

NBER WORKING PAPER SERIES

DETECTING ILLEGAL ENTRY:
MIGRANT SANCTIONS AND RECIDIVISM IN BORDER APPREHENSIONS

Samuel Bazzi
Sarah Burns
Gordon Hanson
Bryan Roberts
John Whitley

Working Paper 25100
<http://www.nber.org/papers/w25100>

NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH
1050 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138
September 2018

We thank Craig McIntosh for helpful comments and Juan Herrera for helpful research assistance. Hanson acknowledges support from the Center on Global Transformation at UC San Diego. Burns, Roberts and Whitley acknowledge support from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (USDHS) for previous projects on border security and undocumented immigration. USDHS provided no support for the analysis in the current paper. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Bureau of Economic Research.

NBER working papers are circulated for discussion and comment purposes. They have not been peer-reviewed or been subject to the review by the NBER Board of Directors that accompanies official NBER publications.

© 2018 by Samuel Bazzi, Sarah Burns, Gordon Hanson, Bryan Roberts, and John Whitley. All rights reserved. Short sections of text, not to exceed two paragraphs, may be quoted without explicit permission provided that full credit, including © notice, is given to the source.

Deterring Illegal Entry: Migrant Sanctions and Recidivism in Border Apprehensions
Samuel Bazzi, Sarah Burns, Gordon Hanson, Bryan Roberts, and John Whitley
NBER Working Paper No. 25100
September 2018
JEL No. F22,J61

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we use administrative records from the U.S. Border Patrol to examine how penalizing illegal border crossing affects recidivism in the apprehension of undocumented migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border. Over 2008 to 2012, the Border Patrol rolled out a Consequence Delivery System, which increased the fraction of apprehended border crossers subject to administrative or criminal sanctions from 15% to 85% percent. By matching fingerprints across apprehension records, we detect if a migrant apprehended by the Border Patrol is subject to penalties and if he is re-apprehended at a later date. Exploiting day-to-day variation in the capacity of the Border Patrol to levy sanctions during the rollout phase, we estimate strong effects of penalties on the likelihood that an apprehended migrant re-attempts illegal entry and is recaptured. Exposure to (milder) administrative penalties reduces the 3-month and 18-month re-apprehension rates for male Mexican nationals by 6.6 and 4.6 percentage points, off of baseline rates of 22.6% and 24.2%; exposure to the full set of penalties reduces these re-apprehension rates by 8.1 and 6.1 percentage points. The estimated magnitudes imply that the rollout of the CDS can account for 28 to 44 percent of the reduction in re-apprehension rates over 2008 to 2012. Further results suggest that our estimated impacts of sanctions on recidivism in apprehensions may understate the impact of sanctions on recidivism in attempted illegal entry.

Samuel Bazzi
Department of Economics
Boston University
270 Bay State Road
Boston, MA 02215
and NBER
sbazzi@bu.edu

Sarah Burns
Institute for Defense Analyses
4850 Mark Center Drive
Alexandria, VA 22311-1882
sburns@ida.org

Gordon Hanson
IR/PS 0519
University of California, San Diego
9500 Gilman Drive
La Jolla, CA 92093-0519
and NBER
gohanson@ucsd.edu

Bryan Roberts
Institute for Defense Analyses
4850 Mark Center Drive
Alexandria, VA 22311-1882
bwrobertsjr2@yahoo.com

John Whitley
Institute for Defense Analyses
4850 Mark Center Drive
Alexandria, VA 22311-1882
jwhitley@ida.org