

# Conceptions and practices of management, governance, and governability in Latin American border migration control

## Las concepciones y prácticas de la gestión, la gobernanza y la gobernabilidad en el control migratorio fronterizo latinoamericano

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### Abstract

The concepts of management, governance, and governability in Latin American border migration control are critically analyzed, highlighting their theoretical and practical differences as well as their implications for policies and institutions. Drawing on a documentary review and a qualitative-comparative approach, regulatory frameworks, institutional discourses, and operational practices implemented by states and multilateral organizations are examined. The findings show that migration management, presented as a technical tool, becomes a mechanism for legitimizing securitarian and exclusionary measures under narratives of efficiency and order. Governance, promoted as multi-actor cooperation, faces tensions between security, development and human rights, reproducing global asymmetries and limiting the effective participation of civil society. Governability, in turn, reveals institutional weaknesses and the predominance of restrictive approaches. The study concludes that these categories are not neutral but rather fields of political contestation and calls for alternative frameworks oriented toward migration justice and the protection of human rights.

Keywords: migration management, governance, governability, border control, human rights.

### Resumen

Se analizan críticamente los conceptos de gestión, gobernanza y gobernabilidad en el control migratorio fronterizo latinoamericano, destacan sus diferencias teóricas y prácticas, así como sus implicaciones en políticas e instituciones. Desde una revisión documental y un enfoque cualitativo-comparativo, se examinan marcos normativos, discursos institucionales y prácticas operativas implementadas por Estados y organismos multilaterales. Los hallazgos muestran que la gestión

Received on April 30, 2025.

Accepted on December 3, 2025.

Published on December 12, 2025.

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE LANGUAGE:  
SPANISH.



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CITATION: Neira-Orjuela, F. (2025). Conceptions and practices of management, governance, and governability in Latin American border migration control. *Estudios Fronterizos*, 26, Article e177. <https://doi.org/10.21670/ref.2519177>

migratoria, presentada como herramienta técnica, se convierte en un dispositivo de legitimación de medidas securitarias y de exclusión bajo narrativas de eficiencia y orden. La gobernanza, promovida como cooperación multiactoral, enfrenta tensiones entre seguridad, desarrollo y derechos humanos que reproducen asimetrías globales y limitan la participación efectiva de la sociedad civil. La gobernabilidad, por su parte, evidencia fragilidades institucionales y la prevalencia de enfoques restrictivos. El estudio concluye que estas categorías no son neutras sino campos de disputa política y plantea la necesidad de marcos alternativos orientados a justicia migratoria y derechos humanos.

Palabras clave: gestión migratoria, gobernanza, gobernabilidad, control fronterizo, derechos humanos.

## Introduction

Throughout the 21st century, migration has become one of the most complex and structural phenomena facing both receiving and sending countries. Its impact transcends demographic boundaries, becoming a central focus of political, socioeconomic and humanitarian agendas worldwide. Since the 1990s, the sustained increase in irregular migration has intensified debates around border control and state responses to human mobility.

Within this context, academic research has sought to evaluate, compare and systematize migration policies, paying particular attention to those aimed at regulating irregular flows. Over the last three decades, the conceptual language used to address these dynamics has incorporated notions such as *management*, *governance* and *governability*, which have permeated the discourse of political actors, public institutions, international organizations, civil society organizations and business sectors. These categories not only represent theoretical perspectives but also guide concrete institutional practices aimed at addressing the contemporary challenges of human mobility.

Nevertheless, specialized literature tends to use these terms interchangeably, without considering their theoretical differences or practical implications. This lack of conceptual precision generates ambiguities in discourse analysis and in the design of migration policies, and obscures the regulatory frameworks that underpin them. Confusing the operational management of migration flows with broader governance processes—which involve the coordination of multiple actors and levels of decision-making—or with governability—which refers to the institutional capacity and legitimacy of the political system—hinders the development of coherent, sustainable and human rights-based policies. As a result, there is a persistent risk of reproducing fragmented, technocratic or reactive definitions that fail to address the structural causes of mobility or to guarantee effective and legitimate state responses.

This paper critically examines the concepts of *management*, *governance* and *governability* in border migration control, highlighting their theoretical and practical differences and their application in policies and institutions in the Latin American context. The hypothesis that guides this work is based on the idea that, far from promoting effective protection of migrants' rights, contemporary conceptions of management, governance and governability in the border sphere operate as discursive devices that legitimize practices of exclusion, security and externalization of control, which reinforce dynamics of inequality and structural violence. Within this framework, the core

question of this study is: how are the concepts of management, governance and governability used in discourses and practices of border migration control and how do they contribute to legitimizing processes of securitization and exclusion of migrants in Latin America?

The main contribution of this work lies in unraveling the conceptual and operational differences between these categories to demonstrate their influence on the formulation of migration policies and the production of institutional narratives. The aim is to strengthen an academic debate that goes beyond superficial or technocratic readings and moves toward a critical analysis of human mobility focused on rights, equity and social justice.

To address the objective set, a qualitative methodological strategy was designed based on two dimensions: *a*) a conceptual analysis in which a genealogical reconstruction of the terms *management*, *governance* and *governability* in migration studies was carried out, identifying their origins, transformations and contemporary uses in the academic and political fields; *b*) institutional practices, in which the operational mechanisms implemented by state and multilateral actors—such as surveillance devices, regularization processes and control programs—were studied to identify how the concepts translate into concrete actions.

The information was collected through a systematic search of international academic databases (Scopus, SciELO, Redalyc, EBSCO, Dialnet) and specialized repositories (REBID, Latindex), supplemented by a review of printed literature. Sources included official documents from multilateral organizations (International Organization for Migration [IOM], United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], among others), government reports on migration control and specialized academic literature.

The selection of documents was based on three criteria: thematic relevance—materials related to migration control and governance policies and discourse—, timeliness—texts from 2000 to the date of this writing—and institutional diversity—governmental, multilateral and critical sources (IOM and academia)—. The analysis was carried out through an initial exploratory reading, followed by an organization of the corpus by type of actor (governmental, multilateral and critical).

The analytical strategy combined targeted content analysis and critical discourse analysis, focusing on two aspects: *a*) the dominant interpretive frameworks surrounding management, governance and governability; *b*) the uses of each term in institutional and regulatory discourses and practices. This approach enabled the identification of conceptual continuities and differentiated appropriations at different levels of state and multilateral action. The integration of these methodological procedures strengthened the coherence between the objectives and findings by transparently showing the selection of the documentary corpus, the analysis criteria and the interpretive logic employed.

The paper is organized into two main sections: the first discusses the origins, approaches and characteristics of the concepts of management, governance and governability, while the second examines their implementation in Latin America through specific experiences and case studies.

## Origins and characteristics of the concepts of management, governance and governability

### *Management*

The concept of the Spanish word *gestión* (management) originates from the Latin word *gestus*, derived from *gerere*, which means to execute, conduct or direct an action (Huer-go, 2003, p. 1). At its root, management involves coordinating efforts to achieve common goals, executing projects and organizing resources. This meaning was expanded by authors such as Frederick W. Taylor (1856-1915) and Henry Fayol (1916), who laid the foundations of modern administration by linking management with efficiency and structural planning in organizations (Said Sulleman, 2019, p. 11). Subsequently, Mary Parker Follett and Peter Drucker (1954) incorporated the participatory and strategic dimensions, defining management as a process of coordinating human, technical and political resources to achieve collective objectives (López Carrizosa, 2008, p. 14).

Huergo (2003) notes that management transcends mere efficient resource administration, as it also involves practices of power and consensus-building. In the field of public policy, this concept emerged as a comprehensive approach that combines resource coordination with institutional legitimacy and is adapted to the demands of efficiency and democratic governability (Aguilar, 2007, p. 22).

The link between management and migration was consolidated toward the end of the Cold War, when migration flows began to be perceived as a global risk (Kalm, 2010; Kron, 2011). In this context, the notion of migration management emerged, influenced by administrative reforms aimed at state efficiency. Geiger and Pécout (2010) state that management became a category used by public and private actors to justify migration interventions, creating a global framework for action.

Bimal Ghosh, considered a pioneer of the concept, proposed in the 1990s a third way between total openness and closed borders, advocating a model that reconciled state and humanitarian interests (Domenech, 2008; Estupiñán Serrano, 2013). Nonetheless, Kalm (2010) points out that the discourse on migration management, although presented as liberal and pragmatic, ended up legitimizing restrictive and controlling practices. Pécout adds to this idea that “well-managed” migration functions as reassuring language that hides the logic of exclusion under the discourse of efficiency (Pécout, 2018, p. 38).

From this perspective, migration management operates both as a technical tool and a rhetorical resource. It legitimizes state actions under the argument of effectiveness by articulating mechanisms of border control, regularization and biometric surveillance (Neira Orjuela, 2023). Bigo (2002) calls this network of surveillance and exclusion the *ban-opticon*, in which control technologies are justified in the name of security. From this perspective, migration management resembles a device of governmentality, through which States regulate mobility and produce governable populations (Foucault, 2007).

Authors such as Mezzadra and Neilson expand on this analysis from a critical perspective, interpreting borders as mechanisms for the differential management of mobility, in which flows are not blocked but filtered and hierarchized. In their concept of differential inclusion, they consider that migrants may be subject to different degrees of subordination, command, discrimination and segmentation (Mezzadra &

Neilson, 2016, p. 245). Similarly, Georgi (2010) points out that migration management reproduces the hegemonic structures of the Global North by subordinating mobility to criteria of profitability.

From a Foucauldian perspective, power over migration is not limited to repression but also produces regulated ways of life through controls, visas, detentions and deportations. As Gammeltoft-Hansen and Nyberg Sørensen explain, the externalization and privatization of migration controls respond to a neoliberal rationality that transfers sovereign responsibilities to private actors and third countries (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Nyberg Sørensen, 2013, p. 12). Delgado Wise (2018), from a Gramscian perspective, complements this critique by denouncing the managerial discourse of “flow management” for concealing the structural inequalities of global capitalism and the exploitation of the migrant workforce.

In contrast to approaches focused on imposition, Mezzadra and Neilson conceive of migration as an act of agency and resistance. They claim that struggles to move generate political dynamics capable of challenging forms of control. For them, migrants are not mere recipients of state decisions, but rather contest practices of management and sovereignty, demonstrating that power is never absolute. This creates dissonances, interferences and interruptions that resonate beyond the moment of crossing the border (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2016, p. 207).

In this explanation, Mezzadra and Neilson maintain that the collective actions of migrants are not limited to opposing control but also generate new political subjects and open up emancipatory possibilities. Likewise, the authors question the idea that migration management is a purely technical or neutral process, emphasizing that mobility is a field of dispute where political subjectivities and practices of resistance to the hegemonic order emerge (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2016, p. 274). From this perspective, migration management functions both as a device of control and as a space for confrontation and social re-signification.

## Governance

The concept of governance derives from the Latin verb *gubernare*, whose original meaning is “to steer a ship”, and which later came to be associated with the art of governing. In French, *gouvernance* appeared in the 15th century, used by Charles of Orleans to refer to the exercise of government. Its modern use resurfaced in 1937 in corporate governance studies in the United States, focused on business organization and efficiency (Launay, 2005, p. 93).

Gradually, the term transcended the corporate sphere and was adopted by political science and public administration in the late twentieth century. In this context, governance began to be described as a form of government characterized by the participation of multiple actors—state, private and social—in the design and implementation of public policies (Aguilar, 2007, p. 19). According to Calame (2003), its incorporation into international development institutions, such as the World Bank, since 1989, sought to adapt state structures to the principles of economic liberalism. Thus, governance, presented as a technical notion, has had profound political implications by weakening the redistributive function of the State and subordinating it to the logic of the global market (Calame, 2003, p. 13).

In the social sciences, the concept of governance has sparked debate over its relation to government. While the latter refers to hierarchical, centralized structures based on state authority, governance is associated with horizontal, cooperative decision-making networks (Farinós Dasí, 2008, p. 12). Aguilar defines it as a process through which society and government determine common objectives, distribute responsibilities and coordinate actions to achieve them, with an emphasis on shared responsibility between public and private actors (Aguilar, 2007, p. 8).

Globalization profoundly transformed state sovereignty, generating new forms of interdependence and forcing the creation of cooperative institutional frameworks. This gave rise to the idea of global governance (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2016), in which the State is no longer the sole actor and shares authority with multilateral organizations, international agencies and transnational actors.

Within this framework, migration governance emerged in the 1990s as a response to the challenges of transnational human mobility. The Commission on Global Governance (1993-1994) defined it as “the sum of the various ways in which individuals and institutions, public and private, organize their common affairs through continuous processes of interest reconciliation and cooperative action” (Estupiñán Serrano, 2013; Pécoud, 2018). Subsequently, the Global Commission on International Migration (2005) expanded on this notion, emphasizing that migration governance should integrate both national policies and international cooperation mechanisms.

Since then, migration governance has taken shape as a multilevel framework in which legal, political and institutional factors interact at the local, regional and global levels. Newland (2005) emphasizes that its main purpose is to coordinate government action in the face of cross-border challenges, although tensions persist regarding its scope and objectives. The IOM (2019, p. 103) defines migration governance as the set of regulatory frameworks, laws, organizational structures and processes that regulate state action on migration, promoting international cooperation as an essential condition for effective management.

From a critical perspective, Mezzadra and Neilson state that migration governance extends beyond mere coordination among States and involves a series of “regime conflicts” among international organizations, non-governmental organizations, security entities and national governments (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2016, p. 280). Borders thus become spaces of experimentation and articulation where sovereign and transnational control practices converge. From a Gramscian perspective, Delgado Wise points out that civil society participation in global governance forums tends to operate in “guest spaces”, defined by the rules of hegemonic actors, which limit its counter-hegemonic capacity (Delgado Wise, 2018, p. 29). Similarly, Domenech points out that migration governance, presented as technical cooperation, reinforces the externalization of control and the international subordination of human rights (Domenech, 2021, p. 47).

Betts broadens the discussion, proposing to distinguish levels of governance by type of migration: multilateral for forced migration, regional for irregular labor migration and bilateral or unilateral for highly skilled migration. According to this author, the main challenge is balancing security, the economy and human rights. Betts also observes that migration lacks a coherent institutional framework, resulting in “fragmented global governance” composed of diverse institutions and levels—multilateral, regional, bilateral and informal—and marked by the absence of effective regulatory oversight (Betts, 2011, p. 4). The author suggests that governance can consolidate international hegemony, legitimizing exclusionary practices under the guise of cooperation and

management. In this regard, Mezzadra and Neilson point out that concepts such as governance, governmentality and governmental regime, once understood critically, make it possible to comprehend some of the crucial political transformations linked to global processes that are crystallized at borders (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2016, p. 270).

The authors also note that governance is often presented within emerging migration and border regimes as a simple process of persuasion rather than coercion (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2016, p. 276). However, this is not the case, as in practice it often reproduces global asymmetries and power hierarchies. That is why they believe that only a critical perspective that integrates human rights, migration justice and real civil society participation can reorient this concept toward a truly inclusive mobility paradigm.

### *Governability*

The term governability, etymologically derived from the quality of being governable (Camou, 2016, p. 15), emerged as an analytical category in the 1970s, when O'Connor (1973) identified the fiscal crisis of the capitalist State as a challenge to its capacity to govern (Aguilar, 2007). This approach was reinforced by the Trilateral Report (1975), which analyzed the stability of industrial democracies amid growing social demands (González Villarreal, 2010, p. 9).

During the 1980s, the concept evolved from a situational diagnosis to a theoretical category, adopting a predominantly State-centric approach. As Aguilar (2007, p. 14) notes, this perspective was based on the assumption of a chaotic society that required state intervention for its regulation, and it overlooked the self-organizing capacities of civil society. This shift paved the way for debates on more participatory models of governability.

Camou (2016, pp. 17-18) identifies three essential components of the concept: effectiveness in policy implementation, institutional legitimacy and stability of the political system. These elements reflect its dual nature: on the one hand, they describe actual institutional capacities; on the other, they prescribe normative ideals, placing themselves between empirical analysis and political project.

In the contemporary context of human mobility, migration governability has gained relevance as an analytical framework. Domenech (2018) points out that its use in migration studies began in the 1990s, often overlapping with migration management, although with substantive differences. Mármora distinguishes three paradigmatic models: securitization, focused on national security and the criminalization of irregular migration; shared benefits, which are utilitarian in nature; and human development, oriented toward fundamental rights (Mármora, 2010, p. 76). Domenech expands this framework by identifying nine characteristic features, including "regulated openness", the cost-benefit approach, the binary classification of flows (desirable/undesirable), and the combination of directional control and humanitarian rhetoric (Domenech, 2021, p. 148).

Mezzadra and Neilson propose understanding securitization as a flexible assembly that regulates both inclusion and exclusion, and articulates humanitarian discourses with control practices (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2016, p. 298). Accordingly, migration becomes a testing ground for rethinking global governability: borders manage mobility, differentiate between people and create barriers of exclusion (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2016, p. 286).

There are significant theoretical and practical challenges here. Hence, Marmora warns of the gap between theory and practice, noting that “most States have not achieved effective governability” (Marmora, 2010, p. 86) due to factors such as political opportunism, restrictive nationalism, institutional opacity and the weak transfer of academic knowledge into public policy. Camou agrees, stating that the central problem of politics lies in “the effective/efficient exercise of power and the maintenance of the degree of governability over a society” (Camou, 2016, p. 24). In the field of migration, this logic translates into border control and securitization strategies, where effectiveness prevails over democratic legitimacy. Stang also observes that the notion of “safe migration” has a double meaning: protecting both migrants and national society from the potential risks associated with mobility (Stang, 2016, p. 94).

In this complex explanation, Mezzadra and Neilson introduce the idea of the “sovereign machine of governmentality”, in which border control combines state sovereignty, neoliberal rationality and humanitarian discourse (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2016, p. 310). Magliano (2015) complements this view from a Latin American perspective, emphasizing that state discourses on human rights coexist with practices of exclusion that particularly affect women and people in vulnerable situations.

From a critical perspective, Camou states that a system is more governable to the extent that it exhibits greater institutional adaptability and flexibility in the face of environmental changes (Camou, 2016, p. 27). Applied to migration, this implies that governability does not depend solely on controlling flows, but also on the institutional capacity to respond to changing phenomena, such as humanitarian crises or mass displacement. Along the same lines, Stang (2016) proposes rethinking migration governability from a perspective that recognizes migrants’ agency and subjectivity.

In this discussion, Mezzadra and Neilson state that migration’s autonomy must be highlighted in the face of control, noting that displacement should be understood as a social movement that continually overwhelms government attempts to control it. They speak of a “multiplication of borders” determined by zoning and security technologies that make global space anything but smooth (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2016, p. 308), where migrants refuse to be completely subordinated and act as political subjects who resist and reconfigure regimes of control.

Mezzadra and Neilson’s approaches are important in that they make it possible to understand migration not only as an object of institutional management or governance, but also as a terrain of resistance and political creation. Migrants and their organizations reconfigure power structures and challenge the supposed neutrality of governance, insofar as global borders allow the free movement of capital while restricting the mobility of bodies, thereby directly affecting migrants’ labor market integration (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2016, p. 46).

In summary, the concept of governability has evolved from its origins as a diagnosis of state crisis to a complex analytical category marked by tensions among institutional capacity, political legitimacy and social stability. Its application to the field of migration reveals the coexistence of security-based, utilitarian and human rights-centered approaches, although a significant gap remains between theoretical frameworks and their effective implementation. Political resistance, exclusionary nationalism and institutional deficiencies limit the construction of truly inclusive migration governability. Hence the need to rethink current models of governability and promote participatory approaches that place human dignity and social justice at the center of migration policies.

### *Similarities and differences*

At this point in the analysis, it is pertinent to note the convergence between migration governance and governability, as the two are closely interrelated: the former depends on the latter for its effectiveness. Governance promotes international cooperation and coordination among multiple actors, but its success requires a context of governability, understood as the state's capacity to implement policies legitimately and effectively. While governance defines the frameworks for coordination and participation, governability determines whether institutions have the resources, legitimacy and social acceptance necessary for those policies to materialize. In contexts of institutional weakness, administrative opacity or exclusionary nationalism, as is the case in several regions of Latin America, the lack of governability restricts the scope of governance, creating a gap between inclusive discourse and restrictive practices (Domenech, 2018). Thus, sound migration governance requires a solid foundation of governability that guarantees not only cooperation but also the real capacity of States to respond to migration challenges sustainably and legitimately.

On the other hand, while management is associated with the national sphere and the practical implementation of policies (border control, regularization, specific programs), governance is oriented toward the international political and economic sphere, where multilateral decisions and global agendas are formed (Mármora, 2010; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2016). The two are complementary: management provides the operational mechanisms, while governance defines the regulatory and cooperation frameworks. Nevertheless, as Geiger and Pécoud (2010) and Kalm (2010) warn, both can serve as tools of control and security subordinated to the strategic interests of States.

The transition from a hierarchical model of government to one based on relational governance, however, does not eliminate the tensions inherent in the exercise of power. This is where governability comes into play, understood as the capacity of political systems to maintain order, respond to social demands and ensure stability, even in scenarios of fragmentation of authority (Camou, 2016). Governance redefines the mechanisms of coordination and participation, but governability remains the structural condition that enables these mechanisms to be functional and sustainable over time.

Having characterized the concepts addressed, it can be said that there is a structural interdependence between them. Management, governance and governability

are complementary dimensions of the contemporary exercise of power. Management provides the technical and administrative tools for policy implementation; governance organizes the frameworks for cooperation between state and non-state actors; and governability ensures the cohesion, legitimacy and stability of the political and institutional system that underpins them. None of these dimensions can operate in isolation: without effective management, governance lacks operational capacity; without inclusive governance mechanisms, management becomes vertical and limited; and without governability, both lose stability and long-run viability.

These three concepts form an interdependent analytical triangle in the field of migration control. Management executes specific actions; governance designs frameworks for cooperation and coordination; and governability assesses their legitimacy and viability. Together, they reflect the complexity of managing human mobility in a globalized world, where the balance between control, rights and cooperation is essential. Nonetheless, this interrelation also reveals tensions: management and governance can be co-opted by security or technocratic agendas, while governability exposes the structural limitations of States to implement equitable policies. Therefore, rethinking these categories from critical approaches centered on human dignity is critical to building more just and democratic migration regimes.

Finally, it is necessary to clarify the differences between these three concepts, whose analytical distinction is key. Governability refers to the State's capacity to provide effective and legitimate responses; governance refers to multi-stakeholder coordination processes that facilitate cooperation and shared responsibility; and management refers to the practical and operational implementation of migration policies. In functional terms, management concerns the bureaucratic and administrative levels; governance encompasses discursive and intergovernmental processes; and governability focuses on institutional capacities and political legitimacy. As Geiger and Pécoud (2010) point out, these three approaches constitute forms of government with different actors, practices and analytical emphases. Additionally, they agree that all can operate as mechanisms of regulation and control, aimed at managing mobility rather than structurally transforming it.

### Political and institutional practices of management, governance and governability in migration

The political and institutional practices associated with the concepts of management, governance and governability reflect the different ways in which states and international organizations control, regulate and justify the control of human mobility. Collectively, these practices not only shape the frameworks for state action but also reveal the tensions between security and rights, effectiveness and legitimacy, showing how migration has become a strategic field of political dispute and power reconfiguration at the regional and global levels. Below are some examples of these practices in the region.

### *Regarding management*

In Latin America, the notion of migration management has translated into policies and institutional reforms that strengthen legal frameworks and border controls, in line with global models promoted by the IOM and other international agencies. Nevertheless, this adoption has not always been accompanied by critical reflection on its social and ethical impacts, nor by a real commitment to the principles of migration justice and human rights.

Within this framework, the States in the region have created and consolidated institutions specializing in migration, which intensify controls at airports and border crossings and formalize legal frameworks that legitimize mobility restrictions. These actions, presented as technical and necessary responses, reflect the progressive incorporation of management into migration control.

A prime example is the set of regularization programs and processes implemented in Mexico, Central America, and the Dominican Republic. A regional study by the IOM (2021) identified 57 regularization regimes in these countries, 24 of which were designed specifically to assist people in irregular situations. These programs establish administrative procedures, requirements, deadlines, fees and mechanisms for processing applications; in other words, they are concrete expressions of operational migration management. From a regional co-responsibility approach, these initiatives seek to strengthen the management of mixed flows in response to contemporary migration dynamics (IOM, 2021, p. iv).

In Mexico, migration policy has become increasingly restrictive, largely due to pressure from the United States. The deployment of the National Guard to control irregular flows reflects this trend, with more than 150 000 deportations and returns in 2023. Such measures, however, have been widely criticized for human rights violations (Amnistía Internacional, 2023). A more recent example is the temporary protection permit implemented in Panama by executive decree in 2023, aimed at people displaced by conflict or humanitarian crises. This instrument represents a practical application of migration management, designed with deadlines, requirements and procedures that seek to guarantee access to basic rights such as residence and work (Decreto Ejecutivo No. 112, 2023).

In the academic sphere, Stefanie Kron (2011) analyzes how the migration management strategy was implemented in the Central American isthmus through regulatory frameworks, transnational coordination, control mechanisms and institutional technical cooperation. The author highlights the Regional Conference on Migration as a space for regional management where States share standards and practices with international organizations. She also identifies concrete examples of this institutionalization in Costa Rican migration law and border operations.

In South America, Fernández-Rodríguez and Céleri (2024) examine how bureaucratic structures—ministries, immigration offices, control agencies—influence migration policy paradigms in Colombia and Ecuador, particularly in response to the Venezuelan displacement. Migration management is evident in the daily implementation of border controls, regularization processes, temporary permits and institutional monitoring mechanisms. According to the author, national bureaucracies act as agents of both change and reproduction of control, showing that migration management is not neutral but is influenced by political decisions, resources and

institutional hierarchies. In Colombia, the Temporary Protection Statute for Venezuelan Migrants (*Estatuto Temporal de Protección para Migrantes Venezolanos*) benefited more than 2.5 million Venezuelan migrants (Resolución 971 de 2021, 2021), while Haughton and Lewis point out that the Venezuelan crisis also accelerated the securitization of the Colombian-Venezuelan border, thereby justifying military presence in the name of national security (Haughton & Lewis, 2024, p. 150).

In the Southern Cone, Trabalón (2018) analyzes how Brazil, Chile and Argentina have regulated mobility through visa and border control policies that reinforce the administrative and discursive dimension of management. In Chile, the new immigration law of 2022 undermines migrant stabilization, directing their expectations toward leaving the country rather than integrating (Brower Beltramin, 2024), although it has been criticized for its security-focused approach. In Brazil, Portaria 666 authorized the summary deportation of persons considered “threats to the constitutional order”, which represented a setback in terms of rights (Vargas Turriago & Borelli, 2022). In Argentina, Law No. 25.871 (2003) had promoted regularization and a rights-based approach (Nicolao, 2010), but the reform of Decree 70/2017 during the Macri administration reinstated expedited removal procedures (Arlettaz, 2021). In Ecuador, Executive Decree 826 (2019) imposed passport and Verhu visa requirements for entry for the Venezuelan population, which drastically reduced regular entries (Acuerdo Ministerial N° 0000066, 2022).

These examples show that migration management, understood as an operational, administrative and discursive process, has become a key instrument of state control in Latin America. While regularization programs are among their most visible expressions, border control and permit issuance reflect considerable institutional discretion. Likewise, the discursive dimension—centered on the rhetoric of “order” and “security”—reinforces the legitimacy of these practices, while the global political dimension links national policies to international migration control agendas, demonstrating that management does not operate in isolation, but as part of a regional and global power network.

### *Regarding governance*

The concept of migration governance is implemented in Latin America through various multilateral mechanisms and institutional frameworks that aim to coordinate mobility policies at the regional level. A prime example is the Regional Platform for Interagency Coordination for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V), a multilateral governance mechanism co-led by IOM and UNHCR that brings together agencies, NGOs, and governments from at least 17 Latin American countries. The R4V coordinates regional refugee and migrant response plans that unify interventions in reception, protection, health, shelter and reintegration under common operational criteria (Plataforma Regional de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela R4V, 2024).

While national governments retain regulatory powers, the platform promotes minimum standards of protection and international cooperation, demonstrating that migration governance transcends the state level and requires coordination between multiple levels: international agencies, receiving States, transit countries and donors

(Plataforma Regional de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela R4V, 2024). This example embodies multilateral governance for forced migration, as defined by the IOM.

Likewise, the report *Institutions of Migration Governance in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Headrington et al., 2025) offers a comparative overview of migration institutionalization processes in the region. It identifies six fundamental pillars: (i) border control; (ii) protection and asylum; (iii) humanitarian assistance and development; (iv) social integration; (v) health and education; and (vi) employment and the economy. The document highlights that Latin American states have strengthened their regulatory frameworks, regulations, specialized institutions and regional cooperation mechanisms, thereby consolidating multilevel governance coordinated between national, regional and international levels.

This governance structure, however, is not without tensions. Acosta et al. warn that, amid the Venezuelan exodus, migration governance in South America has been fragmented and contradictory, combining discourses of welcome with securitization measures and selective border closures. According to the authors,

the legal responses to the arrival of Venezuelans have not been as open as they could have been if the Cartagena definition of refugee or the Mercosur Residence Agreement had been correctly applied by those States that have ratified it. (Acosta et al., 2019, p. 24)

An illustrative case of the institutionalization of migration governance is Mexico, which adopted the IOM's Migration Governance Indicators (MGI) methodology. This tool enables evaluation of regulatory quality, inter-institutional coordination, policy coherence and administrative transparency, which contribute to aligning state action with international standards (IOM, 2022). Mexico also actively participates in multilateral forums such as the Regional Conference on Migration and the Global Compact for Migration, although, as Domenech (2021) observes, tensions persist between national security policies and international human rights commitments.

In Colombia, migration governance is expressed through the Interagency Group for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, which operates under the R4V platform and is co-led by IOM and UNHCR. This mechanism coordinates policies between the State and multilateral and non-governmental organizations and coordinates shelter, regularization and humanitarian assistance services (Plataforma Regional de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela R4V, 2023). Colombia has also led the Quito Process, a regional effort with Ecuador, Peru and Chile to manage the Venezuelan exodus, though its implementation has been hampered by resource constraints and rising xenophobia (Freier & Parent, 2019).

Another relevant example is Argentina's *Plan Patria Grande* (2006-2010), a migration regularization program for citizens of the Southern Common Market (Mercosur) and associated States. This included regulatory frameworks, local administrative structures and social integration mechanisms (Perera & Velázquez, 2013). The plan provided for legal residence, access to labor rights, and regularized transit, becoming a model of intrazone regional governance (Cerrutti, 2009).

Moreover, countries such as Chile, Brazil and Argentina have actively participated in migration cooperation forums such as the Lima Declaration, the Organization of American States (OAS) Commission on Migration Affairs, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), and the Ibero-American Network of Migration Authorities (*Red Iberoamericana de Autoridades Migratorias*), which has promoted

the exchange of information and the harmonization of criteria (Estupiñán Serrano, 2013; Stang, 2016). In Brazil, Mercosur residence agreements have facilitated labor and social mobility for citizens of member countries (IOM, 2018).

These examples demonstrate that migration governance in Latin America is a heterogeneous process, conditioned by national contexts, institutional resources and international relations. Although multilateral cooperation has been crucial in sustaining coordinated responses, gaps in implementation and tensions between control and rights persist. Consequently, rethinking migration governance implies recognizing its political nature: a space of dispute where meanings are negotiated, interests are confronted and the place of migrants in the international order is redefined. Only truly inclusive governance, which prioritizes human dignity and solidarity-based cooperation, can offer fair and sustainable responses to the challenges of mobility in the 21st century.

### *Regarding governability*

The application of the concept of migration governability in Latin America presents a wide range of experiences, often marked by tensions between control and human rights. In South America, the Venezuelan exodus has revealed a clear trend toward migration control, with state responses prioritizing control over integration. León Rojas (2020), in her article “Migration governability: reinforcing the securitization model?” points out that several countries in the Southern Cone have implemented policies of partial border closures, reinforced controls and emergency measures to contain irregular flows. This approach, focused on national security, has generated administrative overload, loss of institutional legitimacy and instability in migration systems, confirming that governmental effectiveness does not always translate into democratic legitimacy (Mármora, 2010).

A common expression of this logic is the differentiation between “desirable” migration—highly skilled—and “undesirable” migration—irregular or low-skilled—which shapes institutional hierarchies of mobility (Domenech, 2018). This classification, together with the notion of “orderly migration”, acts as a normative principle that legitimizes state control and reproduces structural inequalities.

In Mexico, migration governability faces limitations due to institutional corruption and poor coordination between levels of government (Ramos, 2016). In Colombia, despite progress made in integrating the Venezuelan population, institutional capacity remains fragile and levels of informal employment remain high (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe [Cepal] & ParlAmericas, 2024). In Chile, the lack of political consensus and the rise of xenophobia have eroded the legitimacy of migration policies, creating a gap between discourse and practice (Concha Villanueva, 2018).

The case of Argentina illustrates a significant transition. Law No. 25.871 (2003) consolidated a model of migration governability oriented toward shared benefits and inclusion, promoting rights and institutional stability (Novick, 2004). Subsequently, however, the reform of Decree 70/2017 during the Mauricio Macri administration

and the recent policies of Javier Milei reversed that paradigm, reinstating security-oriented and exclusionary practices (Nicolao, 2010; Pereira & Clavijo, 2022). Similar phenomena were observed in Brazil, with the Bolsonaro government's summary deportation policies (Bandeira de Mello & Gomes Saraiva, 2024), and in Ecuador, where during Lenin Moreno's term in office, a human mobility emergency was declared in the provinces with the highest migratory transit (Ministerial Resolution No. 152), accompanied by restrictive measures in response to the increase in Venezuelan arrivals (Ramírez, 2020).

At the regional level, the formulation of Migration Governability Indicators (MGIs) by the IOM (2019) constitutes an institutional effort to standardize evaluation metrics. This monitoring system seeks to strengthen administrative efficiency, accountability and transparency—key elements of institutional legitimacy—. Systematic measurement enables stabilizing migration policies, reducing their reliance on temporary decisions and strengthening the system's sustainability.

The South American Migration Plan 2035, promoted by the Conferencia Suramericana sobre Migraciones (CSM, 2025), represents a milestone in the consolidation of regional migration governability. This plan proposes common regulatory frameworks, integrated border policies and governability with a focus on human rights and regional integration (CSM, 2023). Its objective is for countries to adopt cooperative mechanisms that are consistent with international standards and to consolidate governability that balances control, protection and institutional legitimacy.

In summary, a comparative analysis of migration management, governance and governability in the region shows that these categories are not confined to theory but are manifested in concrete practices with diverse outcomes depending on national contexts. Latin America oscillates between security models, integration initiatives and multilateral cooperation mechanisms, reflecting both the heterogeneity of state capacities and the centrality of international cooperation. Understanding migration from this triple perspective reveals not only the control and regularization mechanisms but also the ethical, normative and political dilemmas involved in states' attempts to coordinate order, development and human rights in today's world.

### *Regarding the social reaction*

An interesting contribution to the critical perspective on migration advanced by authors such as Mezzadra and Neilson is the idea that migrants are not passive entities in the face of management, governance and governability mechanisms, but rather respond as political subjects, resisting and reconfiguring control regimes. The best example of this is the various migrant caravans that set out from Central America in 2014.

This new phenomenon has transformed the dynamics of irregular or undocumented migration in North America, the demographic composition of migration flows and the behavior of illicit human trafficking networks on transit routes and at borders in North America, Central America and other countries (Correa-Cabrera & Koizumi, 2021). Migrant caravans became the best strategy for those who wanted to travel more safely through Mexican territory and did not have sufficient resources to pay the fees charged by human traffickers or organized crime.

Although it is not clear who has been behind the migrant caravans, the evidence suggests that these processes are not exclusively the result of spontaneous dynamics. On the contrary, they may be partly shaped by agendas or objectives promoted by certain state actors, organizations or countries (Correa-Cabrera & Koizumi, 2021).

Caravans can therefore be understood as a mechanism for collective action that emerges in response to the externalization and tightening of controls—a mobility tactic that seeks to redistribute risks and costs along the route (Correa-Cabrera & Koizumi, 2021). Ethnographic studies show that caravans “emerge” in response to the increasing difficulty and cost of irregular transit, operating as a form of protection through numbers, coordination and negotiation en route (Frank-Vitale, 2023). At the same time, by synchronizing bodies and times, the caravan disrupts the rhythms of migration governance—what Walker (2025) conceptualizes as a “time of pilgrimage” that disrupts control and surveillance mechanisms.

In operational terms, traveling in caravans creates economies of scale (for food, transportation and information), increases public visibility and facilitates dialogue with authorities and support organizations. Reports and fieldwork on the 2018-2019 caravans document how these contingents negotiated passage, accessed shelters, managed paperwork and mitigated abuses in the face of violence and criminalization of transit (IOM 2019). In summary, group density and media visibility act as partial shields against state and non-state actors, allowing progress to be made, since individualized mobility increases vulnerability.

At the structural level, caravans also operate as adaptive tactics within a cat-and-mouse game with States that deploy containment, deterrence and fragmentation (for example, pressure from the United States on Mexico and the Northern Triangle to stop caravans). The literature on public policy and regional security records how these state mechanisms—from checkpoints and containment on the southern border to breakup operations—reconfigure routes and push migrants toward new forms of coordination and communication (for example, messaging and social media) to circumvent closures and policy shocks (Hale & Ma, 2023).

Of course, the caravan does not eliminate risks: repression, criminal co-optation, fragmentation and lethal violence are still present, and some contingents are disbanded or attacked. Nevertheless, even these limitations confirm their strategic nature: when the individual route is too costly or dangerous, the caravan offers a greater probability of transit and relative protection, although never absolute (Torre Cantalapiedra, 2022). Thus, rather than anomalies, caravans are social strategies for mobility that emerge and reconfigure themselves in contexts of border closure.

As a final reflection, it can be said that the “social reaction” expressed in migrant caravans shows that migration processes cannot be understood solely through the institutional categories of management, governance and governability favored by States. On the contrary, this phenomenon shows that mobility also produces its own forms of organization, decision-making and collective action that overwhelm, strain and reconfigure official control mechanisms.

On the other hand, it can be observed that there is a connection between caravans and management, governance and governability. First, in terms of migration management, caravans demonstrate that migrants develop their own operational mechanisms to manage irregular transit: they distribute risks, share costs, protect themselves through collective visibility and negotiate collectively with authorities, shelters and support

organizations. In this way, the “social reaction” shows that migration management is structured from the bottom up, based on cooperation between migrants and pragmatic forms of non-institutional organization.

Secondly, the caravan reconfigures migration governance, understood as the network of actors, rules and procedures that regulate transnational movement. The collective action of migrants alters the rhythms and capacities of state mechanisms: it forces authorities to adapt their responses, generates unexpected negotiations and highlights the tension between control measures and humanitarian needs. By synchronizing bodies, times and trajectories, the caravan disrupts the multi-institutional logic.

Finally, in terms of migration governability, caravans highlight that states’ capacity to control flows is always limited, fragmented and negotiated. Caravans serve as an example of self-governance in mobility: a form of horizontal organization that responds to state closures, incarcerations and deterrents through collective strategies that increase the likelihood of moving forward. Even when they are repressed or dispersed, these dynamics show that state authority over mobility is never absolute and that migrants have the capacity to exercise agency, reorganizing routes, reinventing tactics and sustaining mobility despite attempts at containment and coercion.

Overall, what this social reaction reveals is that contemporary migration processes cannot be explained solely by the logic of security and control imposed from above. The caravans show that, in the face of securitization and the externalization of borders, a self-government of mobility is emerging, capable of challenging, negotiating and reconfiguring institutional mechanisms and decisions. This confirms that the management, governance and governability of migration are fields of dispute, where States attempt to regulate flows, but where migrants also produce their own forms of organization that question, strain and transform existing policies.

## Conclusions

This paper aimed to examine, based on specialized literature, the conceptual differences between management, governance and governability in the field of migration, as well as the role that States play in shaping them. This reflection arises from the observation that, both in academic production and in institutional discourse, these terms are often used interchangeably, which dilutes their semantic and practical differences and hinders understanding of the power dynamics that structure migration policies.

A comparative analysis of these notions in the context of Latin American border migration control shows that, far from being neutral categories, they operate as discursive and practical devices that legitimize restrictive policies and reproduce the asymmetries of the international system. Migration management, originally conceived as a technical and administrative instrument, has been co-opted by security-oriented approaches that, under the rhetoric of efficiency and order, justify the externalization of control and the exclusion of populations considered undesirable. Migration governance, presented as a model of multi-stakeholder cooperation, is strained by the predominance of state interests and by the security-development-human rights triad, which limits its transformative potential. For its part, governability highlights the gaps between state legitimacy and effectiveness, especially in contexts marked by exclusionary nationalism, institutional opacity and democratic fragility.

National responses to recent migration crises reflect the prevalence of security models, in which containment and control policies tend to prevail over rights-based or shared-benefit approaches. Consequently, neoliberal approaches to migration management, governance and governability are configured as mechanisms of control rather than protection, reproducing logics of exclusion, surveillance and the subordination of human rights to the imperatives of security and productivity.

Based on these findings, this study helps to demystify the supposed neutrality of these categories by showing that they constitute fields of political dispute marked by tensions between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces. The critical approaches—inspired by Foucauldian, Gramscian and autonomist perspectives—discussed reveal the tensions between institutional control and migrant resistance, where mobility appears not only as an object of governing, but also as an act of disobedience and the construction of new political subjectivities.

Overcoming the logic of securitization requires rethinking migration from a paradigm of global justice, centered on human dignity, solidarity and universal rights, beyond the technocratic frameworks of management, governance and governability. From this perspective, possibilities open up for structuring alternative approaches within the region that can challenge the managerialist paradigm and promote migration regimes grounded in social justice and free movement.

Finally, there is a need to move toward empirical research that examines how state and institutional practices are reappropriated and reinterpreted by migrant subjectivities and by the collective action of civil society. This analytical shift would not only enhance the academic debate but also contribute to the design of more inclusive, legitimate and sustainable public policies that balance security imperatives with the full recognition of migrants' human rights in Latin America.

## Acknowledgments

This article is part of a broader research project entitled “Latin American migration across the Darien border in the new century: characteristics, problems and alternatives”, funded by the UNAM's Program to Support Research and Technological Innovation Projects (PAPIIT).

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