

# Unequal access to foreign spaces: how states use visa restrictions to regulate mobility in a globalized world

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Nation-states employ visa restrictions to manage the complex trade-off between facilitating the entrance to their territory by passport holders from certain countries for economic and political reasons and deterring individuals from other countries for reasons of perceived security and immigration control. The resulting system is one of highly unequal access to foreign spaces, reinforcing existing inequalities. Transnational mobility is encouraged for passport holders from privileged nations, particularly rich Western countries, at the expense of severe restrictions for others. Visa restrictions manifest states' unfaltering willingness to monitor, regulate and control entrance to their territory in a globalized world.

**key words** globalization visa restrictions passport borderless world nation-state travel

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## Introduction

Travellers nowadays need passports or other documents, which only nation-states have the right to issue, in order to enter foreign spaces, together with a valid visa depending on which passport they hold and where they want to travel to. However, the modern system of passports and visa restrictions has only evolved gradually over time. While passports and visas in one form or another have existed since medieval times, the comprehensive system as we know it is inextricably linked to the evolution of the modern nation-state, 'the almost inevitable outcome of the Westphalian state' (Anderson 2000, 18). Torpey (1998 2000) argues that nation-states have successfully managed over time to monopolize and usurp the authority to determine who may enter their external borders, which came together with the victory of the principle of national sovereignty.<sup>1</sup> Nation-state sovereignty might have weakened in recent decades, but few, if any, deny nation-states the right to control and restrict entry into their territory. Such controls and restrictions have

'historically been viewed as inherent in the very nature of sovereignty' (Collinson 1996, 77).

As Sassen (1996 1998) notes, nowhere in international law is there a right to enter foreign spaces. Even the non-binding Universal Declaration of Human Rights only postulates a right of exit and entry to one's own country (article 13). In order to guarantee security and order a state has to keep a close eye on who enters its territory and must be free in its decision to refuse entry, argued Bertelsmann (1914, 11) in his study on the passport system just before the First World War. More than 90 years later, states still subscribe to this view with few amendments. If anything, it has seen a revival in the wake of 9/11 as well as the increasingly hostile reaction to asylum and other migration to Western high-income countries (UN 2002). As we will show below, this has led to recent attempts by the US and, if less so, also by Western European countries to create 'smart borders' by pushing border controls both into virtual cyber-space and into foreign real space and by obliging private agents such as transport companies to take over monitoring and deterrence functions normally undertaken by state

officials (Kosłowski 2005). Also, and somewhat ironically, in order to assert their national sovereign authority over control of entry, Western European countries had to transfer some of their sovereign rights to integrated and coordinated policy-making at the supra-national level (Kosłowski 2000).

Yet, at the same time as nation-states cling to their prerogative to control entry, economic and political imperatives also call for permeable borders. Already the League of Nations in the inter-War period and, after the Second World War, the Council of Europe reminded nation-states that visa restrictions inhibit international trade and tourism (Salter 2003). Over the last two to three decades, globalization has led to a degree of cross-border mobility never known before. Globalization has seemingly created a 'borderless' world (Ohmae 1990), a world 'where borders and boundaries have become increasingly porous' and where 'people readily (although certainly not freely and without difficulty) cut across national boundaries' (Inda and Rosaldo 2002, 2 ff.). Certain groups of countries have set up passport unions and harmonized visa policies in order to facilitate travel and the exchange of goods, services and ideas. Many have argued that the unprecedented demand for mobility undermines the state's ability and willingness to exercise stringent controls of who enters its national borders (Cornelius *et al.* 1994; Bigo 1998). Such stringent controls are apparently against states' economic interests. For example, Flynn argues that they would 'place governments on a collision course with easy trade, which is key to the sustained expansion and integration of the global economy' (2000, 58). Stringent controls also run counter to the expansion of human and civil rights to resident immigrants (Sassen 1996 1998). They would, in the words of Bigo, 'put at risk economic prosperity and political liberties associated with open societies' (1998, 160). Do these developments constrain the sovereignty of nation-states against their will, are they simply 'losing control' (Sassen 1996)?

There can be no doubt that cross-national movement, both short-term and long-term, has increased dramatically over the last three decades in the wake of revolutions in communication and transportation technologies that gave rise to what Harvey (1989) has termed the process of 'time-space compression' leading to an unprecedented fluidity of moving people (Urry 2003) in an age of high-speed, complex and difficult-to-predict 'liquid modernity' (Bauman

2000). International arrivals increased from 166 million in 1970 to 702 million in 2002 (WTO 1995 2003), making tourism one of the biggest industries in the world. The number of migrants, that is people residing in countries other than their country of birth, has doubled since 1970 to 175 million (UN 2002). This study demonstrates how nation-states employ bilateral visa restrictions in an attempt to manage the complex trade-off between facilitating and promoting economic and political interests on the one hand and maintaining immigration control and upholding security on the other hand. As a consequence of this trade-off, a system has been put in place that is highly unequal in granting easy access to foreign spaces. The restrictions to freedom and difficulties in crossing national borders turn out to be highly unevenly distributed across people with different nationalities. Facilitating the mobility of some is achieved at the expense of inhibiting and deterring mobility of others. Not passports as such, as Salter (2003, 2) seems to suggest, but the visa restrictions imposed on passport holders from certain countries are one of the most important mechanisms with which nation states exert their prerogative to control entry into their territory. I will describe and characterize the system of bilateral visa restrictions, put forward hypotheses with regards to its determinants and test these hypotheses empirically.

To my knowledge, despite its significance in restricting travel opportunities for billions of people, no such analysis has ever been undertaken, by political scientists, scholars of international relations or geographers. Many others have noted the strange paucity of research on the topic of international passports, visa restrictions and the like (e.g. O'Byrne 2001, 399). Salter (2003, 152) sees a great gap in the existent scholarship and explicitly calls for a research programme that includes a 'study of the international visa regime'. It is this specific gap that this article attempts to fill. The study of visa restrictions should be of great interest to geographers, not only because access to foreign spaces is an inherently geographical topic, but also because it directly relates to many issues, which have long since been at the top of geographical debate. For example, visa restrictions directly relate to the issue of governments' attempt to control and ultimately deter immigration from certain groups of people, they are pertinent to debates on whether or not borders have become more permeable in a globalized world undermining the sovereignty

of nation-states and they represent an important manifestation of inequalities imposed on people on the basis of nationality.

### Why states impose visa restrictions

Every state faces the dilemma between facilitating the cross-border flow of people for its own economic and political benefit on the one hand and monitoring, controlling and limiting that same flow for its perceived security interest on the other hand. In order to understand the system of bilateral visa restrictions, one must therefore look at why countries want to encourage (or at least not discourage) the inflow of people from certain countries, but want to deter the inflow of people from other countries.

Let us start with the motivations for keeping people out. One obvious concern is that visitors might turn into immigrants in staying on (illegally) in the country instead of returning back home. This concern is particularly raised by policymakers of Organization of Economic Cooperation and Economic Development (OECD) countries who have become increasingly anti-immigrationist (Black 1996; UN 2002; Cunningham 2004), mainly for economic reasons, but partly also because immigrants pose a challenge to territoriality and national identity (Koslowski 2000) and are increasingly regarded as a threat to social and ethno-cultural stability (Samers 1997; Nevins 2002; Purcell and Nevins 2005). Greatly improved communication links, global television networks and the breakthrough of more affordable and faster transportation links in the wake of globalization have meant that the potential of immigration has increased hugely. Pictures of apparent material affluence being broadcast into the cities and villages of poor countries buttressed by mass tourism of Westerners, cheaper telephone calls and more affordable flights means that would-be immigrants have more information, better contact and easier travel access to OECD countries. At the same time, the factors pushing people toward migration such as poverty, political repression, human rights abuse, war and civil conflict have not eased off (Neumayer 2005).

Northern Africans trying to enter Southern Italy by night via unregistered and unofficial boats, Mexicans trying to cross the border to Texas illegally and Asians being rescued in the middle of the Pacific Ocean from the wreckage of a ship that was on its way to Australia are the most televised

and publicly known efforts to enter the promised land of OECD countries. However, despite their great salience, they are not the major pathways to illegal immigration. Bigo (1998, 152) reports from discussions with French Schengen Officials and the *Central Directorate for the repression of illegal immigration and employment* that only 20 per cent of illegal immigrants crossed the border illegally, whereas the vast majority entered the country perfectly legally, but then overstayed the allowed period of time. Andreas (1998, 607) and Koslowski (2005, 5) report a higher share of individuals crossing the border illegally for the United States (50–60% and 60–70%, respectively), despite the increasing militarization of the US–Mexican border (Nevins 2002). But even so, an estimated 150 000 people each year overstay their visa with the intention of settlement. In reaction, the US plans to have an automated entry–exit tracking system in place that can detect visa overstays much more efficiently than the current paper system.<sup>2</sup>

Visa restrictions represent an important deterrent against would-be immigrants. First, there is the additional cost and hassle of applying for the visa either via post, which can take weeks or months, or in person, which implies travelling to the embassy or one of the few consulates and waiting in the queue, possibly for hours. Second, the issuing consulate or embassy can, of course, deny the application without giving any reason. As Torpey has put it:

At a time when substantial but unknown numbers of people become ‘immigrants’ simply by overstaying the legally prescribed duration of their stay, limiting ingress is the best way for states to avoid entering into a series of potentially costly obligations to nonnationals. Passport and visa controls are crucial mechanisms for this purpose, the ‘first line of defense’ against the entry of undesirables. (1998, 252)

It is no coincidence that one of the major policy consequences taken by Western European countries in the 1990s in response to the rising flow of asylum applications was the set-up of a common policy of visa restrictions, together with a system of penalties on airlines carrying passengers without a valid visa.<sup>3</sup> Council Regulation 2317, adopted in 1995, provided the first common list of countries and has been updated continuously since then. It was based on an earlier provision of the Schengen Implementation Agreement from 1990 (Jileva 2002). This regulation forms part of the Schengen

acquis, which became part of the EU treaty system with the Amsterdam Treaty, and is regarded as essential for lowering the internal border controls within the Schengen area. Ironically, in order to stem illegal immigration and thereby re-assert national sovereignty, EU countries had to allow a transformation of some of their national sovereignty rights into integrated and coordinated European-wide policies (Koslowski 2000). Today, all European Union countries, with the exception of Ireland and the United Kingdom, plus Iceland and Norway, succumb to an identical list of countries whose passport holders must be in possession of a valid visa for crossing the external borders of the Member States.<sup>4</sup> Starting out with 73 countries on the list, the number of countries facing common visa restrictions to all Schengen countries increased to 108 in the 1995 regulation and to 132 in the 2001 regulation. The increase in external border controls, together with an increasingly more comprehensive common country list of visa restrictions, was inextricably linked to and a precondition for the abolition of internal border controls (Wiener 1998). Enhanced freedom of movement for insiders was achieved at the expense of decreased mobility for certain outsiders, namely those on the list of countries in need of a visa for entry, prompting critics to speak of efforts to create a 'fortress Europe' and a 'wall around the West' (Andreas and Snyder 2000). Former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma warned that the Schengen visa rules would 'replace the Iron Curtain with a different, more humane but no less dangerous Paper Curtain' (quoted in Lavenex and Uçarer 2004, 433 ff.).

Visa restrictions fulfil the double role of pre-selection and deterrence. Those who do not need a visa are regarded as desirable and low-risk visitors by default, those who need a visa and have been approved by the country's consulate or embassy abroad are regarded as not undesirable and not representing a great risk upon closer inspection, whereas those who need a visa and do not have one are denied access. To be sure, even if no visa is needed or a visa has been attained, the final decision of whether one can enter a foreign space is made at the border itself and there is always the risk of being rejected despite being in possession of a valid visa. However, this risk is rather small in reality, which is why the pre-selection role of the system of visa restrictions is so important. This importance is further heightened by the fact that it might not be possible to send people whose entry

is rejected back to their home country. True, in principle the passport 'provides an assurance for the State of transit or destination that the bearer can return to the State which issued the passport' (ICAO 2004, 13). In other words, in principle the passport guarantees that those denied access can be sent back to the issuing country. However, there have been many cases where countries have refused to take their nationals back, prompting OECD country governments to persuade sending country governments to conclude readmission agreements in exchange for financial aid (UN 2002). Also, asylum seekers and other immigrants sometimes destroy their passports and other travel documents so that the country denying access to them has nowhere to send them to. It is exactly for this reason that many countries require airlines not to let anyone enter the aircraft who is not in possession of a valid visa (if required to do so). Otherwise the dual purpose of visa restrictions, namely pre-selection and deterrence, would be defeated. Increasingly, sanctions are applied to sea and ground transport companies as well (UN 2002). The US now even requires airlines to electronically submit passenger details to US authorities before departure as part of its effort to create a 'smart border', pushing border controls beyond US territory (Koslowski 2005).

The importance of visa restrictions in combating immigration to European Union countries can be illustrated by three facts. First, Article 100c of the Treaty Establishing the European Community calls for introducing visa restrictions on countries, which enjoyed visa-free travel before, 'in the event of an emergency situation in a third country posing a threat of a sudden inflow of nationals from that country into the Community'. Second, Romania (and before that Bulgaria) was only included in the list of countries being exempt from visa requirements after it had convinced the European Commission that it had made 'undeniable progress . . . as regards illegal immigration from its country, its visa policy and the controls at its borders' (European Communities 2001a). Third, the new EU member countries of Eastern Europe had to accept the existing list of countries and had to impose visa restrictions on third countries such as Moldova, Russia and the Ukraine, despite the fact that they had not had such restrictions in place before accession to the EU and have economic, political or cultural ties with these countries (Jileva 2002 2004). After the restrictions came into force, cross-border

tourism and trade travel fell sharply. Other countries eager to join the EU, such as Croatia, Macedonia and Turkey already implement changes to their visa policies anticipating that they will have to cut old ties in order to gain new membership (Lavenex and Uçarer 2004). On the other side of the Atlantic, US authorities removed Argentina and Uruguay from the list of countries enjoying visa-free travel to the US when too many passport holders from these countries attempted to overstay their allowed 90-day period or were denied admission at the border (Siskin 2004). Indeed, to qualify for visa-free travel to the US, countries must maintain a very low 'disqualification rate' of below 2 per cent on average over time, defined as the percentage of national passport holders violating the conditions of their entry allowance or being rejected or withdrawing their application at the border (Siskin 2004).

The discussion so far leads to our first hypothesis to be tested, namely that countries impose visa restrictions on passport holders from nations from which they fear large-scale illegal immigration. Besides immigration, another big concern for many states is infiltration by potential terrorists, criminals such as drug traffickers and other *persona non grata*. In the past, entry has also been denied to people with infectious diseases (Salter 2003, ch. 3). However, some high-profile cases of visa restrictions on HIV-infected persons notwithstanding (Ezzell 1989; Garmaise 2002), the focus of concern is now clearly on threats to regime stability by politically undesirable individuals and threats to national security by politically motivated violence. Given this new focus on national security interests, it comes as no surprise that the new US legislation requiring counterfeit-proof passports and visas with biometric information content was initially envisaged for combating illegal immigration via visa overstay, but is now increasingly seen as a weapon to fight the entry of terrorists, albeit with dubious prospects for success (Koslowski 2005). Our second hypothesis is therefore that passport holders from countries whose nationals have perpetrated more acts of terrorism in the past are more likely to face visa restrictions going abroad.

Long before 9/11, autocratic regimes have always been suspicious that foreign influence might undermine the regime's foundations and have therefore been eager to keep an eye on who enters the country. The more autocratic and repressive a regime is, the more it is threatened by open

borders (Anderson 2000). Visa restrictions represent an important mechanism to monitor and control entry. One would therefore expect that democracies, all other things equal, are more liberal with their system of visa restrictions than autocracies are, which is our third hypothesis to be tested.

Democracies are too liberal, indeed, in the eyes of those concerned with national security, particularly in the United States after 9/11. Following these attacks, the US has severely restricted the issue of visas. This has created much concern among business groups, research centres and universities of undue delay in granting visas and keeping out students, scientists and businessmen whose entry would be beneficial to US interests (Froelich 2004; Bhattacharjee 2004).

### Why states refrain from imposing visa restrictions

From the considerations so far it follows that, conversely, countries might refrain from imposing visa restrictions on passport holders from other countries from which they do not fear illegal immigration or the entrance of unwanted individuals. However, the absence of restrictions is not only motivated by the absence of concerns, but also by actual positive incentives to facilitate international travel. Most policymakers now subscribe to the view that international trade, foreign investment, tourism, scientific, business and other contacts are desirable for mainly economic reasons. Hence one would expect that countries that trade much with each other would want to facilitate the international exchange of goods and services by providing easy access to each other's spaces. Poorer countries have an incentive to exempt passport holders from high-income countries from visa restrictions in the hope of bolstering foreign investment and knowledge spill-overs into their country. Major tourist destinations have an incentive not to impose visa restrictions on sending countries in order to remain attractive in the increasingly competitive market for mass tourism. O'Byrne (2001) argues that the relaxation of visa requirements in many countries can be explained as a direct response to the demands by the tourism industry to whom 'freedom of travel is freedom to trade' (emphasis in original). Our fourth hypothesis is therefore that countries grant visa-free travel for high-income countries for economic reasons, the fifth hypothesis is that countries that

are major trading partners are less likely to impose visa restrictions on each other, while our sixth hypothesis is that major tourist destinations are less likely to impose visa restrictions and that major tourist sending nations are less likely to face visa restrictions travelling abroad.

As a caveat to the sixth hypothesis, visa restrictions can represent a simple way of raising a good deal of foreign currency<sup>5</sup> for a major tourist destination. Of course, the revenue from visa applications has to be balanced against the costs of processing the application and the opportunity costs of deterring potential visitors. The processing costs can be kept low if the visa can be obtained at the border itself, the procedure of getting it is extremely simple and does not involve any major check on the applicant. Egypt is a good example for this where passport holders from OECD and other major tourist sending countries need a visa, but can obtain one at the border for a fee of US\$15 without complication. With an estimated number of arrivals in 2000 of around 5 million people, this might have generated a revenue of up to US\$75 million.

But besides economic reasons, there are likely to exist important political reasons why countries do not want to impose visa restrictions on passport holders from certain other countries. Such restrictions are likely to be regarded as an unfriendly act, as a sign of suspicion against the citizens of the affected country. Indeed, while such restrictions are affected by the relations between two states (Wang 2004), they also affect the relations between two states. Countries are therefore likely not to impose visa restrictions on other countries with which they share the same geographical region or civilization. Historical links such as former colonial experience can also play a role. Historical, geographical and civilizational patterns of shared belonging are likely to influence visa restrictions, given that the latter are powerful manifestations of inclusion and exclusion. Granting visa-free access to one's territorial space is perhaps the most welcoming thing that can be done for passport holders from other nations, short of a full passport union. Full passport unions, where travel between the union members is not only visa-free, but also possible with identity cards other than a passport, are a rather rare phenomenon. The Nordic Union (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), the Schengen area, the UK-Ireland union and the Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab

Emirates) are the only currently functioning unions (Salter 2003). These considerations lead to our seventh and final hypothesis to be tested, namely that countries are less likely to impose visa restrictions on nations with which they have a historical, geographical or civilizational link.

The mixture of motivations driving the bilateral system of visa restrictions is clearly discernible from the European Union's Council Regulation (EC) No. 539/2001, which lists 'the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement'. The preamble to the regulation states that

the determination of those third countries whose nationals are subject to the visa requirement, and those exempt from it, is governed by a considered, case-by-case assessment of a variety of criteria relating *inter alia* to illegal immigration, public policy and security, and to the European Union's external relations with third countries, consideration also being given to the implications of regional coherence and reciprocity. (European Communities 2001b, emphasis in original)

## Empirical analysis

So far, hypotheses have been put forward with regards to the reasons why states impose visa restrictions on passport holders from certain countries, but allow visa-free travel for individuals from other countries. In this section, these hypotheses will be put to a formal statistical analysis to see whether they can explain well the existing system of visa restrictions. In addition, summary statistics and descriptive information are used to illustrate the extent to which the system provides highly unequal access to foreign spaces reinforcing existing inequalities and disparities between the rich and the poor nations of the world.

Information on bilateral visa restrictions for 189 sovereign nation-states as well as Hong Kong and Macao is taken from the November 2004 edition of the International Civil Aviation Association's *Travel Information Manual* (IATA 2004). Used by the vast majority of airlines and travel bureaus, this manual provides authoritative information on restrictions in place. Ideally, one would like to trace changes in restrictions over time, but with approximately 36 300 relevant country pairs (so-called dyads), doing so would be prohibitively costly in terms of effort (it took several months to input the existing data).<sup>6</sup>

Let us start with some descriptive information and summary statistics. The very end of the justification for imposing visa restrictions given by the EU in its Council Regulation No. 539/2001 quoted in the last section above points toward the fact that countries seem to pursue, to some extent at least, the principle of reciprocity. That is, they are likely to respond with visa restrictions on passport holders from a certain country if that country imposes such restrictions on one's own nationals and vice versa. Generally speaking, there is a relatively high degree of reciprocity in visa restrictions. Around 68 per cent of country dyads have mutually consistent restrictions in place in the sense that they either impose or do not impose such restrictions on each other. However, for the OECD countries the degree of reciprocity is far lower at 48 per cent (71% for non-OECD countries). As one will see below, this is because OECD passport holders enjoy much fewer restrictions for travelling abroad than their countries impose on passport holders from other countries.

OECD countries use their political power to maintain these inequalities. Thus whilst the European Union's above-mentioned Council Regulation on visa restrictions threatens any country being exempt from visa regulations entering the Schengen area with a review of its status should it decide 'to make the national of one or more Member States [of the European Union] subject to the visa obligation' (European Communities 2001b), it has no problem with the fact that it imposes visa restrictions on many third countries who grant nationals from EU countries visa-free entry. Similarly, in order to be granted visa-free access to the United States, it is a prerequisite for countries to offer reciprocal privileges to United States passport holders, but offering such privileges in no way provides countries with visa-free access to the US (Siskin 2004).

Perhaps the most striking feature of the system of bilateral visa restrictions is thus the great degree of inequality in access to foreign spaces. Holders of certain passports face much fewer visa restrictions for travelling abroad and therefore have much easier access to foreign spaces than holders of other passports. The passport holders from the 25 countries facing the smallest number of visa restrictions are all Western high-income OECD countries, with the exceptions of Malaysia and Singapore, which are also relatively high-income countries of course. At the bottom are passport holders from countries

that need to have a visa for travel to almost any foreign country. This group is more mixed, but generally consists of countries with a history of violent political conflict (e.g. Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia), countries with a strictly autocratic regime (e.g. Northern Korea and Myanmar), very poor countries (e.g. Ethiopia and Haiti) or countries with some combination of these aspects. In these countries, holding a valid visa is almost the defining condition for being able to travel abroad.

If gaining access to foreign spaces is highly unequally distributed, so is granting access to one's own space. Some countries whose passport holders face a high number of visa restrictions are also in the top group of countries imposing visa restrictions on passport holders from other countries (e.g. Afghanistan, Somalia, Myanmar, Northern Korea). In this sense, there is some symmetry between facing visa restrictions and imposing visa restrictions on others. However, countries whose passport holders face a low number of visa restrictions are typically not among the group of countries imposing relatively few restrictions on other countries. With the exceptions of Ireland, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, none of the Western high-income countries is in the group of 25 countries imposing the lowest number of visa restrictions. Instead, it consists mainly of small island countries (e.g. Barbados, Maldives, Micronesia, Haiti, Jamaica).

On average, OECD countries do not have a number of visa restrictions in place that differs in a statistically significant way from the number of restrictions imposed by non-OECD countries (around 150 in both cases). However, whereas the average OECD citizen faces visa restrictions in travel to approximately 93 foreign countries, the average non-OECD citizen needs a visa to travel to approximately 156 countries. Passport holders of OECD countries therefore enjoy relatively easy access to foreign spaces, but OECD countries do not generally provide easy access to their own spaces. Kumar (2000, 20 ff.) summarizes the inequality succinctly as follows: 'For those who live in affluent countries, the passport is of use for international travel in connection with business or vacations', whereas for those living in the poorer nations of the world 'the passport is without any value if it does not have the visa. In other words, it is meaningless as a passport'.

Turning to the formal empirical analysis, the choice of explanatory variables is driven by the hypotheses put forward in the sections above. To

**Table I Summary descriptive variable information**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Obs</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
Visa restriction (from home country on target country)	21 934	0.76	0.43	0	1
GDP p.c. (thousand US\$) (target country)	21 934	8.2	8.6	0.48	43.8
Restrictions to political freedom (target country)	21 934	6.23	3.47	2	14
Armed political conflict (target country)	21 934	0.29	0.75	0	3
Number of terrorist attacks (target country)	21 934	15.52	36.50	0	245
International tourism receipts % of exports (home country)	21 934	12.72	15.01	0	70.83
International outbound tourists per mill. (target country)	21 934	4.60	11.53	0	73.4
Bilateral trade (% of home country's total trade)	21 934	0.73	5.12	0	81.2
Same region	21 934	0.17	0.37	0	1
Same civilization	21 934	0.18	0.38	0	1
Colonial link (non-Commonwealth)	21 934	0.01	0.08	0	1
Colonial link (Commonwealth)	21 934	0.06	0.24	0	1
Restrictions to political freedom (home country)	21 934	6.89	3.90	2	14

test our first hypothesis, we include variables on the target countries' per capita income, political regime and history of violent conflict. This is because poverty, autocracy and violent conflict are well-established push factors for asylum and other migration (Neumayer 2005). The inclusion of per capita income also allows simultaneous testing of the fourth hypothesis, namely that passport holders from rich countries are less likely to face visa restrictions. Our second hypothesis suggests that countries whose nationals have been major perpetrators of terrorist attacks in the past are more likely to face visa restrictions, so we include a count of terrorist attacks for which the nationality of the perpetrator is known. To test our third hypothesis, we include the home country's political regime to see whether democracies are indeed less likely to impose visa restrictions than more autocratic regimes, all other things equal. Testing the fifth hypothesis calls for including a variable on bilateral trade, whereas the sixth hypothesis requires a variable measuring the extent to which a country is a major tourist destination as well as a variable measuring the extent to which a country sends tourists abroad. For the final hypothesis, we include dummy variables for dyads with a former colonial link, countries from the same geographical region as well as civilization, contested as the latter concept might be. The appendix provides the exact definition of these variables as well as the sources of data. Table I provides summary descriptive variable statistics.

The dependent variable is dichotomous (1 = visa restrictions in place; 0 = no restrictions in place), which calls for the use of a non-linear estimator

such as probit or logit. I employ logit, but probit leads to qualitatively very similar results. Standard errors are obtained from a so-called robust variance estimator to account for the fact that the variance of the unobservable error term might not be constant (heteroskedasticity).

The estimated results reported in Table II provide clear evidence for the use of visa restrictions to deter unwanted entry. The poorer, the less democratic and the more exposed to armed political conflict the target country is, the more likely that visa restrictions are in place against its passport holders. The same is true for countries whose nationals have been major perpetrators of terrorist acts in the past. Yet, at the same time, there is also unambiguous evidence on how visa-free travel is granted in order to encourage desirable entry. Major tourist sending countries are less likely to face restrictions, whereas major tourist destinations are less likely to impose restrictions. Dyads, which are major trading partners, are less likely to impose visa restrictions on each other. Regional and civilizational ties render visa restrictions less likely. Former colonial links as such have no impact on the visa regime, but Commonwealth countries are more likely to grant visa-free travel for each other. More democratic countries impose fewer visa restrictions on passport holders from foreign countries.

The explanatory power of the estimated model is quite good. At the mean of explanatory variables, the model predicts that 75.9 per cent of all dyads have visa restrictions in place – not far off the actual observed frequency of 78.1 per cent. With a very large sample size, variables tend to be statistically significantly different from zero, but their



**Table II Estimation results on visa restrictions**

GDP p.c. (target country)	-0.062 (22.33)**
Restrictions to political freedom (target country)	0.127 (13.76)**
Armed political conflict (target country)	0.204 (6.29)**
Number of terrorist attacks (target country)	0.001 (2.25)*
International outbound tourists (target country)	-0.008 (4.33)**
International tourism receipts (home country)	-0.011 (8.29)**
Bilateral trade	-0.027 (3.73)**
Same region	-1.044 (18.30)**
Same civilization	-0.888 (17.11)**
Colonial link (non-Commonwealth)	0.114 (0.51)
Colonial link (Commonwealth)	-0.998 (13.82)**
Restrictions to political freedom (home country)	0.219 (36.79)**
Constant	0.294 (3.78)**
Observations (dyads or country-pairs)	21 934
Log pseudo-likelihood	-8948.2
Predicted probability	75.9%
Actual probability	78.1%

Note: Logit estimation with robust standard errors. Absolute z-statistics in parentheses. \*Statistically significant at 0.01 level

substantial importance can be very small. To explore this, one can assess the actual impact of varying the explanatory variables on the likelihood of visa restrictions being in place. Contrary to the

linear ordinary least squares (OLS) estimator, probit or logit coefficients have no direct easy-to-understand interpretation. We will therefore now look at changes in predicted values, which are easier to understand. Unfortunately, the estimated probabilities are contingent on specific values of the explanatory variables because the logit and probit models are non-linear, and therefore non-additive, in the probabilities. We will look at the impact of changing a variable from its minimum to its maximum. That is, we look at the change in predicted probability comparing a very poor to a very rich targeted country, a very repressive to a very rights-protecting country, comparing a country within the same geographical region to one outside and so on. The disadvantage is that one needs to set the remaining variables at a certain level, for which for simplicity we choose the average value. Table III reports the results. A very poor country has visa restrictions imposed on its national passport holders with a predicted probability of 89 per cent, whereas a very rich country has a probability of only 34 per cent (holding all other variables at their mean). Since there are a multitude of countries deciding on whether or not to impose a visa restriction, another way of interpreting the estimated results is that passport holders from a very poor nation are predicted to face visa restrictions in travelling to 88 per cent of all other countries, whereas a passport holder from a very rich nation is predicted to face such restrictions in only about a third of other countries. This demonstrates again the great inequality in access to foreign spaces reinforcing existing inequalities between rich and poor nations. Very repressive countries are predicted to

**Table III Predicted probabilities of visa restrictions**

	<i>At minimum (%) (zero for dummy)</i>	<i>At maximum (%) (one for dummy)</i>
GDP p.c. (target country)	88.6	34.0
Restrictions to political freedom (target country)	73.7	92.8
Armed political conflict (target country)	81.9	9.3
Number of terrorist attacks (target country)	82.1	86.9
International outbound tourists (target country)	83.3	73.6
International tourism receipts (home country)	83.7	71.6
Bilateral trade	83.0	35.0
Same region	5.1	66.8
Same civilization	84.9	69.8
Colonial link (Commonwealth)	83.6	65.3
Restrictions to political freedom (home country)	62.1	95.8

Note: In each row, all other variables are held at mean values

encounter visa restrictions in 93 per cent of other countries, whereas very rights-protecting countries do so only in 73 per cent of cases. The respective predicted probabilities for peaceful countries are 82 per cent and for war-torn countries 89 per cent. Countries with no nationals known to have been involved in terrorist attacks are predicted to face visa restrictions in 82 per cent of cases, whereas this rises to 87 per cent for the country with the highest number of terrorists (Colombia in our sample).

A liberal rights-protecting democracy is predicted to impose visa restrictions on 62 per cent of all other countries, whereas a very repressive regime does so in 96 per cent of cases, i.e. is predicted to impose visa restrictions on almost all other countries. For the regional and civilizational dummy variables, the best way of interpretation is that a passport holder on average faces a visa restriction travelling to a country outside its region or civilization with a predicted probability of 85 per cent, but with a predicted probability of 67 per cent and 70 per cent if travelling to a country within its region or civilization, respectively. Passport holders from Commonwealth countries on average need a visa in 84 per cent of cases travelling abroad to a country outside the Commonwealth, but this falls by a predicted 19 percentage points if travelling to another Commonwealth country. A country very heavily reliant on receipts from tourism is 13 percentage points less likely to impose a visa restriction than a country with no tourism (72% as opposed to 85% predicted probability). Passport holders from major tourist sending countries are 9 percentage points less likely to face visa restrictions going abroad than individuals from countries with virtually no tourists going abroad (74% as opposed to 83%). Countries with no bilateral trade are predicted to have visa restrictions in place in 83 per cent of all cases, whereas the targeted country's likelihood of facing visa restrictions drops to 35 per cent when the bilateral trade forms a very large share of the home country's total. In sum, a country's per capita income and repression of political freedom, bilateral trade as well as regional, civilizational and commonwealth links exert the strongest substantive influence on the international visa regime.

## Conclusion

Taking up the issue of states' apparent faltering willingness and ability to control entry into their

territories, as far as willingness is concerned, our analysis of visa restrictions clearly demonstrates that states remain willing and eager to systematically keep out passport holders from certain nations. For passport holders from OECD countries the world appears in easy reach, with relatively few restrictions imposed. They come closest to the ideal of a global citizen who, in order to be called thus, must have, among other things, the right

to migrate for leisure purposes throughout most of the countries on the globe and hence to 'consume' all those other places and environments (including those *en route*). (Urry 2000, 174)

But for passport holders from poor, authoritarian countries with a history of violent political conflict travel is and remains severely restricted. This paper's analysis cannot really tell us anything on states' actual ability to control entry and deter inward migration. Koslowski argues that 'sovereignty can be understood in terms of a state's ability to control its borders and determine its membership' (2000, 7) and, given this definition, the large-scale inflow of 'illegal' immigrants without doubt represents an important example of 'the erosion of state sovereignty' (Collinson 1996, 77). However, there is evidence that visa restrictions in combination with carrier sanctions have been effective. Neumayer (2004), for example, shows that European countries, which became full members to the Schengen Convention, received a lower share of asylum seekers. I therefore agree with Brubaker that 'seen from the outside – from the perspective of those turned down for tourist visa ... immigration control appears all too effective' (1994, 230).

Visa restrictions allow states to facilitate the trans-national movement of some at the expense of deterring the movement of others. If mobility is one of its defining features, then as with many other aspects of globalization, its realization is highly stratified and subject to states' monitoring, regulation, interference and control. States might struggle with exercising their prerogative for thorough and comprehensive monitoring and control of movement in times of globalization. But the era of supposedly unprecedented mobility is only part of the picture, and is at the same time also an era of great, continued and enforced inequality in access to foreign spaces based on the principle of nationality. Yeung (1998) argues that the notion of a borderless world has more to do with folklore

than with reality, that states maintain their role of organizing and regulating the international flow of capital and goods and services, thereby asserting the continued importance of national boundaries. He argued this mainly with respect to the globalization of economic activities, but this verdict is also true for the cross-national movement and mobility of people. As Hirst and Thompson (1999) argue, 'people are less mobile than money, goods or ideas, and in a sense they remain "nationalized", dependent on passports, visas, residence and labour qualifications' (257), which is why those without privileges cannot easily move around and why despite all the rhetoric of globalization 'the bulk of the world's population lives in closed worlds, trapped by the lottery of birth' (267).

This study has made a first attempt at analysing and understanding the role of visa restrictions in granting unequal access to foreign spaces. Much more can and should be done in future research. In particular, more in-depth and qualitative studies should complement this necessarily broad-brush quantitative analysis. Dicken (2004) has argued that geographers are marginal at best to the wider debates on (economic) globalization. Border and passport controls, visa restrictions and other features of state responses to the unprecedented potential for cross-national mobility in the wake of 'time-space compression' deserve the attention of geographers. They form an as yet under-researched aspect of globalization in the social sciences, which geographers must not leave almost exclusively to other disciplines for study.

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## Notes

- 1 Nation-states also often exert control over who may exit their territory. In some countries it is very difficult for certain groups of people to gain a passport

that is a necessity for foreign travel. Some countries also severely restrict the movement of people within their territory (Torpey 1998 2000). These issues are outside the scope of the present article, however, which focuses on the control of entry into foreign spaces via visa restrictions.

- 2 However, stricter and more sophisticated visa and border control policies are likely to lead to increased and increasingly sophisticated human smuggling across international borders (Koslowski 2001 2003) as well as to permanent settlement of existing illegal migrants (Koslowski 2005).
- 3 This is reminiscent of the fact that European governments of the nineteenth and early twentieth century required steamship companies to check whether individuals had the right to travel to their chosen destination (Torpey 1998, 243).
- 4 Ireland was unwilling to give up its bilateral free movement agreement with the UK, which it would have had to sacrifice in order to become part of the Schengen area. Denmark retains the right to accept decisions taken within the Schengen framework on an individual basis, but has accepted the EU's common list of countries whose passport holders need a visa for entry (Anderson 2000).
- 5 This point had already been noted by Bertelsmann (1914).
- 6 Due to lack of data for the explanatory variables, the statistical analysis is based on a smaller sample size.

## Appendix

### *Variable definitions and sources of data*

- Visa restriction: 1 = home country imposes visa restriction on target country; 0 = home country does not impose visa restriction on target country. Source: IATA (2004).
- GDP p.c.: Gross Domestic Product per capita in thousand dollars of purchasing power parity. Source: Heston *et al.* (2002).
- Restrictions to political freedom: A subjective index based on experts' judgement of the extent of civil and political rights restrictions. Source: Freedom House (2004).
- Armed political conflict: A measure of conflict intensity, covering both civil and interstate conflict, based on fatality levels (0 = no conflict; 1 = conflict with more than 25 and less than 1000 casualties in a single year; 2 = as 1, but with an accumulated total above 1000 casualties; 3 = conflict with more than 1000 casualties in a single year). Source: Strand *et al.* (2004).
- Number of terrorist attacks: The sum of terrorist attacks carried out by nationals of a country in

the period 1990 onwards anywhere in the world. Source: Mickolus *et al.* (2003).

- Same region: Dummy variable based on geographical location of country within one of seven regions used by World Bank (2004) for regional classification: Northern America, Latin America and the Caribbean, Western Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Middle East and Northern Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific.
- Same civilization: Dummy variable based on Huntington's (1996) admittedly controversial classification of countries into eight civilizations (plus one residual category): Western, Latin American, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Islamic, African, Sinic, Buddhist. Source: Russett *et al.* (2000). Henderson and Tucker (2001) provide a slightly different classification, also based on Huntington (1996). Using their alternative measure has very little influence on the results.
- Colonial link: Two dummy variables are used. One is based on whether countries share a common colonial past, but are not a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. The other is based on whether countries are members of the Commonwealth (plus Zimbabwe whose membership was suspended in 2004). Source: Alesina and Dollar (2000) and Commonwealth Secretariat (2005).
- Bilateral trade: The value of bilateral trade in goods and services divided by the total trade value of the home country. Data refer to 1996 due to lack of more current comprehensive data. Source: Rose (2005).
- International tourism receipts: Expenditures by international inbound visitors, including payments to national carriers for international transport, divided by the value sum of exports of goods and services. Source: World Bank (2004).
- International outbound tourists: The number of departures per million inhabitants from a country to any other country for any purpose other than a remunerated activity in the country visited. Source: World Bank (2004).

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