructure at points of entry or along the border line will not, on its own, solve cross-border issues. A larger, regional approach is [required](#).

Because of regionalism, the borderlands between nations need to be recognized as [unique cultural spaces](#). Cross-border relationships emerge through interactions throughout these regions, that increasingly happen despite policy efforts to keep people on different sides of the border separate. Put simply, national and international policy seeks to impose economic policies on regional cultures that are at odds with the

interests of those same groups.

Lines of communication across and along the border are often crossed or dropped, due to misalignments of schedules, time zones, and protocols. For cross-border trade to flourish, lines of communication must be in alignment.

There is often a contradiction between border security policy and border economic policy. Policy makers see security and economic interests as parts of a zero-sum game. If security is increased, flows of goods decrease; if economic interests are prioritized, security suffers. This results in policies that work against one another. This is especially true when borders cross those of First Nations, [whose priorities](#) are often subordinated to national security interests.

**THE BORDER IS DISAPPEARING, AND THE BORDERLAND HAS EMERGED TO TAKE ITS PLACE. IN THE 21ST CENTURY, SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR BORDERLANDS WILL REPLACE SINGLE-STATE SOVEREIGNTY OVER BORDER POLICY AND CONTROLS.**

## THE POLICY

If border policy in North America could be reduced to a single word, it would be this: harmonization. Research emerging out of the BIG project has illustrated that contradictions in cross-border policy, coupled with divergent views about the nature of the border and the risks associated with cross-border trade have created an environment in the borderlands that is rife with misalignments. As BIG researchers have illustrated, borderlands are complicated spaces where

national interests, cultures, and identities overlap in ways that are not easily disentangled. Pretending that the border line (and its limited points of entry) is a wall between nations is not only a mistake, it is a source of increased frustration and policy bottlenecks because it limits the sorts of solutions that can be considered. Instead, policy makers must understand how borderlands are spaces of shared responsibility. Actors on both sides of a border line must share in the responsibility of managing borderlands. Policy makers should consider the following:

1. Processing and pre-clearance policies must be harmonized such that all parties involved are operating from a single set of protocols. This will allow for businesses and freighters across North America to move their goods more quickly and with fewer security concerns than they are currently able to do. Instead of heightened security at points of entry that slow all traffic that seeks to cross, security checks will instead be targeted, and will happen long before cargo or people arrive at border crossings.
2. To do this, not only does policy need to be jointly drafted and refined, but staff from all countries involved need to be integrated.
3. To facilitate this, regulations and regulatory reporting processes across all agencies and shareholder groups must be aligned. A shared vision and protocol will facilitate this. There are already examples of such integration in action, including the International Joint Commission (ICJ) for the [Great Lakes region](#), and the [Arctic Council](#), both of which feature staffing and procedural integration.
4. Such integration will require jointly funded upgrades to existing infrastructure, to ensure staff and facilities are operating at peak efficiency.

While there has been a push in recent years to draw

bright and clear lines along national boundaries, and to treat those lines as impermeable walls to be controlled from Washington or other North American capitals, the truth is that such a position ignores the historical and contemporary realities on the ground. The border is disappearing, and the borderland has emerged to take its place. In the 21st Century, shared responsibility for borderlands will replace single-state sovereignty over border policy and controls.

If policy makers in North America are in favour of reducing frustrations – and waits – along their nations' shared borders, then they need to move across them. Policy, from conception, to draft, to presentation, adoption, and implementation, must be a joint, integrated endeavour. It must emerge from the borderlands, and reflect it, if it is to manage them effectively.

More information and research can be found by visiting the Borders in Globalization [website](#).

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