

Prof. Nick Vaughan-Williams, PhD, University of Warwick

Position: Professor of International Security in the Department of Politics and International Studies (PAIS) at the University of Warwick, UK



Research interests: international politics of border security, changing nature and location of borders, impact of bordering practices from the perspectives of „irregular“ migrants and citizens in contemporary Europe

The everyday politics of migration and border control in Europe: Citizens’ narratives of hostility, hospitality, and (in)security

Recent attention in social science research has been drawn to the experiences of ‘irregular’ migrants and refugees – estimated by UNCHR to be 1,007,716 in 2015 – arriving in southern and south-eastern Europe. In this context interdisciplinary research has focused in particular on conditions *en route* in transit countries and in the context of reception and detention on arrival. However, almost two years on from the peak of the so-called ‘migration crisis’ in November 2015, Europe has moved into a new phase – one principally centred on issues relating to coexistence, integration, and security and safety among citizens and newly arrived populations. Following Chancellor Merkel’s temporary suspension of the Dublin Regulation in 2015, the centre of gravity of the ‘crisis’ has shifted from southern to northern countries, particularly to Germany, which was the primary destination for asylum-seekers in the EU with 441,800 first-time applications (Hungary was the second most popular with 174,000 applications).

Against this backdrop, migration management and border control have been catapulted to the top of the EU Commission’s strategic agenda. Although the securitisation of migration and the militarisation of external border control have been a gradual process following the 1985 Schengen Agreement, these dynamics have gathered significant pace since 2015. A series of high-profile policy responses – including the European Agenda on Migration (May 2015), the Valletta Summit on Migration (November 2015), the EU-Turkey Statement (March 2016), the New Partnership Framework (June 2016) and the EU Global Strategy (June 2016) – have focused on tougher border security measures as a deterrent against ‘irregular’ migration, strategies to disrupt the business models of smugglers, and closer cooperation among Member States including the establishment of a new European Border and Coast Guard. Furthermore, this renewed emphasis has been justified and legitimised by the EU Commission in the name of the safety and security of EU citizens. In the face of terror attacks in Belgium, France, and Germany – and a rising tide of populism and support for anti-

immigrant groups – the relationship between ‘irregular’ migration into the EU and public opinion is one of the most pressing policy issues facing Europe today. Yet, very little is known about emerging political cultures of coexistence between citizens and newly arrived populations post-2015. Even less is known about how diverse publics in EU countries perceive and experience ‘irregular’ migration and governments’ attempts to enhance citizens’ security and safety via tougher border controls in the context of their everyday lives. Standard Eurobarometer surveys depict a hardening of attitudes and an atmosphere of xenophobia, racism, and hostility across Europe; other evidence points to the persistence of pro-migrant sentiment and refugee networks of support, volunteering initiatives, and hospitality. Thus, there is an urgent need to investigate in more nuanced terms how citizens and newly-arrived populations coexist in contemporary Europe.

If meanings of migration and border security are produced intersubjectively and contested politically then the perceptions and experiences of ‘regular’ citizens – *as well as* elites and ‘irregular’ populations – are significant in shaping fields of knowledge, policy, and practice in which responses are made possible. Therefore, the principal aim of this paper and the broader Leverhulme Trust-funded programme of research of which it is a part is to begin to analyse cultures of hostility, hospitality, and (in)security among diverse publics across the EU, asking questions such as: How do citizens perceive and narrate ‘irregular’ migration and their everyday experience of it? What categories and identity claims are made in order to structure these perceptions and narratives? To what extent are citizens aware of governments’ attempts to enhance border security measures and how far are these policies supported or challenged?

This paper argues that the portrayal of ‘the public’ by the EU Commission and Eurobarometer surveys over-simplifies the complexities and ambivalences that characterise the diversity of citizens’ perceptions and experiences in relation to migrants and refugees. It draws on a pilot series of qualitative in-depth interpretive focus group discussions held exactly one year after the height of ‘irregular’ arrivals to the EU in December 2016 in: Germany (Munich) and Hungary (Miskolc), as EU Member States with high first-time asylum application rates; Greece (Thessaloniki) as a ‘frontline’ Member State; and the UK (Nottingham) as a peripheral Member State following the EU referendum. While sovereign, xenophobic, and racist narratives are part and parcel of the everyday, so too are volunteer and welcoming initiatives, calls for governments to do more to protect migrants and refugees, and other counter-veiling narratives that are otherwise silenced by dominant portrayals of public opinion used to justify tougher border security.

Based on approximately 720 minutes of group discussion time and 80,000 words of primary transcript data, our initial research findings based on the pilot phase reveal not only a varied and heterogeneous picture, but also a common set of demands among citizens for more transparent and authoritative sources of information, less sensationalism and greater contextualisation in media and policy representations of the „migration crisis“, and higher quality public debate across groups self-identifying as both ‘pro’ and ‘anti’ immigration. The

presentation will report on: 1) the concepts, categories, and knowledge mobilised by groups to discuss migration into Europe; 2) narratives of migration and its impact on security and safety in everyday life and public spaces; and 3) citizens' conceptualisations of border security and their awareness of and support for governments' policies in this context. Overall, it will be argued that migrants are imagined and encountered by interviewees in complex and ambivalent ways as *both* threatening *and* threatened, and that if policy-making communities were to listen more carefully to the nuances of citizens' voices beyond public opinion surveys then tougher deterrent border security would not be so readily legitimised as the dominant policy paradigm in which to offer a response to the „crisis“.