

The Impact of Global Connectedness on Urban Areas

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Abstract

Wayne State University faculty in the Social, Behavioral and Economic (SBE) sciences propose that the NSF SBE division fund primarily individual grants aimed at understanding the impact of global connectedness on urban areas. One example is the vulnerability of urban areas to weapons of mass destruction (WMD), made easier by the increasing permeability of states. Investigators in this area strive to understand, predict

and ameliorate the behaviors and actions of individuals, groups and nations intent on acquiring, building and using WMD. Another example of the impact of global connectedness on urban areas is how the flow of socioeconomic and political ideas, businesses, technology and labor forces cross national boundaries and impact societal processes and functions. Investigators in this area study topics including how individuals and societies impacted by global changes such as multinational corporations, technology, and migrant work forces are affected, socially, economically, politically, and the response of individuals, societies and governments.

Overview

While globalization has many benefits, it also presents new and unique threats to the safety and security of the U.S. There are threats of criminal organizations and the threats of use of weapons of mass destruction. Individual, communal and societal manifestations of fear, hatred, prejudice and motivations for committing large-scale crimes against others are likely from these global threats. U.S. governmental and social institutions need to both prevent and respond to these new global threats. This requires research on the specific types of threats, how to prevent them, and how to best respond to them. This research should be interdisciplinary rather than discipline specific. These are complex threats that require study by multifaceted research teams exploring the issue from different perspectives. New approaches to research are needed to deal with new threats from unseen enemies across the globe. These threats pose great harm not only to individuals, but groups, communities, and society. These threats and attacks can affect changes in individuals' and communities' conceptions of safety, peace and harmony and how people interact with one another. There are economic (social and individual) costs such as the destabilization of governmental systems, loss of housing, loss of life, food, employment, as well as social costs of human suffering, loss of life, and decreased feelings of security and safety. Furthermore, these threats can have an impact on individual freedoms (such as the right to bear arms or increased border security) and norms of society. In the end, the new challenges of safety and security resulting from an ever rapidly increasing globalization require a new focus of research in this area for decades to come.

SBE Research

Departments that are interested in conducting research on the impact of global connectedness in urban areas include:

Political Science:

A considerable amount of recent scientific research has been conducted on the effects of nuclear weapons possession on the interaction patterns of nations (e.g., the special

issue of the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 53, no. 2, 2009). However, much less scientifically-based work has been done in the area of non-state actors and the use of WMD. Such studies could conceivably focus on: the intersection of the political objectives of non-state actors and states in a position to supply WMD to non-state clients; deterrence of WMD attacks by non-state actors and the transfer of WMD from states to non-state clients; and the relative effectiveness of preemption policies versus nonproliferation regimes in preventing the use of WMD. The disciplines that might be involved in such prospective analyses would include political science and criminal justice. The research strategy would involve the compilation of new data sets and the use of existing databases such as those found in the Correlates of War Project.

Criminal Justice:

Until the past decade, most U.S. criminal justice agencies focused the majority of their efforts on domestic street level crime. With the attacks by terrorists on September 11, 2001, U.S. criminal justice organizations became a part of the mobilization to deal with both internal and external large-scale threats to the well-being of the U.S. society, and some agencies were woefully ill-prepared to handle their new duties.

While globalization brings great benefits to the U.S., it also poses great threats that need to be addressed by criminal justice and related social-control organizations. One looming area of concern is the growing influence of criminal organizations in other nations. These criminal organizations know no boundaries, and their influence is having a greater and greater threat to the safety and security of U.S. interests both home and abroad. This has also created unique issues for U.S. criminal justice agencies. Many of these criminal organizations transport illegal goods and substances across the border security checkpoints to satisfy illegal markets largely in urban areas. In addition, there is the threat of counterfeit goods and human trafficking, which also generally affect urban areas. This has created incredible wealth for organizations that not only have no vested interest in the security and safety of the U.S., and some are actively working against U.S. interests. For example, the Taliban is accused of smuggling opium and other illicit drugs into Western nations and uses the profits to wage war against the U.S.-led coalition and to destabilize the elected Afghan government.

In addition, aside from the danger from posed by state sponsors of terror, the potential for enormous financial gains has led other more for profit international criminal organizations to become increasingly involved in the illegal transport and sale of military weapons. There is a rising possibility that sophisticated military-grade weapons, including WMD (many from the crumbling security of the former Soviet Union), will ultimately end up in the possession of groups who will attack U.S. installations or citizens on U.S. or foreign soil. In addition, there are growing threats from state

sponsored terrorism from other nations and political zealots that must be addressed by U.S. criminal justice agencies.

Moreover, many of these new and growing criminal organizations are branching off into new criminal enterprises. Kidnapping, scams, selling corporate and trade secrets, and attacks attempting to compromise or incapacitate computer files, systems, and networks have become increasingly common. Electronic criminal activity poses a great threat to the security and safety of the U.S. society from enemies who may never set foot on U.S. soil.

U.S. criminal justice agencies need to adapt to a more diverse and potentially devastating set of threats from both home and abroad. The growth in global threats means that U.S. criminal justice agencies need to change from dealing with domestic street level crime to a board, diverse of threats. This means developing new information networks, new detection techniques (particularly for military weapons and WMD), new investigation techniques, creating new partnerships with international criminal justice agencies, enhancing the flow of information across different criminal justice agencies, including those in other nations, recruiting new types of applicants, and training for dealing for large scale emergencies, whether man-made or natural. For example, it is unclear how criminal justice agencies in a large urban area would respond to a nuclear attack or an outbreak of a deadly epidemic. There is a need to research these and many other areas to help U.S. criminal justice agencies both prevent and prepare for increasing serious threats to U.S. citizens from the effects of globalization. Without research in these and other areas, U.S. criminal justice agencies may not be ready for the global challenges that will face them in the future. Failure to be ready is a recipe for disaster and places many lives at risk.

Sociology:

Sociology studies the political economy of the world systems. Under this rubric, it examines such topics as: 1) biotechnology as the new lead industry in the global political economy, 2) the process of urbanization, suburbanization, and settlements, 3) the emergence of social movements across the globe, 4) social inequality, including the impact of gender, social class, and race/ethnicity on economic development and individual well-being, 5) transnational corporations, and 6) the functions of formal and informal labor markets. The interrelationship between local and global social, economic, and political processes is analyzed to understand impact of processes on societal functioning.

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