

Humanitarian Governance and Migration Dynamics: Analyzing Policy Impacts at the United States-Mexico Border

Gobernanza humanitaria y dinámicas migratorias: análisis de los impactos de las políticas en la frontera Estados Unidos-México

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to analyze the role of humanitarian governance in the context of increasing human mobility at the U.S.-Mexico border during the period 2021-2023. The methodology used includes a focus group with experts to discuss regional dynamics and propose solutions. The main findings reveal an unprecedented level of human mobility, influenced by the policies of the Biden administration, such as humanitarian visas and Temporary Protected Status for Venezuelans. The study highlights the importance of effective coordination among diverse actors, although significant obstacles in communication and collaboration are identified, resulting in fragmented humanitarian responses. It concludes that the protection of human rights and cooperation between governmental and non-governmental organizations are essential for effective humanitarian governance in the Tijuana-San Diego region.

Key words: humanitarian governance; migratory mobility; Cali-Baja border; migration policies; multi-stakeholder coordination.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar el papel de la gobernanza humanitaria en el contexto del aumento de la movilidad humana en la frontera México-Estados Unidos durante el periodo 2021-2023. La metodología utilizada incluye un grupo focal con expertos para discutir las dinámicas regionales y proponer soluciones. Los principales resultados revelan una movilidad humana sin precedentes, influenciada por las políticas del gobierno de Biden, como visas humanitarias y el Estatus de Protección Temporal para venezolanos. El estudio destaca la importancia de la coordinación efectiva entre actores diversos, aunque se identifican obstáculos significativos en la comunicación y colaboración, resultando en respuestas humanitarias

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fragmentadas. Se concluye que la protección de derechos humanos y la cooperación entre organizaciones gubernamentales y no gubernamentales son esenciales para una gobernanza humanitaria eficaz en la región de Tijuana-San Diego.

Palabras clave: gobernanza humanitaria; movilidad migratoria; frontera Cali-Baja; políticas migratorias; coordinación multiactor.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to analyze the role of humanitarian governance in the context of increasing human mobility on the U.S.-Mexico border during the period 2021-2023.¹ The border area under study is characterized by its complexity in terms of human mobility, encompassing diverse social, economic, and cultural implications, as well as situations of violence that result in multiple vulnerabilities (Solano and Massey, 2022). This research provides an analytical framework from a sociological perspective, examining social interactions and underlying structures to understand and address the social phenomena related to migration in this border area (Sassen, 2007; Massey et al., 2000).

This study focuses on the specific challenges of human mobility in the border region of Tijuana, BC, Mexico, and San Diego, CA, USA. Noted for its high number of apprehensions by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (USCBP), this crossing point is crucial to understanding migration dynamics in the region (USCBP, 2023b). Irregular migration frequently exposes individuals to risks and vulnerabilities (Pincock, et al., 2021). In this context, humanitarian governance plays a critical role by focusing on protecting human rights, providing adequate reception conditions, ensuring access to basic services, and aligning migration policies with international human rights principles (Betts et al., 2017).

Humanitarian governance provides a framework for effectively addressing human mobility, emphasizing the importance of coordination and collaboration between governmental, non-governmental, and civil society entities to comprehensively manage humanitarian issues (Betts, 2011). This framework centers on humanitarian assistance, protection of vulnerable populations, and coordinated efforts to mitigate the impacts of humanitarian emergencies related to human mobility, based on principles such as humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and universality (Betts et al., 2017).

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In the contemporary global migration landscape, the U.S.-Mexico border emerges as a critical epicenter of challenges and opportunities in the management of human mobility. This study utilizes humanitarian governance to analyze and understand the complex dynamics of migration in this unique context. The border region between Tijuana, BC, Mexico, and San Diego, CA, USA, offers a unique setting to explore the interaction between migration policies, humanitarian practices, and human rights imperatives. This paper critically reviews humanitarian governance in action, assessing its effectiveness and efficiency in managing the largest human mobility in North America's history, with a particular emphasis on multidimensional approaches that encompass rights, vulnerability, security, and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

KEY FINDINGS ON THE BORDER AND MIGRATION CONTEXT

The Tijuana-San Diego region is a crucial convergence point for national and international migrants seeking employment opportunities, leading to a constant flow of people into this border area (Elkin, 2018). This continuous influx has not only impacted the local economy but also posted significant challenges in terms of migration and humanitarian management (Zamora Salazar and Casillas, 2024).

The Tijuana-San Diego border is pivotal for studying migration phenomena due to its high concentration of migrants and socioeconomic complexity. Between 2021 and 2023, the region experienced unprecedented migratory flows, transforming it into a living laboratory for humanitarian management of migratory mobility (Mariscal Nava and Torre Cantalapiedra, 2024). This steady influx has created a visible economic dynamic in the city's streets, where many migrants work as street vendors and in other informal jobs, significantly contributing to the local economy (Vazquez and Gutiérrez, 2022).

The region is characterized by a sector of cross-border workers engaged in activities within the U.S. market, significantly contributing to the regional economy, particularly in construction, services, and the informal sector (Reyes Santos and Saldaña Téllez, 2024). However, over the past decades, intensified efforts by the U.S. government to control the border with Mexico and deter irregular crossings have forced migrants into more dangerous areas, relying on coyotes to cross clandestinely (Aviña Cerecer, 2020).

The profile of migrants has notably shifted from predominantly Mexican to an increasing number of Central Americans and individuals from other nationalities seeking asylum in the United States. During Donald Trump's administration, policies were implemented to hinder asylum access, such as the Migrant Protection

Protocols (MPP) and the requirement to seek asylum in third countries before reaching the U.S. (Barrachina, et al., 2023). The Title 42 policy, enacted during the Covid-19 pandemic, has prevented migrants from applying for asylum, violating national and international protection regulations (Mariscal Nava and Torre Cantalapiedra, 2024).

Despite expectations of favorable changes for migrants with Joe Biden's arrival, migration policies have faced obstacles, and restrictive measures like MPP and Title 42 remain in place (Ramos and Barrachina, 2023). Additionally, differences in treatment based on nationality have been observed, with cases of differential access for Russian, Ukrainian, and Venezuelan migrants, raising criticisms of discrimination and racism in migration policies (Rocha, et al., 2023).

Current migration policies at the Tijuana-San Diego border present significant challenges for humanitarian governance. Policies often prioritize security over human rights, creating tensions in implementing humanitarian approaches and hindering humanitarian organizations' access to vulnerable populations. The Title 42 policy has prevented migrants from applying for asylum, violating national and international protection standards. Humanitarian governance seeks to balance security concerns with humanitarian solutions, promoting international cooperation and a rights-based approach.

Deportations from the United States have significantly impacted migration dynamics in Tijuana. During the presidencies of Barack Obama and Donald Trump, high deportation figures were observed, with Baja California being one of the most affected states. The arrival of Central American caravans in Tijuana at the end of 2018 presented a new challenge in migration management (Barrachina, et al., 2023). These groups, driven by violence in their home countries, arrived without fully understanding the asylum application process, overwhelming local authorities, and necessitating organized civil society intervention.

The enactment of the Law for the Attention, Protection of Rights, and Support for Migrants in Baja California in 2021 reflects efforts to protect migrants' rights in the region. However, greater coordination among various government levels is needed for effective migration management (Rocha and Juárez, 2024). The Tijuana City Council has taken steps to address migration, such as creating the Municipal Directorate for Migrant Assistance and approving the Migrant Population Assistance Protocol in 2022 (Rocha, et al., 2023). These actions aim to ensure a human rights approach and coordinate assistance for people in mobility contexts.

Coordination among government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations is crucial but challenging, especially regarding vulnerable groups. The lack of coherence and effective communication among these actors results in fragmented and ineffective humanitarian responses. The precarious situation in makeshift camps,

such as the one formed at the San Ysidro port of entry in 2021, highlights the need for better coordination and provision of basic services.

Collaboration between the Tijuana City Council and international organizations such as UNHCR and IOM has been crucial in providing support to migrants in the region (Rocha, et al., 2023). Programs for labor inclusion, psychological care, and economic support for people in mobility situations have been established, demonstrating a joint effort to improve migrants' conditions in the city (Hernández and Camarena-Ojinaga, 2024). However, the conditions for migrants in Tijuana would be even more precarious without the help of NGOs.

U.S. migration policies, like the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), have increased wait times for asylum seekers, forcing many to remain in Tijuana (Rocha and Juárez, 2024). Mexican migration policy has also heightened control measures at its southern border, pushing migrants to take more dangerous routes (Ramos, et al., 2022). Migrants in Tijuana face significant risks, including violence, extortion, and kidnapping. The city is a hostile environment where organized crime and corruption are common. Migrants in transit suffer abuse from both authorities and criminal groups (Aviña Cerecer, 2020).

Migrants in the Tijuana-San Diego border region face precarious living conditions, including exposure to environmental contaminants. Air and water pollution, exacerbated by proximity to maquiladoras and energy plants, negatively impacts migrants' health, who often reside in makeshift camps or shelters without adequate access to basic services (Honkanen, 2020). Local organizations, such as "Casa del Migrante," play a crucial role in providing essential services, though they face constant resource shortages and limited governmental support.

Limited local resources hinder the adequate protection and care of migrants. Collaboration with international organizations like UNHCR and IOM is essential to aid and develop specific programs for migrants in Tijuana (Rocha, et al., 2023; Rocha and Juárez, 2024). Despite the existence of laws and protocols, the implementation and scope of these policies are insufficient. The processes for obtaining refugee status or complementary protection are slow, and many migrants abandon their applications due to a lack of resources and support (Mariscal and Torre Cantalapiedra, 2024).

The pandemic exacerbated already difficult conditions for migrants, with increased border control and reduced cross-border cooperation. Migrants in transit were particularly vulnerable during this period, facing disorganization and inadequate care.

Environmental injustice and racism disproportionately affect marginalized communities on both sides of the border. These communities, often low-income and composed of ethnic minorities, are most affected by pollution and inadequate infrastructure to manage toxic waste and sanitation (Honkanen, 2020). Case studies in

Tijuana neighborhoods, such as Colonia Chilpancingo and Campestre Murúa, show how proximity to maquiladoras and exposure to toxic waste have caused significant health problems, including respiratory diseases and cancer (Honkanen, 2020). These communities also face economic and infrastructure challenges that exacerbate their vulnerability.

The main findings regarding the border and migration context in Tijuana can be summarized as follows: the growing complexity and diversity of the migrant population, restrictive policies that increase risks for migrants, and the insufficiency of local resources to address these challenges. However, the collaboration between international agencies and local measures has proven crucial in improving migrants' conditions. In summary, Tijuana faces significant challenges in migration management but has also implemented important measures and collaborations to protect rights and provide support to people in mobility contexts in the border region.

HUMANITARIAN GOVERNANCE AT THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

At the threshold of the 21st century, the U.S.-Mexico border has become a powerful symbol of the challenges and dynamics of modern migration. This scholarly work delves into this region where human histories, migration policies, and humanitarian efforts intersect, exploring the concept and application of humanitarian governance in the context of migratory mobility. From 2021 to 2023, this border area has not only witnessed an unprecedented migratory flow but has also become a living laboratory for examining how these phenomena are managed from a humanitarian perspective.

The U.S.-Mexico border is often depicted as a frontline where the complexities of migration are most visible, reflecting broader global patterns of movement and displacement. This area serves as a critical testing ground for policies that aim to balance national security with humanitarian concerns. The surge in migration has brought to light both the strengths and weaknesses of existing frameworks, prompting a reevaluation of strategies to manage such flows more humanely and effectively.

Migration along the U.S.-Mexico border represents a multifaceted phenomenon, influenced by economic, political, and social factors (Bustamante, 1972). This study examines how migration policies, border security, and community dynamics on both sides of the border define the migration experience and present significant challenges to effective management and appropriate governance (Solano and Massey, 2022). The Tijuana-San Diego border has been a focal point of these dynamics.

The historical and socio-political context of the Tijuana-San Diego border region reveals a microcosm of broader migratory trends. This area not only highlights the immediate impacts of migration policies but also underscores the long-term social and economic effects on both sides of the border. By focusing on this specific region, the study provides valuable insights into the intricacies of border management and the lived experiences of migrants navigating this complex landscape.

Irregular migration exposes individuals to significant risks and vulnerabilities (Pincock, et al., 2021). In this context, humanitarian governance plays a critical role in protecting human rights, providing adequate reception conditions, ensuring access to basic services, and aligning migration policies with international human rights principles (Betts et al., 2017). This approach emphasizes the necessity of balancing security and humanitarian concerns.

Humanitarian governance requires a multifaceted approach that not only addresses immediate needs but also fosters long-term resilience among migrant populations. This involves implementing policies that safeguard fundamental rights and promote sustainable livelihoods. By integrating humanitarian principles into border management, authorities can mitigate the adverse effects of irregular migration while promoting stability and security in the region.

The primary challenge of humanitarian governance lies in managing diverse dimensions, actors, and social demands (Geddes et al., 2019). Effective border management requires inter-agency coordination, comprehensive planning, and efficient resource management. These elements are essential to addressing the complex humanitarian challenges at the border (Moore, 2011).

Achieving effective humanitarian governance necessitates a collaborative effort among various stakeholders, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and international bodies. This collaboration must be underpinned by a shared commitment to transparency, accountability, and the protection of human rights. By fostering a coordinated and inclusive approach, stakeholders can enhance their collective capacity to respond to the multifaceted challenges of migration:

- *Inter-agency coordination*: effective border management involves facilitating coordination among various agencies and organizations, both at the national and local levels, involved in responding to humanitarian needs. A key challenge is reconciling the varied priorities of these actors (Wolfe and Gertler, 2004).
- *Comprehensive planning*: planning must integrate elements such as security, health, humanitarian assistance, and development. A significant challenge is planning with a long-term vision while addressing immediate short-term needs (Ambrosini, 2022).

- *Resource management*: efficient resource allocation is crucial to addressing humanitarian challenges. This involves ensuring the effective use of financial, logistical, and human resources to meet the needs of the most vulnerable (Wolfe and Gertler, 2004).

Effective collaboration among governments, NGOs, and international agencies is crucial but challenging, especially concerning vulnerable groups (Kainz and Betts, 2021). Ensuring that displaced persons are treated with dignity and respect requires managing a multidimensional agenda that encompasses rights, mobility, vulnerability, and normativity.

Coordination among these diverse actors is often complicated by differing priorities and operational mandates. Governments may prioritize border security and control, while NGOs and international agencies often focus on humanitarian aid and the protection of migrants' rights. Bridging these divergent priorities requires ongoing dialogue, mutual understanding, and the establishment of common goals that align with both humanitarian and security concerns.

At the Tijuana-San Diego border, humanitarian governance faces significant challenges in coordinating actors and protecting human rights. Despite efforts to integrate security and humanitarian aspects, migration management is often hampered by a lack of coherence and effective communication among government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations. This results in fragmented and ineffective humanitarian responses.

One of the critical issues is the inconsistent application of policies and practices across different jurisdictions and organizations. This inconsistency can lead to gaps in service provision and protection for migrants, exacerbating their vulnerabilities. Effective humanitarian governance requires standardized protocols and robust communication channels to ensure that all actors are working towards the same objectives.

The challenges at the Tijuana-San Diego border mirror the humanitarian crisis in other northern Mexican border cities, such as Nogales, Ciudad Juárez, and Piedras Negras. These cities face additional challenges such as housing, food, health, and violence, highlighting the need for effective and compassionate humanitarian governance throughout the border region.

The broader implications of these challenges emphasize the necessity for comprehensive regional strategies that address the root causes of migration and provide sustainable solutions. Collaborative efforts should include not only immediate relief and protection measures, but also long-term initiatives aimed at improving economic opportunities, social integration, and community resilience in both host and transit countries.

In conclusion, the Tijuana-San Diego border represents a microcosm of the broader humanitarian challenges faced along the U.S.-Mexico frontier. Effective humanitarian governance at this juncture necessitates a multifaceted approach that incorporates robust coordination among various actors, adherence to human rights principles, and responsive measures to the immediate needs of migrant populations. However, the persistence of fragmented responses and the complexity of integrating security with humanitarian imperatives highlight the need for more cohesive and sustained efforts.

Moving forward, it is essential to delve deeper into the multifaceted nature of migration and the policy challenges that arise from it. The humanitarian crisis observed over the past three years in border cities such as Tijuana, Nogales, Ciudad Juarez, and Piedras Negras underscores the urgent need for comprehensive and compassionate governance strategies. These areas have faced significant social and logistical implications due to the high influx of migrants, and the next section will explore these issues in detail, examining how restrictive immigration policies, violence, lack of access to basic services, and other factors contribute to the vulnerabilities and risks faced by migrant communities.

By addressing these complex challenges through a detailed analysis of policy responses and their impacts, this study aims to propose actionable solutions that can enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian governance at the U.S.-Mexico border and beyond.

THE MULTIFACETED NATURE OF MIGRATION AND POLICY CHALLENGES

Over the past three years, border cities in northern Mexico, such as Tijuana, Nogales, Ciudad Juarez and Piedras Negras, have experienced a humanitarian crisis. This situation, exacerbated by the high number of migrants detained by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (USCBP, 2023a), has generated significant social implications, including housing, food, and health demands, as well as vulnerabilities, violence, exclusion, and human trafficking, among other effects (Pérez-Tejada, 2023).

In this scenario, humanitarian governance faces the challenge of reducing the vulnerability of migrant communities along the U.S.-Mexico border. Associated problems include:

- *Restrictive immigration policies:* these policies have increased the number of migrants, including families and unaccompanied minors, who resort to dangerous routes and smugglers to cross the border, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and security risks (SRE b, 2023).

- *Violence and security*: violence related to drug trafficking and organized crime on the U.S.-Mexico border puts migrant communities in situations of high risk and exploitation (Ramos and Barrachina, 2023).
- *Lack of access to basic services*: Migrant communities often face barriers in accessing essential services, which increases their vulnerability and negatively affects their quality of life.
- *Challenges in humanitarian care*: the provision of humanitarian assistance is hampered by logistical, legal, and political barriers, hindering the effectiveness of aid (Betts, 2009).
- *Discrimination and stigmatization*: migrant communities, particularly those of Central American and African origin, face discrimination and stigmatization, which hinders their integration and access to services and opportunities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).
- *Changing migration flows*: the variability and unpredictability of migration flows, including African and Chinese migration, complicates the planning and implementation of appropriate policies and programs (USCBP, 2023a).
- *Binational cooperation*: migration management and humanitarian response require close cooperation between Mexico and the United States, often hampered by political and diplomatic challenges (Pérez-Tejada, 2022; Solano and Massey, 2022).
- *Pressure on humanitarian organizations*: these organizations face demands to aid an increasing number of migrants and refugees, often exceeding their resources and capacities.

To address these challenges, humanitarian governance must promote cooperation between local, border and cross-border actors, implement comprehensive approaches to migration management, strengthen legal and policy frameworks to protect migrants' rights, and foster awareness and social inclusion in receiving communities (Betts, 2009). A holistic approach that addresses both the causes and impacts of migration, prioritizing the protection of the human rights of the most vulnerable communities, is essential.

The situation in Mexico's northern border cities, such as Tijuana, Nogales, Ciudad Juarez and Piedras Negras, has been critical over the past three years. The high number of migrants detained by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (USCBP) has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis, generating significant social implications. These challenges include demands for shelter, food, health and addressing vulnerabilities such as violence, exclusion and human trafficking. Humanitarian governance in this context faces the crucial task of mitigating the vulnerability of migrant communities,

with particular attention to restrictive immigration policies, violence, lack of access to basic services, humanitarian care, discrimination, stigmatization and the variability of migration flows.

To manage these challenges, robust binational cooperation between Mexico and the United States is essential, as well as effective coordination among local, border and cross-border actors. Humanitarian governance should focus on comprehensive approaches to migration management, strengthening legal frameworks, protecting migrants' rights, and promoting awareness and social inclusion in receiving communities. This holistic approach, which addresses both the causes and impacts of migration and prioritizes the protection of human rights of the most vulnerable, is fundamental to an effective response.

This humanitarian crisis in border cities is directly linked to the broader migration dynamics along the U.S.-Mexico border. The significant human mobility observed during President Biden's administration, with millions of encounters with irregular migrants, reflects the complexity and magnitude of migration in this region. The increase in non-regional migrants and the need for effective policies to address these migration flows are critical to understanding the current and future situation on the southwest border of the United States.

COORDINATION AND STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT IN HUMANITARIAN GOVERNANCE

The migration dynamics along the U.S.-Mexico border have been characterized by significant human mobility. During President Biden's administration, USCIBP recorded 6,830,287 million encounters with irregular migrants (USCIBP, 2023b), from January 2021 to October 2023. In the period from October 2021 to September 2022, U.S. immigration authorities apprehended 2,378,444 migrants (USCIBP, 2022). For the current fiscal year, which runs from October 2022 to September 2023, 2,475,669 encounters have been recorded at the U.S. southwest border (USCIBP, 2023a), making fiscal year 2023 the second highest number of encounters, second only to 2022.

Within this migratory flow, there has been a notable increase in non-regional migrants from countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Haiti, who represent 1,019,419 (49.83 percent) of the total in fiscal year 2023, surpassing migrants from Mexico (579,146, equivalent to 28.31 percent) and the Northern Triangle countries (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador), which total 447,273 (21.86 percent) (USCIBP, 2023a). Most of these migrants cross the southern border of Mexico bound for the United States (Solano and Massey, 2022).

For a general overview, the image below is a visual report from U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), specifically U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) and Office of Field Operations (OFO), which presents data on apprehensions, inadmissible volumes and removals under Title 8 and Title 42 for fiscal year to date (FYTD) 2024. It shows a total of 188,778 Title 8 encounters for the entire USBP for the month of October. The distribution of these encounters is detailed in a map of the Southwest land border sector and a corresponding list, with most encounters occurring in Tucson (55,224), followed by Rio Grande Valley (32,107), and San Diego (29,904), with the lowest numbers reported in El Centro (2,049) and Laredo (2,827).

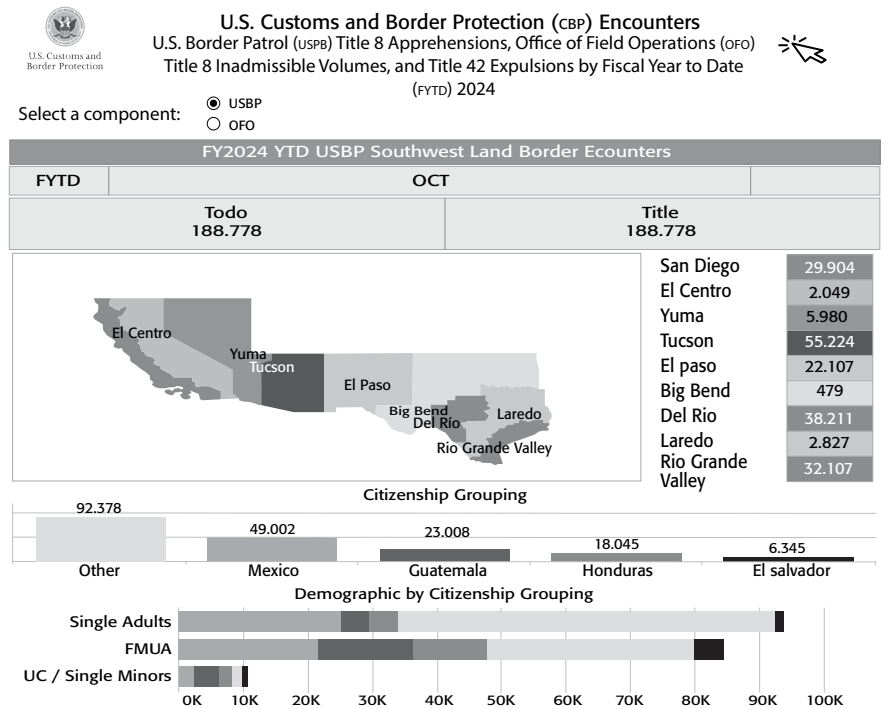
The chart also includes a breakdown of encounters by citizenship groupings. The “Other” citizenship category has the highest number with 92,378 encounters, followed closely by citizens of Mexico with 49,002. Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador also stand out with 23,008, 18,045 and 6,345 encounters respectively. This information is crucial to identify migration trends and patterns by nationality, which can influence CBP’s policy and operational decisions.

At the bottom of the chart, a demographic comparison by citizenship groupings is presented. Single Adults represent the majority with 93,650 encounters, followed by Families (FMUA) with 84,412, and Unaccompanied /Unmarried Children (UC) with 10,716. These numbers provide a clear picture of the demographic composition of individuals encountered at the border, which may have significant implications for CBP’s processing and housing resources, as well as for immigration policies and humanitarian intervention strategies. The source of this data is the USBP and OFO month-end report for the fiscal year to date and the cutoff date for the data is November 1, 2023.

In recent decades, and particularly in the last three years under the administration of President Joe Biden, the U.S.-Mexico border region has faced a humanitarian governance crisis. This situation has been reflected in the vulnerability of families, unaccompanied minors, and women with minors, marked by insecurity, human rights vulnerability and concentrations in Mexican border communities (Gil-Everaert, Masferrer and Chávez, 2023). This context is linked to the highest recorded mobility -nearly seven million encounters- in the history of border relations in North America (SRE a, 2023). Given this, it is essential to manage humanitarian governance that is multidimensional, multiactor and multilevel, addressing both irregular and documented human mobilities.

The Tijuana-San Diego border stands out as an epicenter of both irregular and documented migration. The question arises as to how to effectively manage both forms of migration under a humanitarian governance approach. Specifically, irregular migration can generate tensions at border ports, potentially affecting commercial

crossings of cars, people, and trade, which on a typical day can include about 60,000 people in both directions at the Tijuana-San Diego border (USCBP, 2023b). The management of irregular migration has involved the relocation of Customs and Border Protection personnel for both border control and administrative handling of immigration applications, impacting the efficiency of legal cross-border crossing (Pérez-Tejada, 2022). Collaboration between Mexico and the United States is crucial to address irregular migration, promoting international cooperation, sharing responsibilities and resources to manage migration flows more effectively.



Source: USBP and OFO month end reporting for FY24TD. Data is current as of 11/6/2023.

Managing irregular and documented migration at the Tijuana-San Diego border under a humanitarian governance approach requires a balance between security and humanity. It is vital to ensure access to legal processes and services for documented migrants, while addressing irregular migration with respect for human rights (Solano and Massey, 2022). A coordinated and sensitive approach to the situation of migrants can result in more effective and humane migration management in this border region.

Migrants arriving in this border region face numerous challenges and obstacles in accessing policies with a humanitarian governance approach (Olvera Cáñez, 2022). Among the main problems are the limitations in access to protection and asylum, whether due to the complexity of the processes, restrictions in migration policies or lack of information about their rights.

The complex dynamics of migration along the U.S.-Mexico border, marked by the need to balance security with humanity, are further complicated by the multiple challenges faced by migrants along their journey and during their stay in border areas. These challenges not only reflect the difficulties inherent in irregular migration, but also highlight shortcomings in existing humanitarian governance policies and practices. Among the most pressing problems are:

- *Limited access to protection and asylum:* migrants face difficulties in accessing asylum and protection procedures, either due to the complexity of the process, restrictions imposed by migration policies or lack of information about their rights (Lucero, 2023).
- *Unsafe conditions and health risks:* During their journey and while awaiting the resolution of their migration processes, migrants are exposed to significant health risks and precarious conditions in shelters or makeshift camps. The absence of access to adequate medical care can exacerbate pre-existing health problems (Olvera Cáñez, 2022) or lead to the emergence of new diseases (Washington Office Latin American, 2020). In addition, migrants, especially women, children and people in vulnerable situations, are at high risk of being victims of violence, abuse, exploitation and human trafficking during their migratory journey (Solano and Massey, 2022). Even the conditions in certain shelters may expose them to additional risks.
- *Detention and family separation:* Immigration policies often result in the detention of migrants, including minors. These practices can lead to family separation, generating considerable emotional and psychological impacts (Pérez-Tejada, 2023).
- *Linguistic and cultural barriers:* In addition, migrants face significant barriers due to lack of access to services in their language or cultural practices that are not understood or respected, which may hinder their integration or access to necessary resources (Lucero, 2023).
- *Vulnerability to labor exploitation:* labor exploitation is another critical challenge for many migrants, who, due to their precarious migration status, are in a vulnerable position vis-à-vis employers (Olvera Cáñez, 2022) who may not respect their labor rights (Solano and Massey, 2022).

- *Limitations on mobility and access to legal remedies:* Likewise, restrictions on mobility and lack of access to legal remedies or advice (Olvera Cádiz, 2022) limit the ability of migrants to seek protection or appeal adverse decisions in their immigration cases (Gil-Everaert, et al., 2023).

The current landscape at the U.S.-Mexico border shows a significant discrepancy with the fundamental principles of humanitarian governance, which include humanity, impartiality, and respect for human rights. The implementation of these principles in migration policies should have an impact on the comprehensive protection of migrants, regardless of their legal status, and on addressing the root causes of migration (Betts et al., 2017). However, this humanitarian approach faces limitations in its universal application within the migration network. Human smugglers and other illicit actors perpetuate acts of violence against migrants at different stages of their journey to Mexico or the United States, which represents a significant challenge for humanitarian governance in the region (Solano and Massey, 2022).

This section of the article highlights the intense human mobility along the U.S.-Mexico border during the Biden administration, with a total of 6,830,287 million irregular migrant encounters recorded by the USCIB from January 2021 to October 2023. The analysis shows that most deportations have been concentrated in the southwest of the border, especially in cities such as El Paso, San Diego, Yuma, Tucson and Calexico, due to less restrictive immigration policies compared to the U.S. eastern border.

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This high human mobility and the variability in migratory flows have exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in Mexico's northern border cities, such as Tijuana, Nogales, Ciudad Juárez and Piedras Negras. The situation has generated significant demands in housing, food, health and has increased vulnerability to violence, exclusion and human trafficking. These challenges require effective humanitarian governance management that addresses both irregular and documented human mobility at the border, emphasizing the comprehensive protection of migrants and addressing the root causes of migration.

COMPLEXITIES AND CHALLENGES OF HUMANITARIAN GOVERNANCE AT THE TIJUANA-SAN DIEGO BORDER

The migration dynamics at the U.S.-Mexico border have been characterized by a high volume of human mobility, with 6,830,287 million encounters of irregular migrants apprehended by the USCIBP during President Biden's term, from January 2021 to October 2023. It has been observed that 60 percent of deportations have been concentrated in the southwest of the U.S.-Mexico border, in cities such as El Paso, San Diego, Yuma, Tucson, and Calexico (USCIBP, 2023b). This concentration is due to less restrictive immigration policies compared to the eastern U.S. border, where there is greater border control, promoted by figures such as Texas Governor Greg Abbott.

In particular, the Tijuana-San Diego crossing recorded 29,904 apprehensions in October 2023, representing the fourth highest volume of apprehensions at the U.S.-Mexico border, trailing only Rio Grande Valley, TX; Del Rio, TX; and Tucson, AZ (USCIBP, 2023a, 2023b). This 67.3 percent increase compared to October 2022 reflects the second largest increase in apprehensions, with Tucson, AZ, standing out at 140 percent (USCIBP, 2023a, 2023b).

The various humanitarian, work, asylum, refugee, refugee and family reunification visa programs promoted by the U.S. federal government have been a key factor in regional and Latin American migratory mobility (USDOS, 2023). A significant example is the eligibility of more than 472,000 Venezuelans for Temporary Protected Status in the United States, granting them protection from deportation and the ability to work (USDOS, 2023). These programs reflect an orderly, safe, and humane approach to migration, different from that of President Trump's previous administration, and are part of an initiative to manage increasing human mobility with a humanitarian approach (USCIBP, 2023b).

Managing the humanitarian crisis at the Tijuana-San Diego border presents significant challenges for humanitarian governance. Among the main challenges is limited reception capacity and resources. The large influx of migrants and asylum seekers puts pressure on available resources for humanitarian care.² The reduced capacity of shelters and medical services, coupled with shortages of food and other essential resources, presents a challenge to ensure dignified conditions for those awaiting processing of their claims (Lucero, 2023). In this context, civil society organizations have played a central role, operating with some restrictions, but achieving

² In the early 1980s, when the city of Tijuana received the first wave of migrants bound for the United States, the demands existed, but in smaller numbers. The border line lacked greater surveillance and control, which allowed thousands of migrants to cross into the United States (Pérez Canchola, 2023).

effective management and relative cooperation with local and state instances (Olvera Cádiz, 2022) of the city of Tijuana (Mendoza Cota, 2022) (see table 1).

Table 1
ASPECTS OF HUMANITARIAN GOVERNANCE IN TIJUANA, BC

Governance	Trend
Inter-institutional cooperation	Median
Multiactor Coordination	Median
Cross-border collaboration	High
Multilevel agenda	Median
Support (food, clothing)	High
Support for shelters	High
Legal advice	Median
Health care	Download
Rights agenda	Median
Communication support	High
Innovation initiatives	Download
Adaptability of environments	Median

Source: Own elaboration based on Betts (2011).

Coordination among humanitarian actors, including governmental and non-governmental organizations and international agencies, is critical to effectively address the migration crisis (Pérez-Tejada, 2023). However, this coordination is often hampered by logistical, bureaucratic and communication challenges, thus hindering a unified and agile humanitarian response (Solano and Massey, 2022). The absence of clear leadership among social organizations leads to independent actions and relatively limited inter-institutional cooperation (Olvera Cádiz, 2022). The local government of Tijuana generates certain collaborative actions (Lucero, 2023), but has not assumed a central role, due to the lack of financial resources and because the migration problem is a federal issue, together with the presence of organized crime in migration control.

Regarding the protection of vulnerable groups, such as women, children and people with special medical needs, they are disproportionately affected by the crisis (Lucero, 2023). Ensuring their protection and adequate care is a constant challenge, exacerbated by precarious conditions in reception centers and exposure to risks such as exploitation and human trafficking (FitzGerald and Arar, 2018). Social organizations,

both local and U.S., play a crucial role in the city of Tijuana,³ providing essential support to these vulnerable groups (Pérez Canchola, 2023).

Psychosocial support and mental health are critical for many migrants who have experienced trauma during their journey. However, the capacity to provide these services effectively is limited, which negatively impacts the emotional and mental health of migrants (Rauhut and Laine, 2023). The urgency of migration to the United States often marginalizes attention to these problems, compounded by the pandemic and chronic challenges faced by vulnerable groups (Bustamante, 2023).

Migration policies and political rhetoric have a significant impact on the humanitarian response. Changes in migration policies, lack of clarity in asylum processes, and uncertainty in government decisions can exacerbate the crisis and hinder the orderly management of migration flows (Pincock, et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the CBPOne mobile app has facilitated the orderly and safe crossing of more than 70,000 migrants as asylum seekers from the Tijuana border to the United States since January 2023 (Pérez-Tejada, 2023).

Cross-border challenges and international cooperation are crucial for a coherent and effective humanitarian response⁴. Differences in approaches and policies between Mexico and the United States, along with the growing influence of organized crime, can hinder this cooperation (Faret, Téllez and Rodríguez-Tapia, 2021). However, the involvement of San Diego social organizations in humanitarian work is an example of common and effective cross-border practices (Lucero, 2023).

The relationship between humanitarian governance and migrant shelters at the border is complex and encompasses ethical, legal and humanitarian considerations (Betts, 2011). Shelters face challenges in terms of capacity, quality of life, health, safety, and respect for human rights. In Baja California, collaboration between government and shelters varies, and in many cases, civil society organizations take the lead in their management, albeit with limited government support.⁵ This situation is particularly seen in Tijuana, where some criminal groups control human mobility (Pérez-Tejada, 2023; Efe, 2023).

The International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) play key roles in promoting

³ Espacio Migrante believes that the best care should be sought for migrants arriving in the city, as they did with the deported Mexicans, Haitians, later with Africans and now with Central Americans, always generating a communion among all (Olvera Cádiz, 2022).

⁴ One of the effects of the high human mobility at the Tijuana-San Diego border is the temporary closure of the Pedwest border crossing in San Ysidro, California, effective December 9, 2023. With this measure, USCIBP will reorient its personnel to process migrants in an expeditious and secure manner.

⁵ For example, Espacio Migrante, operates through donations made by foundations such as Save The Children, Global Fund for Children, San Diego County Workers Union, San Diego Cleaning Workers, schools and universities (Olvera Cádiz, 2022).

humanitarian migration governance (Olvera Cárdenas, 2022). These organizations not only provide direct assistance to migrants (Pérez-Tejada, 2022), but also strengthen policies and advocate for human rights, facing the challenge of integrating their proposals into an effective and coordinated humanitarian governance model (Betts et al., 2017).

The section of the article highlights the intense human mobility along the U.S.-Mexico border, especially in the Tijuana-San Diego region, where 6,830,287 million encounters with irregular migrants have been recorded during President Biden's term in office. This migration phenomenon, marked by a significant increase in detentions, reflects the complexity and challenges of humanitarian governance in this region (Olvera Rodríguez, 2023). Biden's immigration policy, focused on humanitarian visas and asylum programs, contrasts with the previous administration, and has significantly influenced regional and Latin American mobility.

The challenges of humanitarian governance include the management of a humanitarian crisis marked by limited reception capacity and resources, where civil society organizations have played a crucial role, especially in Tijuana (Olvera Cárdenas, 2022). Despite efforts, difficulties are faced such as the lack of effective coordination among multiple actors and divergent perceptions of problems and strategies. These challenges highlight the need for a unified and agile humanitarian response that balances human rights protection with border security and promotes efficient international and cross-border cooperation (Olvera Cárdenas, 2022).

The analysis of migration dynamics at the U.S.-Mexico border reveals the growing human mobility and the resulting humanitarian problems in the region, particularly in Tijuana-San Diego. This situation, marked by a significant volume of detentions, reflects the importance of effective humanitarian governance that can efficiently coordinate the actions of the different actors involved in the management of irregular human mobility, overcoming the barriers of communication and mistrust between governmental and non-governmental organizations.

In conclusion, humanitarian governance is essential to ensure that migration at the U.S.-Mexico border is managed in a manner that respects the rights and dignity of migrants, addressing the complex realities of migration at all stages.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study, focused on the Cali-Baja border region and, more specifically, on the Tijuana-San Diego migration dynamics, has revealed crucial aspects of humanitarian governance in the context of migration. With approximately seven million detentions

recorded by U.S. immigration authorities in the last three years, this area has become a focus of intense human mobility and humanitarian challenges. President Biden's immigration policy, characterized by the implementation of programs such as humanitarian visas and Temporary Protected Status for Venezuelan immigrants, marks a significant contrast with the previous administration and has profoundly influenced migration flows. However, this policy shift has also presented challenges in terms of effective coordination among the various actors involved in humanitarian governance, highlighting the need for coherent and multilevel approaches to the management of irregular human mobility.

The research has also revealed that, at the Tijuana-San Diego border, humanitarian governance faces additional challenges due to the complexity of migration and U.S. migration policies. These challenges include limited shelter capacity and coordination among actors, which vary and affect the humanitarian response. Despite collaboration between social organizations and local and state governments, difficulties persist in protecting human rights and ensuring dignified living conditions for migrants and asylum seekers. In addition, the region faces uncertainties about who should take the lead in coordinating and planning humanitarian governance.

The contribution of humanitarian governance on the U.S.-Mexico border, especially in the Tijuana-San Diego region, has been the subject of analysis due to increasing human mobility and the resulting humanitarian problems. The migration dynamics on this border stand out as one of the most intense in the border relations between the two countries, with approximately seven million apprehensions made by U.S. immigration authorities in the last three years. This migratory flow has been significantly influenced by the programs implemented by President Biden's administration since January 2023, including humanitarian, labor, asylum, refugee, family reunification and Temporary Protected Status for Venezuelan immigrants, differing from the Trump administration's policies.

Humanitarian governance underlines the need for effective coordination among multiple actors, such as governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, and humanitarian agencies, to manage irregular human mobility. However, it faces the challenge of establishing coherent and effective multilevel and multi-stakeholder coordination. Difficulties in communication and divergent perceptions of problems and strategies have impacted the effectiveness of humanitarian responses. In addition, mistrust between governmental and non-governmental organizations can be an obstacle to establishing a consensual humanitarian agenda.

At the Tijuana-San Diego border, humanitarian governance faces additional challenges due to the complexity of migration and U.S. immigration policies. Among the most common problems are limited shelter capacity and coordination among different

actors, which can vary and affect humanitarian response capacity. Often, social organizations show a high degree of collaboration and relative cooperation with local and state government agencies. The protection of human rights and the guarantee of dignified living conditions for migrants and asylum seekers are essential in humanitarian governance, as is community participation.

The Tijuana-San Diego border presents uncertainties regarding who takes the lead in humanitarian governance coordination and planning. Some civil society organizations, such as Espacio Migrante, have played a central role in collaboration with the local government, in a context of increasing human mobility and the influence of criminal groups in migration control.

The absence of a shared rights agenda among participants in humanitarian governance at the border is due to several factors, such as lack of coordination and divergent interpretations of human rights. Therefore, managing migration at this border with a humanitarian governance approach is essential, not only to address logistical and security challenges, but also to ensure the dignity and fundamental rights of individuals. International cooperation, transparency and respect for human rights are fundamental pillars for a more humane and sustainable migration management.

In conclusion, this study underscores the critical importance of effective humanitarian governance at the U.S.-Mexico border, especially in the management of migration in Tijuana-San Diego. The absence of a shared rights agenda and difficulties in coordination raise the need for a comprehensive approach that prioritizes both human dignity and security. For future research, further exploration of strategies to improve cross-border cooperation and efficiency in responding to humanitarian crises is suggested. Further studies could focus on the impact of migration policies on social and economic dynamics in the region, and how different interpretations of human rights influence governance practices.

It is also imperative to investigate ways in which civil society organizations, such as Espacio Migrante, can improve their collaboration with governments and other agencies to strengthen the humanitarian response and protection of migrants. A valuable area of study would be the analysis of humanitarian governance models that effectively integrate the needs of migrants with national security policies. In addition, research on the long-term effects of current migration policies on the social and economic structure of border communities, as well as on the quality of life of migrants and asylum seekers, should be considered. Finally, it is crucial to study ways to foster a more cohesive and shared human rights agenda among all actors involved in humanitarian governance. These studies will not only contribute to academic knowledge but will also provide practical guidance for more just and humane migration policies.

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