

## Varieties of failure in the datafication of international borders

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### Abstract

This presentation will focus on the construction and deployment of border and migration technologies, asking: What does failure look like in technical systems at/around the border? How is failure instructive about the forms of politics called forward in contemporary border security, but also generative of new forms of critique? It will build on existing work on the failures of technologies such as biometrics to understand the drive to categorize and automate as illustrative of an obstinate devotion to technology rather than a signal of its technical abilities. Four short case studies will be used to make this argument. The first takes Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) Program as a complex sociotechnical system in which failures of COVID data reporting are but one example of failure, alongside the increased precarity of temporary workers. The second focuses on the automation of visa processing at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), which seeks to reduce waiting times and application backlogs. The third case concerns the US Office for Biometrics and Identity Management, which has persisted despite its inability to demonstrate efficacy (for instance in programs such as US-VISIT). The final case is the ArriveCAN application introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was met by resistance from stakeholders such as border officers, airports and airlines.

### Biography

**Philippe M. Frowd** is Associate Professor in the School of Political Studies at the University of Ottawa. His research draws on critical security studies and focuses on emerging transnational forms of governance of security in the Sahel region of West Africa. His research has primarily focused on irregular migration and border control in the region, with particular attention to biometric technologies. He is currently working on a project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), titled 'Securing the Border with Data' focused on the datafication of border management in Canada.

**Benjamin J. Muller** is Associate Professor in Migration and Border Studies at King's University College at the University of Western Ontario. His interests, teaching and publications sit at the intersection of three interdisciplinary fields: borders and borderlands studies, critical security

studies, and surveillance studies. He grapples with the intersection of borders, borderlands, security, identity and postcolonial studies, sovereign power and exceptionalism, as well as topics concerning biometric technology, surveillance, AI, the politics of risk, migration and mobility, and broader themes and literatures in international political sociology. He is currently working on a SSHRC-funded project titled 'Securing the Border with Data' focused on the datafication of border management in Canada.