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Varieties of Homeland Security: An Assessment of US State-level Definitions

Abstract: Homeland Security continues to struggle to define itself as a field of practice and scholarship. The difficulty in defining the field has led to a variety of conflicts over membership, content, and focus. This article reviews some of the prominent debates over the meaning of homeland security as a field of study and practice. It then defines a simple schema for definitions of homeland security inspired by the academic and legislative debates over the issue. A frequency cataloging of definitions from US state agencies illustrates the continued relevance of a “partial membership” approach to defining the field. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications of the diversity of homeland security definitions for the development of the field.

Keywords: emergency management; homeland security; terrorism; US state politics.

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1 Introduction

The term “homeland security” has rapidly become a part of our policy vocabulary. The codification of the term as part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), though, does not eliminate the various ambiguities inherent in the term. In part, the political difficulties experienced in the history of DHS find their root in varying definitions of the underlying policy domain of “homeland security.” Internal political struggles over the relative importance of terrorism vice other hazards, for example, have generated public debates over the management and direction of DHS.

The definition of homeland security has been subject to a great deal of attention within its emerging academic discipline. Bellavita, for example, defines

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seven distinct themes within definitions of homeland security – ranging from terrorism to a critical view related to civil liberties (Bellavita 2008). While some of Bellavita’s themes do not satisfy as encompassing definitions of the subject (some are, instead, intended to emphasize dimensions of homeland security and emphasize the scope of the field rather than definitively demarcate boundaries), the diversity of themes reflects the fundamentally unsettled nature of the field and its definition. Debates over the definitions of homeland security are not simple academic exercises. The definitions have significant implications for the development of the field in terms of theoretical path (Kiltz and Ramsay 2012) and even the legislative history of policy (May et al. 2009).

Given the importance the definition of homeland security assumes, we have elected to take a new approach to studying the definition of homeland security. Rather than engage in a deductive debate over the linguistic meaning of homeland security, this article chooses an inductive approach by frequency-cataloging the diversity of definitions of homeland security in practice. As an initial step in this strategy, this article charts the diversity of definitions among related agencies among US states. The frequency-cataloging approach reveals a clear divergence in the definitions used by state agencies and state codes – even when using a simplistic definitional distinction.

2 Controversies over the Definition of Homeland Security

As the Department of Homeland Security begins its second decade, we are at a convenient point to assess the coherence of “homeland security” as a policy domain and a field of inquiry. Early conflict over the relative importance of various fields within the newly structured domain of homeland security raged both in the trenches of academic journals and disciplines as well as in the public eye through legislative debate. This section illustrates the parallel debates over the scope of the field within academics and broader public debates.

The debate surrounding homeland security and its application is firmly rooted in the pre-9/11 period, although the term is now most often associated with the post 9/11 world. The use of the homeland security term – and the division of funding priorities – at the federal level has reflected changes in the threat environment. Homeland security activities in the US can be traced to WWI when the Council on National Defense was established for resource planning and morale purposes. The concept of homeland security remained primarily associated with civil defense activities until the end of the Cold War, and was primarily driven by

the concerns of nuclear- and strategic- air strikes. The Cold War-era discussions and plans surrounding civil defense topics also set a precedent for the ongoing disagreements between state and federal responsibilities. The need to respond appropriately to natural disasters emerged as a second pillar to civil defense in the 1960s following a series of temporally connected major natural disasters and, in 1979, the Federal Emergency Management Authority (FEMA) was created as the federal agency with primary responsibility for coordinating disaster relief (National Preparedness Task Force 2006).

The end of the Cold War saw a sudden and dramatic reduction in the threat of a nuclear strike, leading FEMA to focus more heavily on “a true all-hazards approach to disaster preparedness” (National Preparedness Task Force 2006). The use of homeland security as an independent term and concept is most closely associated with the Bush 43 era. This period saw a shift in focus from civil defense and emergency management to homeland security. The modern nomenclature first came to prominence in the 1999 Hart-Rudman report, “New World Coming: American Security in the 21st Century,” which recommended the creation of a cabinet-level agency responsible for coordinating homeland security-related activities. In the wake of 9/11, the Office of Homeland Security was created (in October 2001), with a focus on securing the homeland against terrorist threats. The Office was short-lived, however, being abolished in 2002 following the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which again focused more broadly on the dual activities of counter-terrorism and all-hazards emergency preparedness. The creation of the DHS did little to reduce arguments surrounding the military-civil or terrorist-natural disaster foci of policy and preparedness activities, however, with some disagreements becoming more pronounced under the Department’s lead.

2.1 Definitional Controversies in the Academy

It would surprise few people that academic writers have been engaged in a debate over the definition of homeland security. After all, academics have a reputation for focusing on just such definitional issues. What distinguished this debate, though, were the diversity of voices and the deep ties to other disciplines that shaped the various debates.

The debate over the definition of the field included voices from emergency management, military and national security, and law enforcement disciplines (Beresford 2004; Bellavita 2008). Long-standing disagreements between these fields (fields that had competed for funding and disciplinary legitimacy) exploded into vigorous debates about the relative importance of each field within the emerging domain of homeland security. These debates had important implications in

determining who are eligible for the extensive funding emanating from federal officials, which programs would serve as the home for degree programs in homeland security, and which disciplines would find a new audience for its graduates. In academic circles, the stakes were quite large.

The debates roughly divide into two camps: security-oriented academics in law enforcement and military studies and disaster-oriented academics in emergency management and fire protection (e.g., Thacher 2005). Security oriented academics have focused on terrorism as the key challenging and defining threat to homeland security (Sauter and Carafano 2005). This approach was appealing due in no small part to the prominence of the terrorist attacks on the US in 2001 as well as the continuing terrorist threat illustrated by attacks in London and other locations (Sylves and Cumming 2004). With roots back to the civil defense efforts of the Cold War, these academics argued for the development of a coherent and well-organized defense against terrorist threats as an extension of military efforts abroad (Davis 2007).

Criticisms of DHS emerged within the academic sphere early after the department's creation, and largely mirrored the public discussions surrounding the function and form of DHS (discussed in section 2.2). Tierney, for example, argues the close association of civil defense/homeland security with the planning of war-related concerns caused natural disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina, to be cast in a militaristic frame, which resulted in inappropriate handling of the disaster (Tierney and Bevc 2007). In a similar vein, McEntire (2009) notes that due to the reorganization of multifaceted responsibilities into a singular department with split responsibilities, emergency management had become the "red-headed step-child of government." Waugh (2005) also argues the Department's focus on terrorism has undermined its ability to conduct true all-hazards planning.

Academics from the natural hazard and emergency management tradition countered that homeland security is simply another name for the "all-hazards" approach, which teaches that preparedness investments should emphasize communities' capacities that improve resilience against a wide variety of threats. They argue that efforts to prepare for terrorism can overlap with efforts to prepare for hurricanes or chemical spills (Waugh 2003, 2005). In this, homeland security should include natural hazards preparedness as an integral part of a broad security effort.

These disputes created a large fissure within the homeland security community. To a great extent, these two camps kept to themselves and their own literatures. It is rare to see scholars primarily associated with one tradition work with people from the other tradition. Each group tends to meet separately and quietly, and sometimes not so quietly, competes against each other for funding, publications, and influence.

2.2 Definitional Controversies in the Public Eye

While this conflict within academic communities raged, a parallel debate emerged in the public eye between prominent legislators and policymakers – most prominently over the design of the Department of Homeland Security. The most visible of these public debates surrounded the federal response to, management of, and capacity to handle, Hurricane Katrina in 2005. It is used here as a short case study to illustrate the definitional debate among public officials.

When DHS was formed in 2002, the political impetus driving the organizational reshuffle was a need to respond to the threats posed by terrorism. At the time of its formation, the Department's mission was to “prevent terrorist attacks within the United States; reduce the vulnerability of the United States to terrorism; and minimize the damage, and assist in the recovery, from terrorist attacks that do occur within the United States” (Homeland Security Act 2002). Following the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, questions were raised concerning the Department's mission and whether the focus on terrorism came at the detriment of other responsibilities, such as emergency preparedness and response.

While Hurricane Katrina brought the debate on terrorism and disaster preparedness efforts into clear focus for the population at large, a less noticeable debate had been ongoing within the homeland security community. Clovis notes, “One of the major complaints from state and local officials is that the federal government is “all terror-all the time,” leaving preparedness for the more frequent occurrences of fires, floods, hurricanes, tornados, and earthquakes as an afterthought for which little is being done at the national level” (Clovis 2008). That said, it was not until Hurricane Katrina revealed poor planning and activities by the federal government. It was here the importance of allowing space for all-hazards preparations was widely acknowledged and a criticism of the Bush Administration's post-9/11 focus on terrorism planning became widely voiced and heard.

The series of congressional hearings that focused on the federal response to Hurricane Katrina included accusations that a focus on terrorism was to blame for an inadequate response to a natural disaster. In his opening remarks to the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation For and Response to Hurricane Katrina, Chairman Tom Davis noted “Then we can work backward (beginning, no doubt, today) to discover what may have caused or enabled failures in preparation and response. Maybe we'll end up discovering that it's some mixture of... [A] bureaucratic mindset that now emphasizes terrorism to the exclusion of natural disaster planning” (Davis 2005).

At the same hearings, Michael Brown, the first Undersecretary of Emergency Preparedness and Recovery in DHS, and later FEMA Director at the time of the

hurricane, was deposed. During the deposition, North Carolina Representative Sue Myrick asked whether the movement of FEMA into DHS had a functional effect on FEMA's operations. Brown responded that such a reorganization of DHS would cause FEMA to lose staff as many of them were dual-hatted and would be drawn away from their focus on natural disaster planning to work on terrorism-related issues. He believed had the Emergency Preparedness and Response function been assimilated into FEMA, instead, "we could have changed that culture at that point and made it work. But now the entire Department, the people who have come into the areas are so terrorism-focused that they have minimized and marginalized FEMA to the point that I think now the only way to make that distinction is to pull FEMA out." (Brown 2006).

Brown was critical of the department's overall terrorism focus, and noted he wanted to do disaster planning explicitly; and while he received some funding for it, funding priority was directed towards counter terrorism efforts and he was unable to pursue his disaster planning efforts. Brown notes that even after Katrina, "there may not be another 9/11. Hurricane season is almost here again, and there hasn't been any more planning done. There's not been any more planning done" (Brown 2006).

Further, when questioned why the department did not define Hurricane Katrina as an incident of national significance under the Stafford Act,

Brown: First and foremost, I think there was this mentality that an incident of national significance would have been a terrorist event and therefore, all of a sudden, we would have all jumped up.

Rep. Jefferson (D., LA 2nd): That was the mentality in DHS?

Brown: So that's what they think in terms of an incident of national significance." (Brown 2006)

The Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs found similar themes during its investigation into the government's response to Hurricane Katrina. For example, Kathleen Tierney, Director of the Natural Hazards Center at the University of Colorado, testified that post 9/11, DHS made some crucial, if understandable, mistakes in its efforts to meet the new threat of terrorism. These include rejecting the principle of "integrated emergency management," while simultaneously failing to implement an approach commonly referred to as "all-hazards" preparedness" (Senate 2005). Overall, however, the Senate committee was much less forthright in its findings that the terrorism-specific focus of the Department of Homeland Security contributed to its failings during Hurricane Katrina.

3 Definitions of Homeland Security in Practice

3.1 A Typology for State Homeland Security Definitions

We have opted to use a relatively simple set of definitions of homeland security. Reflecting the disciplinary division between emergency managers and civil defense/military officials, we focus on the distinction between terrorism-only definitions of homeland security and definitions that expand to include a variety of hazards – what we call an all-hazards approach. This distinction also reflects the public debate over the focus of DHS from its origins following a terrorism event to the controversies over its performance following Hurricane Katrina. The result produces three categories: states for which we could not find a formal definition of homeland security, states that had definitions with an exclusive focus on terrorism, and those states with broader all-hazards definitions inclusive of non-terrorist disasters as well as terrorism. There were no instances of states with a definition that excluded terrorism but included other types of disasters. The next section describes how we used the definitions to classify each of the US states.

3.2 Research Methods

Definitions of homeland security were sought for each state by accessing state-specific operational agency websites. The primary intent was to identify official definitions or explanations of homeland security; that is statements in the form of “homeland security is”, “homeland security means,” “homeland security includes,” or “the term homeland security is used to.” Official definitions were initially sought exclusively in state code and executive orders.

For most states, such explicit definitions were absent, so the search was expanded to include more operational state government sources, such as annual reports and strategic documents. Again, the initial research sought official definitions in these documents. When explicit definitions were not present in publicly available documents or state code, the research was again widened to include operational definitions in the form of mission statements, vision statements, and strategic direction statements. In only three situations were researchers unable to locate an explicit or operational definition – and when this occurred researchers contacted appropriate authorities in each state to request a definition (which was provided in only one instance). As the research expanded to include more sources, multiple definitions were collected for a large number of states. That many more states offered definitions in operational documents and

that operational definitions trended more towards all-hazards suggests there may have been some definitional drift over time; however our research did not extend to time-stamping definitions.

On average, around 4 h of research was devoted to each state, although in some cases the definition was immediately accessible from the operational department's homepage, significantly reducing the search time. The research was conducted primarily in one month-long block during November 2012. In March 2013, definitions for each state were researched again to check for currency. As the research progressed it became evident there had been some temporal shift of definitions; however, time-specific definitions, and changes in definitions, were not deliberately sought. The collection of definitions obtained for this research is not considered to be complete – it reflects only what was publicly available online and during the research period. The researchers welcome more explicit, comprehensive, or current submissions from any state authority.

When explicit and operational definitions were obtained, they were categorized by content and source, with original divisions falling along source lines – either state code or operational documents. The definitions were further divided according to a three-category arrangement: no definition, terrorism only, and all-hazards. Terrorism only covered those definitions that specifically mentioned acts of terror or man-made incidents. The all-hazards category included those definitions that included the term “all-hazards” or mentioned terrorism, man-made disasters and natural disasters.

3.3 Table of Definitions

Of the 50 US states, definitions of homeland security are fairly equally spread between a purely terrorism focus and an all-hazards focus. Thirteen and fourteen states provided a definition of homeland security that focused on terrorism in state code and in operational documents, respectively (see Table 1). For a number of states, different documents provided different definitions and interpretations. Often there was no defined meaning of “homeland security” given (only 10 states

Table 1 Number of States with Each Definition of Homeland Security.

Definition	State Code	Operational Definitions
No definition found	20	2
Terror-only definition	13	14
All-hazards definition	17	34

literally defined the concept). Two states did not provide anything approaching a definition – either in the form of state code or in a mission or values statement in an appropriate departmental document. Thirty states defined homeland security (or the role of the homeland security office) in state code or an executive order. It is possible, however, that some states have published a definition in an executive order or other formal document that the researchers were unable to locate.

Ten states provided literal definitions of “homeland security”: Alabama, Alaska, Iowa, Minnesota, Mississippi, North Dakota, Vermont, Texas, West Virginia, and Wyoming. Of these, only one – Wyoming – defined homeland security as efforts to prevent, prepare for and recover from all types of disaster. The other nine provided definitions that were narrowly focused on terrorism. Minnesota, Mississippi and North Dakota provided identical definitions, the same as the definition provided in the US National Strategy for Homeland Security, “Homeland security means a concerted national effort to prevent terrorist attacks within the United States, reduce America’s vulnerability to terrorism, and minimize the damage and recover from attacks in the United States.”

Interestingly, more than half of all states had an office or division of homeland security rather than emergency management. However, the mission statements from across all states were weighted in favor of emergency management activities, specifically. Florida was one of the few states to avoid the term “homeland security,” preferring the term “domestic security.” North Dakota has an office of Emergency Services, though it is still one of the few states to literally define homeland security. Two states (New York and Oregon) have offices of counterterrorism that are responsible for homeland security matters.

Although there was much more difference between definitions of homeland security among the states that did not focus exclusively on terrorism, central themes were still evident. Overall, only 15 states did not include some derivative of the “prepare, prevent, respond” approach to homeland security in their mission statements or agency directives. Thirty states defined homeland security as incorporating responses to both man-made and natural disasters. A small number of states attempted to define the types of crises or disasters. Of the thirty states that provided a blended definition, only six defined homeland security duties by also using the phrase “all-hazards.” However, another seven states only used the “all-hazards” phrase, shying away from discussing terrorism or disasters.

There were a number of slightly unusual findings. As noted earlier a number of states provided conflicting definitions in different public documents (Florida, Oklahoma, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Texas). Oklahoma states in its mission the focus of its office is singular – terrorism – however the state code indicates the duties of the office should include all-hazards mitigation. Florida, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Wisconsin on the other hand discuss an

all-hazards approach in their agency mission statements, while the state code defines homeland security as terrorism specific. A few states that attempt to list out hazards omit terrorism entirely (Connecticut, Illinois, New Mexico). Washington takes an opposite approach, only mentioning “disasters” with no attempt to define them further. Indiana, meanwhile, provides an extremely generic mission statement for its Department of Homeland Security, stating it will “provide statewide leadership, exemplary customer service, and subject matter expertise for the enhancement of public and private partnerships and the assurance of local, state and federal collaboration to continually develop Indiana’s public safety capabilities for the wellbeing and protection of our citizens, property and economy.” Interestingly, Idaho makes note of the fact the mission of its Bureau of Homeland Security is to protect not only life and property, but also animals.

3.4 The Geography of Homeland Security Definitions

Figure 1 illustrates the geography of varying homeland security definitions. Using the most permissive strategy for identifying definitions (that is, operational documents), most states have an all-hazards definition of homeland security. There are a few states with terrorism-specific definitions (including Oklahoma, Oregon, Wisconsin, Maryland, and a few others) but they are spread out without a clear geographic pattern. It does not seem to be the case that coastal states are more or less likely to have an all-hazards definition, nor are the states with other natural disaster profiles – such as flooding or forest fires. Similarly, it is not the case that states that have experienced domestic terrorism are more likely to have an exclusively terrorism focus. The pattern also does not match with traditional indicators of economic development, rurality, or partisan identification. The pattern seems random.

The more strict research strategy (relying only on state code) produced a different map – but one with similar implications. By strictly looking at state codes, there are many more states with no formal definition of homeland security. This includes large, high population states like California as well as smaller states like South Dakota. The terrorism-only states include a cluster in the upper-Midwest of the US along with the a small cluster south of New York state (with a few other scattered states). Again, the clusters do not match up with a specific hazard profile or experience with domestic terrorism.

What does stand out is the lack of consensus in the definitions of homeland security across the US states – despite the push for standardization on issues as fundamental as asset typing, training and exercise standards, etc.

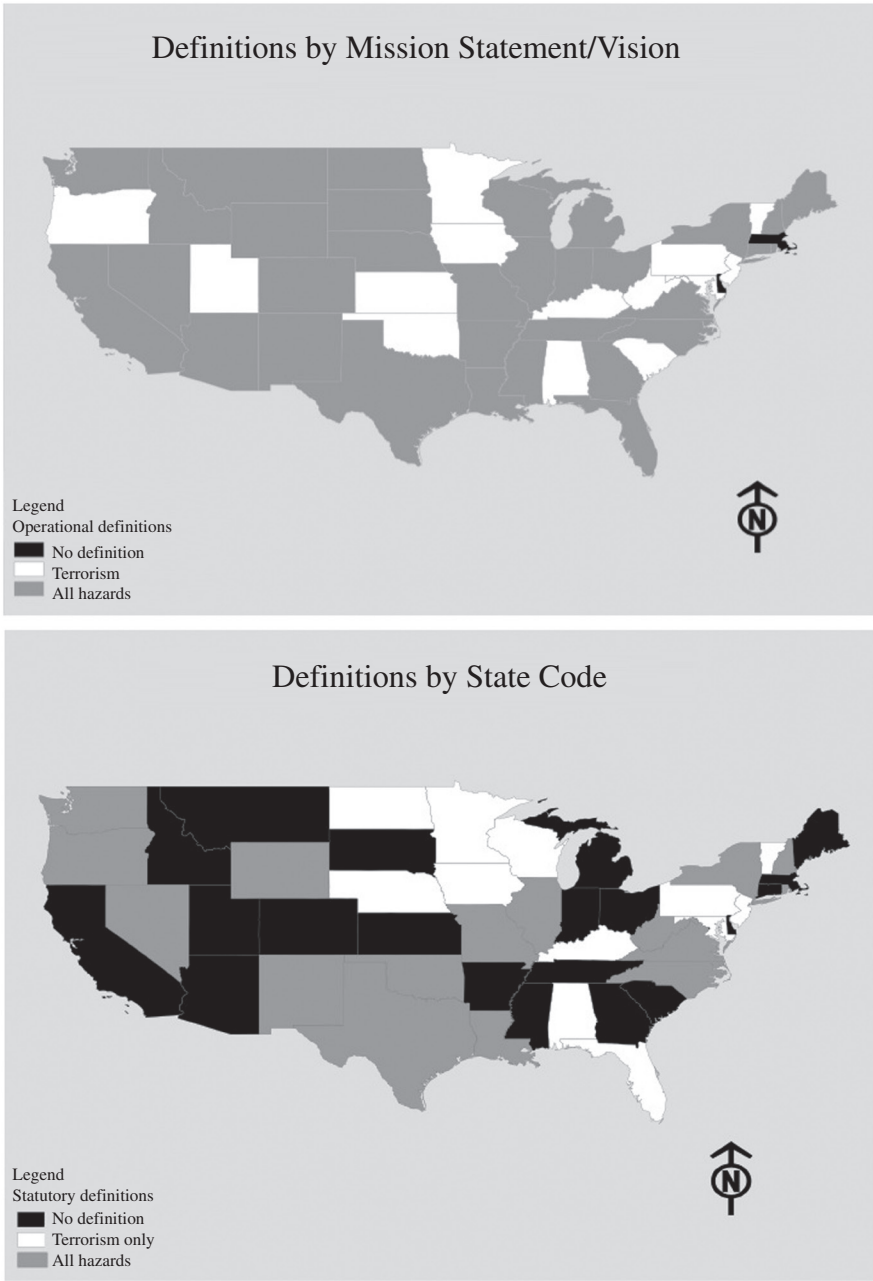


Figure 1 US State Definitions of Homeland Security.

4 Conclusion: The Implications of Divergent Definitions

The varying definitions of homeland security present an important illustration of the lack of consensus over the definition of the concept. This diversity has implications for both the practice of homeland security policy and the development of the related academic field. We have sought to address this diversity with a frequency-cataloging approach as contrasted with more common debates over the true or ideal meaning of the term.

The field of homeland security practice is at a crossroads – further complicated by the lack of consensus documented here. Shrinking and uncertain budgets (especially at the federal level) have resulted in dramatic cuts to many of the mainstay programs of homeland security policy – particularly the federal grant programs. This raises the question of who (if anyone) will take the lead to build a consensus on the meaning of homeland security. In the meantime, different states are likely to continue operating with different visions of homeland security. Even within the federal government, the lack of consensus in the states suggests that the fragmentation within the DHS is likely to continue as different parties have support externally for their vision of homeland security.

Moreover, particularly in states where multiple definitions exist, the possibility of confused management and action – such as in the case of the federal response to Hurricane Katrina – remains. The presence of multiple definitions, particularly partially competing definitions, by nature complicate the ability of homeland security practitioners – public, private and academic to share best practices and engage in truly meaningful discussions without becoming trapped in definitional debate. Further, confusion stemming from the meaning of homeland security in any given state could create difficulties when inter-state, or state-federal, cooperation is necessary, particularly during training or capability planning activity when the pressure of immediate response stemming from a disaster is absent.

The academic implications are also significant. Debates are likely to continue over the boundaries of homeland security, with emergency management scholars (focused on natural disasters and all-hazards approaches), while national security scholars will continue to focus on terrorism. This is not necessarily a problem. It is natural for specialization to emerge within disciplines. The difficulty with this pattern is that homeland security has never converged to a single meaning for the discipline before specialization set in. Rather than specialization, then, this represents an incomplete integration.

The fragmentation within the academic community has significant implications. Given the differing visions of homeland security, academics will tend to collect within their own sub-communities of shared vision. Emergency management scholars will continue to meet with other emergency management officials at their own conferences and publish in their own outlets. National security scholars will similarly gather and publish within their own community. This further complicates survey research or other techniques that assesses public opinion related to homeland security (e.g., Robinson et al. 2011, 2012). Without more discussion across these communities, the possibility of integration seems slight. Future research on the historical changes of state definitions, and on the extent to which definitions determine or influence activities and funding would be beneficial.

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