

# Divergent dynamics of immigration due to insecurity and violence in Mexico

## Dinámicas divergentes de la inmigración por inseguridad y violencia en México

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### Abstract:

Despite the increase in migration since 2000 due to insecurity and violence in Mexico, the geographical patterns and differences by types of migration: municipal, state, and international are unknown. Using data from the 2020 Population and Housing Census and employing regression models and spatial analysis, this research shows the association between migration and violence in destination municipalities. The findings indicate that municipal immigrants tended to move primarily to municipalities with high violence rates, while state immigrants moved mainly to municipalities with low levels of violence. On the other hand, international immigrants particularly directed to border cities with varying levels of violence. Consequently, the relationship between immigration rates and violence rates in destination places varies according to the type of migration and geographic borders crossed.

**Keywords:** internal migration, international migration, violence, insecurity, regions.

### Resumen:

A pesar del aumento de la migración por inseguridad y violencia en México desde la década de 2000, se desconocen sus patrones geográficos y diferencias por tipos de migración: municipal, estatal e internacional. A partir del Censo de Población y Vivienda 2020 y mediante el uso de modelos de regresión y de análisis espacial, esta investigación muestra la asociación entre la migración y la violencia en los municipios de destino. Los resultados indican que los inmigrantes municipales tendieron a desplazarse principalmente hacia municipios con altas tasas de violencia, mientras que los inmigrantes estatales se dirigieron principalmente a municipios con bajos niveles de violencia. Por otro lado, los inmigrantes internacionales se dirigieron particularmente a ciudades fronterizas con variados niveles de violencia. En consecuencia,

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la relación entre las tasas de inmigración y las tasas de violencia de los lugares de destino varía según el tipo de migración y las fronteras geográficas cruzadas.

Palabras clave: migración interna, migración internacional, violencia, inseguridad, regiones.

## Introduction

Violence and criminal insecurity in Mexico have experienced their highest growth in recent history since 2007, following the beginning of the so-called war on drugs. This has led to several problems, such as an increase in various crimes, a decrease in life expectancy due to an increase in homicides, and the forced displacement of people (Aburto et al., 2016; Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos [CMDPDH], 2014). Criminal violence has been concentrated in some regions and municipalities in the north and west of Mexico, linked to the production and distribution routes of drugs heading to the United States of America, which has been associated with the capture or death of some of the main cartel leaders, leading to divisions and clashes for the control of territories (Arteaga-Botello et al., 2019; Salazar Cruz & Álvarez Lobato, 2017).

Despite the increase in forced internal displacement, particularly that derived from insecurity and criminal violence since the implementation of the war on drug, only some tools are available to partially measure the magnitude of the problem in Mexico and its regions, as well as to determine some of its characteristics from censuses, surveys and newspaper records (CMDPDH, 2019; Díaz Pérez & Romo Viramontes, 2019). In this regard, the Population and Housing Census (CPV, by its Spanish acronym of *Censo de Población y Vivienda*) 2020 asked about the reasons for recent migrations, and within these insecurity and violence appears as one of the causes. These data can be disaggregated into migrations to other municipalities within the same state (municipal migration), to other states (state migration) or from other countries (international migration).

The displacement of people due to insecurity and violence to other regions of Mexico has not guaranteed their safety and well-being, as many of them arrive in regions and municipalities where they are exposed to high levels of vulnerability and violence as a result of the expansion of territorial disputes of various criminal groups and in particular drug cartels (Castillo, 2020; Izcarra Palacios, 2016; Moreno Mena & Avenaño Millán, 2018; Silva Hernández & Alfaro Trujillo, 2021). On the contrary, high levels of violence and insecurity can lead people to move to regions further away from the interior of Mexico and even to other countries such as the United States (Grupo Interdisciplinario en Temas Migratorios [GITM], 2022; Muro Aréchiga & Rodríguez Chávez, 2022; Organización Internacional para las Migraciones [OIM], 2023).

This paper aims to determine the factors associated with the increase or decrease of immigration rates due to criminal insecurity and violence in the municipalities of Mexico during the period 2015-2020. It categorizes the rates according to their type of immigration—municipal, state and international—as an approximate indicator of the distance between the places of origin and destination. Subsequently, it seeks to establish the association of immigration rates with the average levels of violence in the places of destination, according to their type of migration, which may expose migrants

to higher or lower levels of vulnerability and violence, especially for those who do not manage to leave territories disputed by organized crime groups.

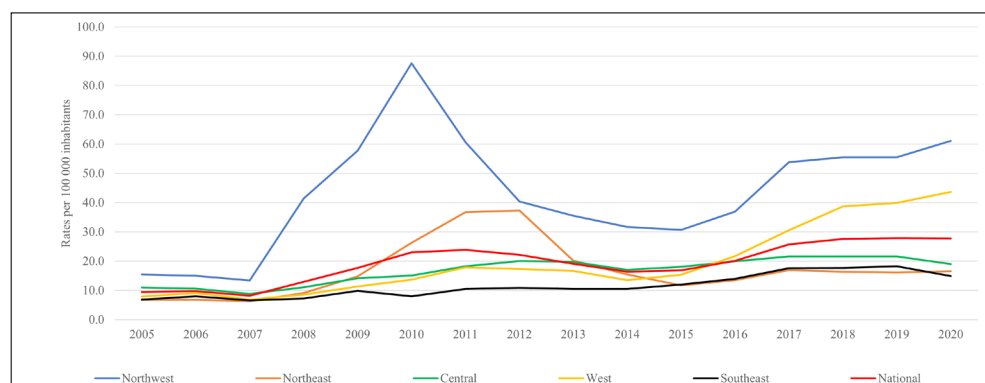
The main hypothesis of this research is that municipal migrants, due to insecurity and violence, are displaced over short distances and do not manage to leave regions with high levels of violence and insecurity, unlike state migrants who seek to reach regions with lower levels of violence. International migrants due to insecurity and violence go mainly to the northern and southern borders of Mexico, where there are varying levels of violence and insecurity.

## Violence and forced internal displacements in Mexico

In late 2006, the federal government implemented a public security strategy to confront organized crime groups, focusing on some of Mexico's drug cartels. This strategy involved the deployment of armed forces in some regions of Mexico that the cartels controlled or contested for the production, distribution and sale of drugs (Gobierno Federal, 2010). Nevertheless, these confrontations led to an increase in violence, particularly in northern and western Mexico, as a result of the division of the large cartels into smaller cells that competed for territorial control and leadership of criminal organizations (CMDPDH, 2014; Pereyra, 2012).

Since 2008, according to data from the administrative records of the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (Inegi, n. d.) there has been an increase in homicide rates in the northeast, northwest and west regions of Mexico, which reached their highest levels between 2011 and 2012 (see Figure 1). This increase was the result of disputes between different criminal groups, in particular the Sinaloa, Beltrán Leyva, Gulf, Zetas, Arellano Félix, Juárez and Familia Michoacana cartels (Gobierno Federal, 2010). Subsequently, violence in the country showed an upturn from the second half of 2015, driven by the emergence and growth of the New Generation Jalisco cartel (CJNG, by its Spanish acronym of *Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación*) and its conflicts with the Sinaloa cartel and other criminal groups (InSight Crime, 2020; Redacción, 2021).

Since the end of 2018, violence has persisted as a result of the increase in regions and states that already showed security problems, such as Colima, Baja California, Chihuahua, Guanajuato, Zacatecas, Morelos, Sonora and Michoacán. Furthermore, new episodes of violence were recorded in Quintana Roo, Jalisco and San Luis Potosí, whose increase since 2019 is associated with the disputes of various cartels, including the CJNG, Sinaloa, Gulf, Zetas and Noreste (Arrieta, 2020; InSight Crime, 2024). More than 15 years after the confrontation of the armed forces against organized crime groups began, the public security policy has not shown the expected results, and the number of people forcibly displaced by various types of violence has been increasing year after year (CMDPDH, 2022).

**Figure 1. Regional homicide rates in Mexico, 2005-2020**

Note: northwest (Baja California, Baja California Sur, Chihuahua, Sinaloa and Sonora); northeast (Coahuila, Durango, Nuevo León, San Luis Potosí and Tamaulipas); central (Mexico City, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Mexico, Morelos, Puebla and Tlaxcala); west (Aguascalientes, Colima, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, Nayarit, Querétaro and Zacatecas); southeast (Campeche, Chiapas, Oaxaca, Quintan Roo, Tabasco, Veracruz and Yucatán); southeast (Campeche, Chiapas, Oaxaca, Quintan Roo, Tabasco, Veracruz and Yucatán). Source: own elaboration with data from Inegi (n. d.), Conapo (2023b) and Acuerdos aprobados en la II Sesión Extraordinaria del Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Pública (2013)

The forced displacement of people within the country does not guarantee their safety and well-being in the regions of destination. Many of these people face higher levels of vulnerability and risk as a consequence of their forced and abrupt departures, which forces them to abandon their homes, leaving behind their sources of income, goods and most of their resources (GITM, 2022; Muro Aréchiga & Rodríguez Chávez, 2022; OIM, 2023). Moreover, it is necessary to consider that many of these people do not manage to leave violent territories that have been taken over or disputed by various organized crime groups, so their safety and well-being continue to be violated by these or other actors generating violence (Moreno Mena & Avendaño Millán, 2018; Silva Hernández & Alfaro Trujillo, 2021).

In the absence of laws and programs to address, compensate and prevent forced displacement in Mexico—both in the places of origin and in the places of destination—thousands of people in various regions of the country have been forced to move in search of greater security and well-being for themselves and their families (CMDPDH, 2022; Díaz Pérez & Romo Viramontes, 2019). Displaced persons have even headed to various cities along Mexico's northern border for asylum or other types of protection in the United States when they cannot find safety within their own country (GITM, 2022; OIM, 2023). Nonetheless, barriers to migration and asylum imposed by the United States have intensified since 2009, which has led to the entrapment of people waiting to begin their administrative processes in the neighboring country (Gil-Everaert et al., 2023).

Different statistical tools have attempted to partially quantify the magnitude of recent forced internal displacement, and in particular of migration motivated by criminal insecurity and violence. The CPV 2020 asked about the reasons for internal migration for people who resided in a different municipality or state in Mexico or another country five years ago. The CPV 2020 recorded 274 000 people migrating for reasons of criminal insecurity and violence. Of these, 168 000 migrated from other states in the country (state migrants), 83 000 migrated to other municipalities within

their states (municipal migrants) and about 23 000 migrated from other countries to Mexico (international migrants).

National and international organizations, such as the CMDPDH and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), have estimated the number of forced internal displacements in Mexico based on newspaper data sources. These records are based on the number of people or families counted in mass events identified by different media and organizations, with which they have come to estimate that between 2009 and 2022 about 386 000 people were internally displaced by conflict and violence (IDMC, 2022). Nevertheless, these records leave out the displacements of individuals and families slowly depopulating communities, municipalities and cities.

In the absence of official records on the magnitude of forced internal displacements and the characteristics of their destinations, the analysis of migration for reasons of insecurity and violence based on CPV 2020 data can provide an approach to the study of this phenomenon by identifying the regions of destination of this type of migrants to the interior of Mexico and the social, economic and security determinants that encourage or discourage their migration to different regions of the country. In this context, previous studies on the determinants of internal migration in Mexico can serve as a basis for comparing the pull factors of migration in general with the pull factors of migration for reasons of insecurity and violence.

Recent research such as Sobrino (2010), Acosta and Cruz Piñero (2015), Rodríguez Chávez (2020) and Massey et al. (2020) has shown that most recent internal migration is still associated with economic, social and demographic factors of the destination locations. These factors include variables related to economic and social aspects, such as levels of marginalization, poverty, income and inequality, in addition to other labor aspects, such as wage levels, types of employment, sectors of activity and occupation. According to this research, internal migration is also linked to the demographic characteristics of the places of destination, such as population size, demographic pressure and the intensity of international migration. Finally, an aspect that has taken on greater relevance and is associated with people's quality of life is the levels of violence and insecurity, which can influence the migration volumes received by Mexico's regions and municipalities.

## Forced migration to and through Mexico

Mexico is not only a country of origin of internal and external forced displacement but also a recipient of forced migrants fleeing violence and insecurity in their countries. They may seek refuge in Mexico or transit through its territory to reach the United States. Nonetheless, U.S. immigration and asylum policy barriers, such as the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) and expedited removals from the southern border under titles 8 and 42, have prolonged the length of stay of international migrants in Mexico who are waiting to apply for asylum or some other type of international protection (Gil-Everaert et al., 2023; GITM, 2022; OIM, 2023).

The refugee system in Mexico has experienced a collapse due to the increase of people requesting refugee status in the various regional offices of the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (Comar, by its Spanish acronym of *Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados*). Refugee applications have increased yearly, from 1 296 people in 2013 to 136 934 people between January and November 2023, the historical maximum on record (Comar, 2023). During this same period, the majority of refugee applicants in Mexico were people from Honduras (32.0%), Haiti (22.2%), Cuba (10.7%), El Salvador (8.7%), Venezuela (8.6%) and Guatemala (4.5%), which are countries facing various social, economic, political and security problems in recent years (Comar, 2023).

Most of the international migrants transiting through Mexico and whose final destination is the United States come from the so-called Northern Triangle of Central America, between Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. According to data from the National Migration Institute (INM, by its Spanish acronym of *Instituto Nacional de Migración*), 74.8% of undocumented foreigners presented by this institution between 2011 and 2022 were from the Northern Triangle of Central America. Nonetheless, growth has been observed in migration flows from other countries such as Venezuela (5.1%), Cuba (4.0%), Nicaragua (3.5%), Haiti (2.4%), Colombia (1.7%) and Ecuador (1.5%), and even from other continents such as Asia and Africa (Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas, 2022). Similarly, CPV 2020 data show that the majority of recent international migrants to Mexico for reasons of insecurity and violence resided five years ago in Venezuela (32.5%), Honduras (24.2%), El Salvador (11.5%), Cuba (7.7%) and Guatemala (4.7%)—data similar to those presented above.

Migration policies and barriers, as well as asylum and refugee restrictions in Mexico and the United States, have aggravated social and economic problems on Mexico's northern and southern borders, trapping thousands of migrants in border cities. The increase in refugee applications in Mexico has been concentrated in the south of the country, in states such as Chiapas, Veracruz and Tabasco, which have accounted for 76.7% of the total number of people requesting refugee status for the period 2013 to 2023 (Comar, 2023). This situation is due, in part, to the policies of containment and deterrence of international migration, which force applicants to carry out their processes in the south of the country and who, due to the refugee policy, cannot leave these states until their applications are resolved. This increases pressure on southern border cities regarding resources and public and private services offered (Gil-Everaert et al., 2023).

U.S. restrictions on migration and asylum have intensified south of its border through the implementation of various measures aimed at expeditiously expelling undocumented migrants and returning them to Mexican territory, regardless of the reasons for their displacement. This situation has led to the entrapment of thousands of people in cities along Mexico's northern border, who are waiting to start their asylum application processes or other forms of protection in the neighboring country while prolonging their stays for months or even years in cities that have experienced high levels of violence and insecurity since the beginning of the war on drug (GITM, 2022; OIM, 2023).

The undocumented status of most of these populations, coupled with the migration policies imposed by Mexico, make them more vulnerable to violence and insecurity exercised by local and regional criminal groups, as well as by local and federal authorities, in addition to the general population (Castillo, 2020; GITM, 2022). Therefore, the

study of international migrants forced by insecurity and violence and their comparison with internal migrants for the same reasons is necessary to identify their differences in terms of destinations and to understand their possible implications regarding security, violence and vulnerability.

## Data

The analysis of migration due to insecurity and violence in Mexico is based on data provided by the CPV 2020 basic questionnaire, which shows information at the municipal level (2 453 municipalities and 16 mayors' offices) on the population residing in Mexico and on their residence five years ago. These data make it possible to analyze internal migration according to the causes and political borders crossed: international, state and municipal. In this way, information can be obtained on the number of recent immigrants due to insecurity, crime and violence who five years ago lived in a municipality, state or country other than that of 2020.

Nevertheless, the CPV 2020 only offers cross-sectional information at a given time on habitual residents in the national territory, which excludes information on the temporary or permanent nature of their migrations. In this regard, it has been documented through journal publication sources and the qualitative work of social organizations that forced migrants may move on various occasions to other states or countries due to the lack of security (CMDPDH, 2022; Moreno Mena & Avendaño Millán, 2018; Silva Hernández & Alfaro Trujillo, 2021). Despite this limitation, the CPV provides information on the characteristics of migrants due to insecurity and violence for the period 2015-2020, providing an opportunity to explore the differences between migrants at the municipal, state and international levels regarding the levels of violence in their municipalities of residence in 2020.

Homicide records from the Inegi (n. d.) are used for the analysis of violence in destination municipalities, from which homicide rates are obtained, an indicator widely used to compare levels of violence between regions, as it is one of the most underreported crimes, as well as for the effect it has on the perception of public insecurity (Krug et al., 2002; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2014). Finally, these data are complemented by other variables at the municipal level associated with the economic, social, demographic, geographic and security determinants of internal migration in Mexico proposed by previous research (Acosta & Cruz Piñero, 2015; Massey et al., 2020; Rodríguez Chávez, 2020; Sobrino, 2010), whose data are obtained from the *Consejo Nacional de Población* (Conapo), the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (Coneval, by its Spanish acronym of *Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social*) and the CPV 2020 (see Table 1).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The final variables included in the models were selected based on correlation tests between independent variables and significance tests of the models, so that in the end, only 10 independent variables were included out of a total of 16 proposed variables.

## Variables

The dependent variable refers to the rates of internal immigration due to insecurity and violence separated by types of political borders crossed by individuals. This is calculated as follows:

$$TIV = \frac{\# \text{ of immigrants due to insecurity in municipality } x \text{ from 2015 to 2020}}{\text{Population in municipality } x \text{ at mid-period}} \times 1000$$

The independent variable of interest refers to the level of municipal violence, for which the five-year homicide rate at the municipal level is used and is calculated as follows:

$$TH = \frac{\# \text{ of homicides in municipality } x \text{ from 2015 to 2019}}{\text{Population in municipality } x \text{ at mid-period}} \times 1000$$

The rest of the control variables associated with economic, social, demographic and geographic factors of the municipalities of destination of internal migrants for these reasons are derived from the proposals of Acosta and Cruz Piñero (2015), Enamorado et al. (2016) and Sobrino (2010); are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Variables associated with municipal determinants of internal immigration in Mexico, 2015-2020**

Domain	Indicator	Definition and type	Source	Period
Migration	Immigration (dependent)	Natural logarithm (NL) of male and female immigration rates by types of migrants and borders crossed (continued)	Inegi (CPV)	2015-2020
Security	Violence	NL of homicide rate per 1 000 population (continued)	Inegi	2015-2019
Demographic	Population size	NL of the municipal population (continued)	Inegi (CPV)	2020
	Population pressure	Ratio of population aged 14 to 25 to population aged 45 to 64 (continued)		
Social	Internal networks	Percentage of population born in other states (continued)	Inegi (CPV)	2020
	USA networks	Index of migration intensity to USA (continued)	Conapo	2020
Economic	Employment	% of economically active population (EAP) in employment (continuous)	Inegi (CPV)	2020
	Inequality	Gini coefficient (continued)	Coneval	2020
	Marginalization	Marginalization index (continued)	Conapo	2020
Geographic	Northern border	Northern border municipalities (dichotomic)	Inegi	
	Southern border	Southern border municipalities (dichotomic)		

Note: the marginalization and migratory intensity indices show an inverse relation: the higher the index, the lower the level of marginalization and migratory intensity (-).

Source: own elaboration



## Methods

For the descriptive analysis, Mexico's municipalities were classified into five equal groups (quintiles) according to the level of their total, municipal, state and international immigration rates. The goal is to compare the average characteristics of economic, demographic, social, geographic and security variables between the group of municipalities with the lowest rates (quintile I) and the group of municipalities with the highest rates (quintile V) in order to identify possible differences in the proposed independent variables. In addition, these rates are compared with those of immigration motivated by employment and family reunification, the main reasons for migration according to the results of the CPV 2020.

Subsequently, given the interest of this research in examining the differences in the levels of insecurity in the destination municipalities according to the types of immigration analyzed, bivariate local indicators of spatial association (BiLISA) maps are developed to evaluate the spatial relation between *municipal*, *state* and *international* rates of immigration due to insecurity and violence and municipal homicide rates. The BiLISA analysis consists of determining the interaction of two different variables in space by using matrices of geographic weights to determine the neighborhood between municipalities with similar characteristics. BiLISA shows the relation between a variable  $X$  in space and the average of the neighboring values of another variable  $Y$  (Anselin, 2020).

$$I_{B,i} = cx_i \sum_j w_{ij} y_j$$

$cx_i$ : value of variable  $x$  located at  $i$ ,  $x_i$

$\sum_j w_{ij} y_j$ : average of the neighbors' values for the variable  $y$

$w_{ij}$ : matrix of geographic weights of the neighborhood between observations.<sup>2</sup>

The maps developed from this technique show a combination of the two variables divided into four types of regions: municipalities where the values of the variables are different (low-high and high-low) and municipalities where the values of the variables are similar (high-high and low-low) (Anselin, 2020).

Finally, to identify the factors associated with the increase or decrease in immigration rates due to criminal insecurity and violence in Mexico's municipalities—and in particular, the relation and association of violence in destination municipalities with municipal, state and international immigration rates—simple regression models (ordinary least squares, OLS) are developed. Nevertheless, given that the dependent variable cannot assume negative values, a logarithmic transformation of the variable is performed. Therefore, the models developed only consider municipalities where immigration cases were recorded for these reasons. In addition, separate models are estimated for female and male immigration to identify differences by sex, either in the direction or magnitude of the proposed independent variables.

<sup>2</sup> This research uses a first-order queen matrix, where neighboring municipalities are defined as those that share common borders or vertices.

## Characteristics of the destination municipalities

By separating the destination municipalities into five groups of equal size according to their rates of total immigration for reasons of *job search*, *family reunification* and *violence and insecurity*, the average characteristics of the groups with the highest rates (quintile V) can be compared with those of the municipalities with the lowest rates (quintile I). The municipalities with higher *total immigration* rates showed higher averages in population size, percentage of the population born in other states and employed economically active population (EAP); a higher percentage of them were located in the northern border, compared to the municipalities with lower immigration rates.

In the municipalities with higher rates of immigration for *job search*, higher average homicide rates are observed in contrast to the analysis of total immigration. In addition, a higher percentage of these municipalities were located on the northern and southern borders, in contrast to the municipalities with lower rates of immigration for *job search*. The rest of the characteristics show a similar trend to total immigration, where higher immigration rates are observed for municipalities with higher population, lower demographic pressure, a higher percentage of the population born in other states, a higher percentage of employed EAP and lower marginalization.

In the case of immigrants for reasons of *family reunification*, the municipalities in quintile V showed lower population averages than those in quintile I. For the rest of the characteristics, conditions similar to total immigration are observed. For migration due to *violence and insecurity*—the reason for interest in this research—the municipalities with higher rates of immigration for this reason presented lower averages in their homicide rates, higher population, lower demographic pressure, a higher percentage of the population born in other states and lower marginalization compared to the municipalities with lower rates of immigration due to insecurity and violence.

Nevertheless, the characteristics of immigrants differ not only by migration motives but also by the geographic borders they have crossed. In the case of *municipal immigrants*, it is observed that the municipalities with the highest rates showed, on average, lower homicide rates, lower population, lower demographic pressure, a higher percentage of the population born in other states, lower marginalization and a lower percentage of municipalities located on Mexico's southern and northern borders. On the other hand, the municipalities with the highest rates of *municipal immigration due to violence and insecurity* showed a higher concentration in municipalities with higher homicide rates.

For *state immigration*, the municipalities with higher rates showed, on average, lower homicide rates, higher population, lower demographic pressure, a higher percentage of the population born in another state, lower marginalization and a higher percentage of municipalities on the northern border, in contrast to the municipalities with lower rates. Conversely, the municipalities with the highest rates of *state immigration due to violence and insecurity* showed a concentration toward municipalities with lower homicide rates.

Finally, for *international immigration*, the municipalities with the highest rates (quintile V) showed higher averages in homicide rates, smaller population size, lower demographic pressure, a higher percentage of the population born in other states, a higher degree of migration intensity to the United States and a higher percentage of municipalities on Mexico's southern and northern borders. In terms of *international immigration due to violence and insecurity*, the municipalities with the highest rates have slightly lower average homicide rates and higher homicide rates compared to municipalities in quintile I.

In summary, although municipalities with higher rates of immigration due to *violence and insecurity* showed lower homicide rates, this trend differs when considering the geographic borders they crossed. Municipalities with higher rates of *state and international immigration due to violence and insecurity* showed lower levels of violence on average. In contrast, municipalities with higher rates of *municipal immigration due to violence and insecurity* showed higher levels of violence compared to municipalities with lower municipal rates (Table 2).

**Table 2. Average characteristics of destination municipalities by type of migration and reason, 2020**

Immigration	Quintile immigration rates	Homicide rate	Population	Population pressure	% Pop of other state	Migratory intensity		% EAP employed	Inequality (Gini)	Marginalization		Northern border	Southern border
						Index	Degree			Index	Degree		
Total	I	1.2	32 548	1.3	3.7	63.7	Low	97.0	0.3	51.4	Medium	0.6%	1.4%
	V	1.2	64 965	1.0	14.8	63.3	Low	98.0	0.3	55.8	Low	3.2%	0.4%
Job search	I	1.0	18 790	1.2	4.4	63.9	Low	97.2	0.3	51.0	High	0.2%	0.6%
	V	1.4	96 065	1.0	14.0	63.1	Low	98.1	0.3	56.3	Low	5.4%	2.3%
Family reunification	I	1.2	46 099	1.3	4.0	63.9	Low	97.0	0.3	51.9	Medium	0.8%	1.2%
	V	1.2	42 896	1.0	13.6	62.9	Low	98.0	0.3	54.9	Low	2.2%	0.4%
Violence and insecurity	I	1.3	36 308	1.2	5.6	62.9	Low	97.5	0.3	52.4	Medium	0.7%	1.6%
	V	1.1	58 233	1.0	13.5	63.8	Low	98.0	0.3	55.0	Low	0.9%	1.6%
Municipal	I	1.3	66 884	1.2	9.1	63.1	Low	97.1	0.3	51.8	Medium	2.0%	2.2%
	V	1.2	52 200	1.0	10.6	63.6	Low	97.9	0.3	55.9	Low	1.2%	0.2%
Municipal due to violence	I	1.1	92 242	1.1	10.1	63.2	Low	97.9	0.3	54.1	Medium	2.1%	2.9%
	V	1.3	66 397	1.0	12.0	63.6	Low	97.8	0.3	55.6	Low	1.5%	0.0%
State	I	1.4	19 329	1.2	2.5	63.1	Low	97.1	0.3	52.1	Medium	0.4%	1.2%
	V	1.2	85 048	1.0	17.9	63.6	Low	98.1	0.3	55.2	Low	4.1%	0.8%
State due to violence	I	1.4	53 129	1.2	5.7	63.2	Low	97.8	0.4	53.2	Medium	2.4%	1.7%
	V	1.0	40 357	1.0	13.0	63.7	Low	98.0	0.3	54.4	Medium	0.5%	0.5%
International	I	0.9	46 287	1.2	7.4	64.9	Very low	97.5	0.3	52.6	Medium	0.2%	0.4%
	V	1.4	29 059	1.0	9.3	60.4	High	97.7	0.3	54.4	Medium	5.0%	1.9%
International due to violence	I	1.3	125 454	1.1	10.9	63.6	Low	98.3	0.4	55.7	Low	0.7%	2.0%
	V	1.2	173 527	1.0	15.1	63.3	Low	98.0	0.3	56.2	Low	12.2%	8.2%

Source: own elaboration with data from Inegi (n. d., 2021), Conapo (2021, 2023a) and Coneval (n. d.)

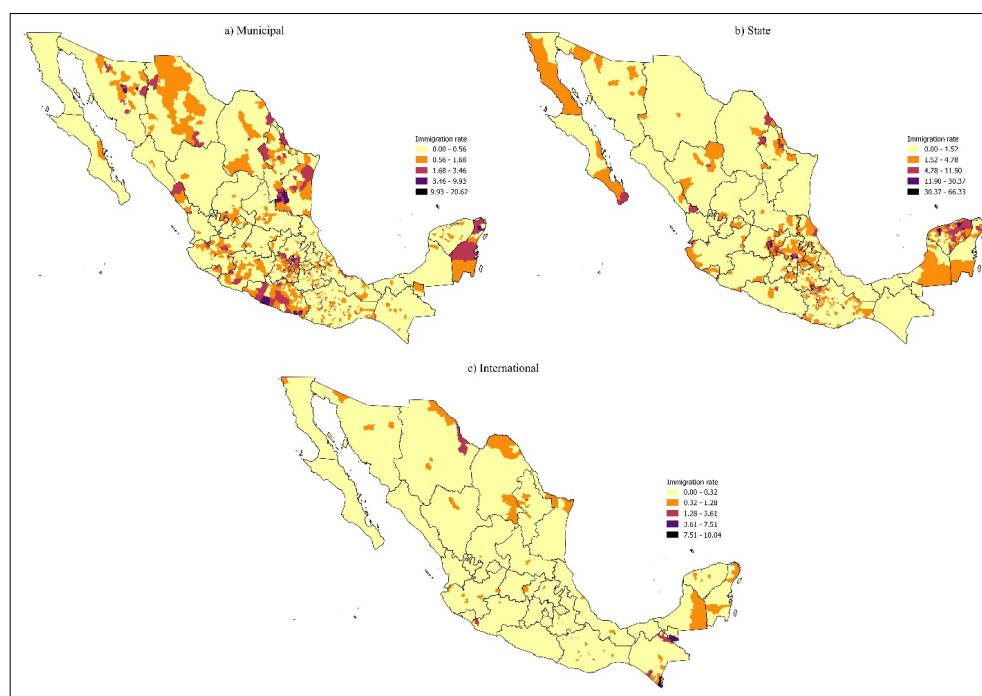
## Spatial analysis of migrants due to violence and insecurity

This section analyzes the spatial distribution of migration rates due to insecurity and violence, differentiated by types of migration—municipal, state and international—as well as their spatial correlation with the levels of violence in the destination municipalities. The maps in Figure 2 show that in the case of *municipal migration*, the high rates are concentrated in regions along the coast of Guerrero, north of Colima, in the Valley of Mexico, around the metropolitan areas of Guadalajara and Monterrey, near Mazatlán in Sinaloa, in central Sonora, south of Chihuahua, north and south of Tamaulipas and center and north of Quintana Roo, and whose concentration may be due to a preference for urban areas and capital cities of the states, as well as the increase in *violence and insecurity* experienced in recent years in some of these states.

For *state immigration* rates due to criminal insecurity and violence, high rates are concentrated in municipalities in Yucatán, the south of the states of Querétaro and Hidalgo, the south of Baja California Sur and in some municipalities in the north of Nuevo León and Coahuila. State immigration due to criminal insecurity and violence in Coahuila comes mainly from Chihuahua and Tamaulipas, while in Nuevo León, it comes from Tamaulipas. In Querétaro, most migrants came from Mexico City, the State of Mexico, Guerrero and Guanajuato, a situation similar to that of Hidalgo, which received migrants mainly from the State of Mexico and Mexico City. Finally, Yucatán's immigration due to insecurity and violence came mainly from Quintana Roo, Tabasco, Mexico City, Veracruz and the State of Mexico. Therefore, two main regions of high attraction of state migration due to insecurity and violence are constituted around the central part of the country and the Yucatán peninsula, where violence levels tend to be low and medium, according to information from the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System (Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública [SESNSP], 2024).

Concerning *international immigration* due to insecurity and violence, the highest rates are concentrated in municipalities on Mexico's southern and northern borders, as well as on migration routes in transit through Mexico to the United States. The municipalities with the highest immigration rates are Tijuana in Baja California, Plutarco Elías Calles in Sonora, Juárez and Ojinaga in Chihuahua, Acuña and Piedras Negras in Coahuila, Reynosa and Matamoros in Tamaulipas and municipalities between the metropolitan areas of Monterrey and Saltillo. In the central part of the country, there are two regions: around the Querétaro metropolitan area and north of Mexico City. On Mexico's southern border, they are concentrated in the states of Chiapas, Tabasco and Quintana Roo, particularly in the municipalities of Tapachula, Suchiate and Palenque in Chiapas, and Tenosique in Tabasco, which may be directly associated with the migratory routes and policies of these regions.

**Figure 2. Municipal rates of immigration due to criminal insecurity and violence by type of migration, 2015-2020**



Source: own elaboration with data from Inegi (2021)

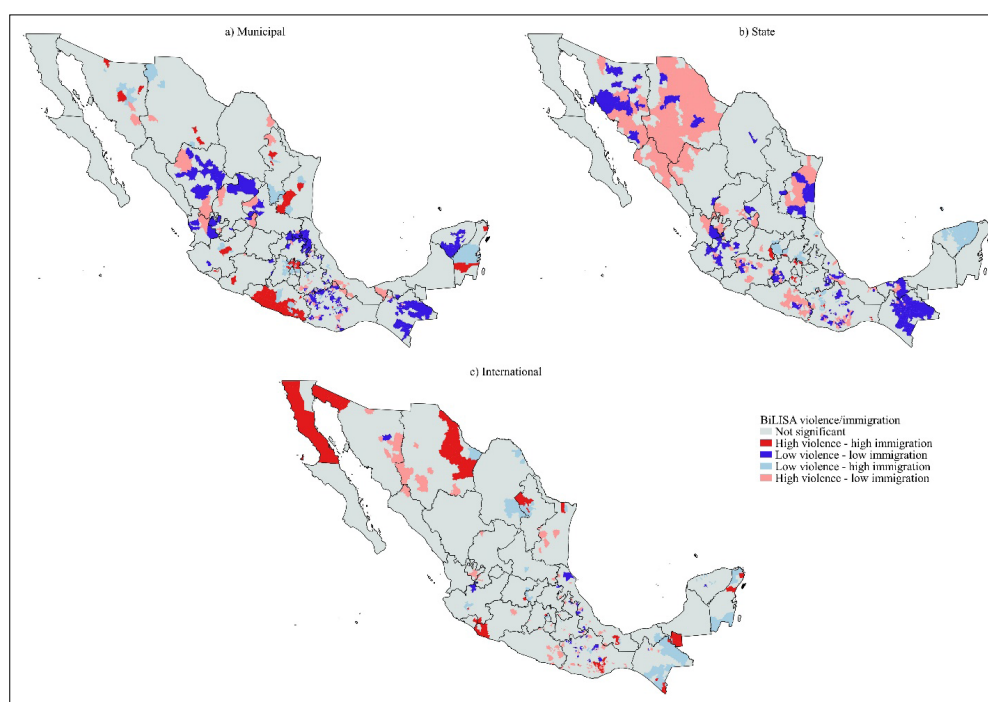
The BiLISA maps show the spatial relation between immigration rates due to insecurity and violence and the municipalities' levels of insecurity and violence (see Figure 3). For *municipal immigration*, high immigration rates are associated with high levels of violence, especially in Guerrero, Tamaulipas, the State of Mexico and some municipalities in Jalisco, Sonora, Nuevo León and Quintana Roo. This shows that, in general, municipal migrants remained in regions of high violence despite their migration, possibly due to economic constraints, migration networks, and even the desire to remain close to their places of origin to facilitate an eventual return (Rodríguez Chávez, 2020).

In contrast, *state immigration* is associated to a greater extent with displacement to municipalities with lower levels of violence. Thus, municipalities in the northwest of the country in the states of Sonora, Chihuahua, Sinaloa and Durango, as well as municipalities in Tamaulipas, Zacatecas, Nayarit, Jalisco and Guerrero with high homicide rates showed low rates of state immigration due to insecurity and violence. Conversely, municipalities in Querétaro, Hidalgo, Yucatán, Veracruz and Oaxaca with low homicide rates showed high rates of state immigration for these reasons. Therefore, it appears that state migrants prefer heading to safer regions with lower levels of violence.

Finally, *international immigration* due to insecurity and violence shows greater diversity, with high rates of violence in municipalities on Mexico's northern and southern borders associated with high levels of immigration, particularly in municipalities in the states of Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, Chiapas, Tabasco and Quintana Roo, similar to what happened in some municipalities on the coast of Michoacán.

In the inland areas of the country, an inverse relation between the variables is observed, as in the cases of regions of Coahuila and Nuevo León near the metropolitan area of Saltillo, in districts in the north of Mexico City, in municipalities around the metropolitan area of Querétaro, in various municipalities near the southern border of Chiapas and Tabasco and in the north and south of Quintana Roo, where there were low rates of violence and high rates of immigration. Therefore, this migration seems to depend mainly on the transit routes to the United States and not on the levels of violence in the Mexican municipalities.

**Figure 3. Spatial correlation (BiLISA) between homicide rates and immigration rates by municipality, 2015-2020**



Source: own elaboration with data from Inegi (n. d., 2021)

### Determinants of internal immigration due to insecurity and violence

Based on linear regression models of the natural logarithm of immigration rates, the demographic, economic, geographic and social pull factors associated with a municipality having higher or lower levels of immigration for the period 2015-2020 are analyzed. Table 3 presents a general analysis for total (model 1), *violence and insecurity* (model 2), *job search* (model 3) and *family reunification* (model 4) immigration rates.

The objective is to identify similarities and differences in the meaning and relation of the explanatory variables, according to the reasons for migration. The results are based on the analysis of 2 183 municipalities that observed immigration for these reasons for the period in question.

**Table 3. Linear regression models of the natural logarithm of the immigration rate: total for violence and insecurity, job search and family reunification**

	Immigration			
	1) Total immigration	2) Violence and insecurity	3) Job search	4) Family reunification
Homicides	0.00	-0.06 ***	0.10 ***	-0.02
Population	-0.13 ***	-0.20 ***	0.00	-0.12 ***
Pressure	-0.14 ***	-0.41 ***	0.03	-0.36 ***
Mx networks	0.03 ***	0.03 ***	0.02 ***	0.03 ***
USA networks	0.00	0.07 ***	-0.05 ***	-0.03 ***
Employment	0.02 ***	0.03 **	0.03 ***	0.02 ***
Inequality	0.03	-0.69	0.92 *	-0.63 *
Marginalization	0.05 ***	0.05 ***	0.08 ***	0.02 ***
Northern border	-0.12 *	-0.28 **	0.38 ***	-0.14 *
Southern border	0.10	0.44 **	0.63 ***	0.13
N	2 183	2 183	2 183	2 183
adj. R-sq	0.39	0.24	0.35	0.32

\* p<0.1, \*\* p<.05, \*\*\* p<0.01

Source: own elaboration with Stata version 17 software

The total immigration model (model 1) shows a negative and significant association with population size, demographic pressure, marginalization and northern border municipalities. In contrast, immigration rates are positively and significantly associated with a higher percentage of the population born in other states (as an indicator of internal migration networks) and a higher percentage of employed EAP. Violence does not show a significant association with immigration rates. The model of immigration due to *violence and insecurity* (model 2) shows similar associations to model 1, but violence in destination municipalities has a negative and significant association with immigration rates, as does the migration intensity index (an indicator of migration networks with the United States).

Model 3, whose dependent variable is the *job search* immigration rate, shows significant and positive associations with violence, internal and international migration networks, employment, inequality and municipalities on the northern and southern borders, in addition to a significant and negative association with marginalization. For *family reunification* immigration rates (model 4), significant associations similar to those of model 1 are observed, but in this case, networks with the United States are significant and positive, while inequality is significant and negative.

In summary, although immigration seems to respond to the search for better living conditions in economic, demographic and social terms driven by the existence of internal migratory networks, only immigration rates due to insecurity and

violence are inversely associated with the levels of violence in the destination municipalities. At a general level, violence does not appear to be a significant factor in immigration rates.

**Table 4. Linear regression models of the natural logarithm of the immigration rate due to insecurity and violence: total and municipal**

	1) Total immigration	Immigration due to violence			5) Municipal immigration	Municipal immigration due to violence		
		2) Total	3) Male	4) Female		6) Total	7) Male	8) Female
Homicides	0.01	-0.05 **	-0.03	-0.05 **	0.02	0.13 ***	0.14 ***	0.12 ***
Population	-0.13 ***	-0.25 ***	-0.25 ***	-0.25 ***	-0.25 ***	-0.39 ***	-0.38 ***	-0.38 ***
Pressure	-0.11 *	-0.33 ***	-0.35 ***	-0.32 ***	0.23 **	0.08	0.05	0.10
Mx networks	0.03 ***	0.03 ***	0.03 ***	0.03 ***	0.00	0.01 ***	0.01 ***	0.01 **
USA networks	0.00	0.07 ***	0.08 ***	0.07 ***	0.09 ***	0.09 ***	0.09 ***	0.09 ***
Employment	0.02 ***	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01	-0.04 **	-0.05 **	-0.04 *
Inequality	-0.18	-0.25	-0.15	-0.19	1.27 **	3.81 ***	3.80 ***	3.79 ***
Marginalization	0.05 ***	0.04 ***	0.04 ***	0.05 ***	0.11 ***	0.07 ***	0.07 ***	0.07 ***
Northern border	-0.13 *	-0.28 **	-0.29 **	-0.29 **	-0.43 ***	-0.62 ***	-0.66 ***	-0.62 ***
Southern border	0.08	0.33	0.32	0.36	-0.24 **	-0.52 ***	-0.59 ***	-0.47 ***
N	2044	2044	2044	2044	1382	1382	1382	1382
adj. R-sq	0.38	0.26	0.25	0.24	0.26	0.21	0.20	0.19

\* p<0.1, \*\* p<.05, \*\*\* p<0.01

Source: own elaboration with Stata version 17 software

On the other hand, the determinants of immigration due to insecurity and violence can also vary by sex. In this case, Table 4 presents models of total immigration rates (model 1), violence and insecurity rates (model 2) and male (model 3) and female (model 4) violence and insecurity rates. In all cases, 2 044 municipalities were analyzed.

Total immigration rates (model 1) are directly and significantly associated with internal networks and employment, and inversely with population size, demographic pressure, marginalization and northern border municipalities. The rates of immigration due to violence and insecurity (model 2) show the same associations as in model 1. Nevertheless, violence shows a significant and negative association, as do international networks, while employment shows a positive and significant association. In models 3 and 4, concerning male and female rates, the associations are similar to those of immigration for violence and total insecurity (model 1), with the exception that violence does not appear to be significant in male rates.



Immigration rates can also vary according to the administrative borders that people have crossed. Table 4 presents the models for municipal immigration rates, broken down by totals (model 5), by violence and insecurity (model 6) and by violence and insecurity, both male (model 7) and female (model 8). A total of 1 382 municipalities that experienced municipal immigration of the four types were analyzed.

Total municipal immigration rates (model 5) show significant and negative associations with population size, international networks, marginalization and northern and southern border municipalities. In addition, they show significant and positive associations with population pressure and inequality. Municipal immigration rates due to violence and insecurity (model 6) show similar associations to those in model 5 but with significant and positive associations for violence and internal networks, and inverse associations with employment. In these cases, higher rates of male and female municipal immigration due to insecurity and violence are associated with municipalities with higher violence, lower population, larger internal networks, smaller networks to the United States, lower employment, higher inequality, lower marginalization and fewer municipalities on the southern and northern borders.

The state immigration models presented in Table 5 analyzed 1 854 municipalities with state immigration, broken down by insecurity and violence and separated by sex. The state rates (model 1) show significant and negative associations with violence, population size, demographic pressure, networks with the United States, inequality and northern border municipalities. In addition, they show significant and positive associations with internal networks and employment.

The state violence and insecurity immigration rates (model 2) show similar associations to those of model 1, with the exception that employment does not turn out to be significant for violence and insecurity immigration rates. In addition, the effect of violence in destination municipalities is shown to be more significant and negative for violence and insecurity immigration rates. Regarding male and female rates of state migration due to insecurity and violence (models 3 and 4), these show the same directions and associations as model 2, but violence presents a slightly more negative association for female rates compared to male rates.

Finally, 424 municipalities were analyzed, concerning the international immigration models presented in Table 5. The total international immigration rates (model 5) show a positive and significant association with violence, international networks and, especially, with municipalities on the northern and southern borders. In addition, they show an inverse association with population size and marginalization of the destination municipalities.

The international rates for violence and insecurity (model 6) show direct and significant associations with internal migration networks and municipalities on the southern and northern borders. They also show inverse associations with population size, international networks and marginalization. On the other hand, male and female rates for violence and insecurity (models 7 and 8) show similar associations to the total international rates for this reason (model 6). That is, higher rates of international immigration are observed toward municipalities with smaller populations, larger internal networks, lower marginalization and municipalities on Mexico's southern and northern borders. Nevertheless, in none of the cases does violence in the destination municipalities show a significant association with international immigration rates due to insecurity and violence.

**Table 5. Linear regression models of the natural logarithm of the immigration rate due to insecurity and violence: state and international**

	1) State immigration	State immigration due to violence			5) International immigration	International immigration due to violence		
		2) Total	3) Male	4) Female		6) Total	7) Male	8) Female
Homicides	-0.02 *	-0.13 ***	-0.12 ***	-0.15 ***	0.14 ***	-0.08	-0.07	-0.09
Population	-0.09 ***	-0.33 ***	-0.32 ***	-0.32 ***	-0.18 ***	-0.36 ***	-0.36 ***	-0.35 ***
Pressure	-0.31 ***	-0.47 ***	-0.46 ***	-0.48 ***	-0.10	-0.17	-0.12	-0.24
Mx networks	0.04 ***	0.04 ***	0.04 ***	0.04 ***	0.00	0.01 **	0.01 **	0.01 **
USA networks	0.03 ***	0.06 ***	0.07 ***	0.06 ***	-0.25 ***	0.05 *	0.05 *	0.04
Employment	0.02 ***	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.11	0.02	0.02	0.03
Inequality	-1.00 **	-1.61 **	-1.80 ***	-1.50 **	1.23	-1.33	-0.98	-1.44
Marginalization	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.02 **	0.10 ***	0.06 **	0.06 **	0.06 **
Northern border	-0.21 **	-0.58 ***	-0.65 ***	-0.55 ***	0.75 ***	0.97 ***	1.00 ***	0.96 ***
Southern border	-0.11	-0.20	-0.21	-0.17	1.14 ***	1.70 ***	1.72 ***	1.73 ***
N	1 854	1 854	1 854	1 854	424	424	424	424
adj. R-sq	0.453	0.322	0.300	0.286	0.51	0.22	0.20	0.19

\* p&lt;0.1, \*\* p&lt;.05, \*\*\* p&lt;0.01

Source: own elaboration with Stata version 17 software

In summary, municipal, state and international immigrants motivated by violence and insecurity generally seek better social, economic and demographic well-being conditions in destination municipalities supported by internal migration networks. However, state migrants tend to move to municipalities with lower rates of violence, while municipal migrants face challenges in leaving regions with high violence and insecurity due to the short distances between their places of origin and destination. On the other hand, international immigrants are mainly concentrated in municipalities on Mexico's southern and northern borders, where they may be exposed to higher levels of vulnerability, especially in northern border cities with increasing rates of violence.

## Conclusions and discussion

The results of this research show that, in general terms, immigrants for reasons of violence and insecurity seek better economic, social, demographic and security conditions in the municipalities where they arrive. When segmenting immigration flows according to the political borders they crossed, significant differences are observed in the factors associated with municipal, state and international immigration rates.

It was observed that regions with high rates of municipal immigration due to violence and insecurity were concentrated in Guerrero, State of Mexico, Colima, Jalisco, Sonora, Sinaloa, Chihuahua, Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and Quintana Roo. On the other hand, high rates of state immigration for these reasons were located in regions and municipalities of Querétaro, Hidalgo, Puebla, Baja California Sur and Yucatán. In addition, the highest rates of international immigration due to violence and insecurity were observed in border municipalities of Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, Chiapas, Tabasco and Quintana Roo, as well as in the center of the country in municipalities of Querétaro and Mexico City.

In the case of municipal immigration due to violence and insecurity, the contexts of violence in municipalities in Guerrero and Mexico, located in the so-called *Tierra Caliente*, as well as in municipalities in Sonora, Sinaloa and Chihuahua in the so-called Golden Triangle, and in municipalities in Nuevo León and Tamaulipas, stem from territorial disputes between criminal groups, especially the CJNG, Sinaloa, Gulf and Juárez cartels, which seek to control both drug production and distribution territories and sales *plazas* in the interior of Mexico. These conflicts have led thousands of people to move, particularly to other nearby municipalities within their states, as a measure to safeguard their lives, even though violence has spread to other neighboring regions and municipalities.

As for state immigration toward Querétaro, Hidalgo, Puebla, Baja California Sur and Yucatán, these are not only associated with better labor and welfare conditions for migrants fleeing violence and insecurity but may also be related to lower levels of violence and higher levels of security. This is especially observed in two regions of Mexico: one located in the center, in states close to Mexico City, where there are low levels of insecurity, and the other in the Yucatán peninsula, where the safest states in the country are located, according to information from the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System (SESNSP, 2024).

Finally, regions with high international immigration due to insecurity and violence are strongly associated with Mexico's northern and southern borders. This trend could be associated with migration containment and deterrence policies implemented by Mexico and the United States, which may increase the length of stay of international migrants in these cities, as well as in municipalities and intermediate cities associated with the main transit routes of international migrants.

Bivariate spatial analysis showed an inverse correlation between state immigration rates and municipal homicide rates, indicating, in general, that regions with high homicide rates tend to have low state immigration rates and vice versa. Conversely, municipal immigration rates, in general, are positively correlated with violence levels, that is, regions with high municipal immigration rates also tend to have high violence rates. This same pattern is observed in international immigration rates, especially in municipalities on Mexico's northern and southern borders, where there is a correlation between regions with high levels of violence and high immigration rates.

Regarding the regression models, it was found that the levels of violence in the destination municipalities, once other economic, social, demographic and geographic factors related to immigration were controlled, presented a significant and negative association with the overall and state immigration rates due to insecurity and violence for the 2015-2020 period. Nonetheless, for municipal immigration rates, a significant and positive association with the level of violence in the destination municipalities was observed. This divergence could be attributed to the distance of migration between

places of origin and destination, as state migrants tend to go to places with better economic, social and security conditions, while municipal migrants due to insecurity and violence do not manage to leave these violent regions within their states.

These results coincide with other studies, particularly qualitative ones, where it has been observed that people who have fled their communities of origin to other municipalities continue to face violence perpetrated by criminal groups, so many of them decide to migrate again to more distant regions and even reach the northern border to try to seek asylum in the United States (CMDPDH, 2022; GITM, 2022; Moreno Mena & Avendaño Millán, 2018; OIM, 2023; Silva Hernández & Alfaro Trujillo, 2021). Therefore, internal displacement and forced migration to other countries can be considered complementary phenomena, influenced by the magnitude and duration of violence experienced by migrants.

For the international immigration models, the rates of immigration due to violence and insecurity do not show a significant association with the levels of violence in the destination municipalities, but they do indicate a concentration in the municipalities on the southern and northern borders. Nevertheless, it is evident that international migrants mainly go to municipalities with high levels of violence. This situation exposes them to risks and vulnerabilities, particularly due to criminal groups sharing spaces on transit routes or at access points to Mexico and the United States, as previous studies have pointed out (Castillo, 2020; Izcara Palacios, 2016).

This research has limitations derived from the data used, such as the fact that it only accounts for final migrations, making it impossible to know the total number of migrations due to the insecurity and violence people have experienced. In addition, it simplifies the distance between the places of origin and destination by establishing three types of migrants and assuming their shorter or longer distances according to the administrative boundaries crossed. On the other hand, it focuses on analyzing municipal factors at the destination and leaves out the individual determinants of displaced people due to insecurity and violence. Therefore, future research is needed that considers the physical distance between the places of origin and destination, as well as the analysis of push and pull factors at the individual, municipal and regional levels.

The findings of this research constitute a first approach to the complexity and divergences in migration patterns due to insecurity and violence in Mexico. It highlights the importance of considering local and regional contexts in the analysis of these migrations. Although no information is available on subsequent migrations, the characteristics of the destination municipalities could place migrants in contexts of greater risk and vulnerability and push them to move again to other states or countries, given the State's inability to guarantee their safety. Therefore, it is imperative to develop laws and programs that protect and care for displaced persons and clearly establish the powers and responsibilities of the different actors to guarantee their safe and assisted return to their places of origin or their full integration in the places of destination.

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