

CHAPTER 6

Emigration, Violence, and Human Rights Violations in Central Mexico

Benjamin James Waddell

Introduction

In this chapter I focus on the social context in which violence and human rights violations have unfolded in modern Mexico. I analyze the relationship between mass emigration and violence in the state of Michoacán. Based on qualitative evidence from the field, I argue that rising crime—including state-sponsored violence—is likely conditioned by the social, economic, and cultural deficits forged by decades of mass emigration. My results have important implications for policy makers interested in reducing human rights violations within regions experiencing high emigration.

Economic Development, Democratization, and Migration

In theory, economic development should plant the seeds of democratic values and norms, and in time, the spread of democracy should foster a more stable world in which human rights violations are less likely to occur. Still, despite improved development levels and reductions in overall violence in recent decades (Pinker 2011), the world has also witnessed blatant crimes against humanity including genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Sudan, and, most recently, Syria and Iraq. These events bring up an important question. What leads to increases in state-led violence during the initial phases of development?

In *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Thomas Huntington (1968) argued that during the early stages of development, state-led violence tends

to increase. Huntington's analysis suggested a parabolic relationship between development and human rights violations, a notion that has since been corroborated (Mitchell and McCormick 1988). Subsequent research finds a similar inverted-U relationship between internal violence and the type of political regime, such that societies experience more crime during the initial stages of democratization but eventually stabilize as democratic norms and values take hold (Fein 1995; Regan and Henderson 2002). This nonlinear pattern is related to the fact that as economic growth and democratic norms expand, governments are unable to keep up with the expectations of citizens, and this gap has a destabilizing effect on society. This is in part due to *economic* enabling structures, such as poverty and inequality, which may encourage people to participate in criminal activity as a form of accessing social mobility. This has been particularly evident in Latin America during the era of neoliberal reform. *Political* enabling structures, such as corruption, clientelism, and authoritarian vestiges from the past, also contribute to criminal activity as countries transition toward democracy. During such transition periods it is often difficult to distinguish between state-sponsored violence and nonstate violence due to the fact that the government cloaks its extrajudicial activities beneath the guise of paramilitary groups, vigilantes, partisan gangs, and death squads (Zinecker 2007: 8). Such activities fall under what Guillermo O'Donnell (2004) has referred to as "brown areas" of rule.

Economic and political enabling structures contribute to nonlinear patterns of violence during periods of economic development and democratization. However, they do not fully explain why some countries experience extreme levels of violence during periods of transition while others do not. To date, researchers have focused on three main factors in explaining nonlinear patterns of violence: (1) regime type, (2) institutional structures, and (3) rule implementation. A fourth factor—the social context from which human rights violations emerge—has received far less attention. In particular, existing research has failed to examine the degree to which major demographic shifts affect levels of internal state- and nonstate-sponsored violence during periods of economic and political transition.

The Lasting Effects of Mass Emigration

We know relatively little about the degree to which mass emigration contributes to increases in state-sponsored violence. However, we know a great deal about the lasting effects of immigrants on levels of violence within migrant-receiving

societies, which is a useful point of departure for this discussion. In the United States, criminologists find that immigrants revitalize local neighborhoods (Lee, Martinez, and Rosenfeld 2001; Martinez 2002; Martinez et al. 2004; Reid et al. 2005) by strengthening social organizations such as churches, schools, and NGOs (Ousey and Kubrin 2009), rejuvenating local economies (Vélez 2009), attracting investment in areas previously lacking business capital (Reid et al. 2005), and, ultimately, making crime less profitable (Martinez 2002). As Lyons and colleagues point out, “Contrary to much public opinion and political rhetoric, our research joins a chorus of others in suggesting that immigration generally makes neighborhoods safer” (2014: 624).

If the influx of immigrants into urban cities in the Global North contributes to a decrease in violence, then it seems at least plausible that the outflow of emigrants in migrant-sending regions in the Global South may contribute to social, economic, and political disintegration by undermining communal stability and draining regions of the exact same forms of capital that contribute to urban renewal in immigrant neighborhoods in the Global North.

While the effects of emigration in the Global South are not entirely pernicious, existing research finds that it fosters social disintegration within migrant-sending regions by abetting conspicuous consumption and exacerbating local inequalities (Mines and de Janvry 1982; Reichert 1981; Wiest 1973). This is particularly evident at the beginning of the migrant cycle (Adams 1989; Adams, Cuenca, and Page 2008; Barham and Boucher 1998; Milanovic 1987; McKenzie and Rapoport 2006).

Ultimately, emigration and remittances (money sent home by migrants living abroad) can deter community members from participating in the labor market altogether (Azam and Gubert 2005). Research in this vein finds that if remittance flows are large enough to provide for the welfare of the entire household, they can have the perverse effect of discouraging individuals from participating in productive sectors (Gubert 2000; Germenji and Swinnend 2004). Azam and Gubert (2005: 1334) find that the more money migrants send home, the less incentive their families have to work.

The communal hazards related to emigration are particularly pernicious for those individuals who receive little or no help from families abroad. In developing regions around the world, and in rural communities in particular, emigration is often seen as the best means through which to achieve material success. This is especially true in rural townships where local economies expand and contract in accordance with the ebb and flow of migrant remittances (Massey and Basem 1992). In these areas, cash flows from abroad allow

some individuals, mainly the relatives of migrants, to participate in a market economy that was traditionally closed off to rural peasants. However, only a relatively small percentage of society benefits from remittances, and those who do are not prone to making the types of investments that would contribute to long-term community development. Instead, remittance recipients typically spend their money on material goods like televisions, electronics, durable goods, and new homes (Massey et al. 1994). While such activities can generate employment in the short run, they are not the types of activities that underpin long-term community well-being. Thus, while emigration introduces conspicuous consumption to marginalized communities in the Global South, it does not appear to stimulate the type of economic development that would permit individuals not directly tied to diaspora communities to participate in mass consumption and economically active sectors.

While diaspora communities contribute directly to the improved welfare of some individuals, and even stimulate employment within communities of origin as migrants build second homes and purchase goods in local markets, in time emigrants inhibit the policy environments that would improve the welfare of those they leave behind. Extant research documents the mechanisms driving this process well. Based on research conducted in Mexico, Goodman and Hiskey (2008) demonstrate that while remittances provide communities with much needed resources in the short run, in the long run they reduce community pressure on the state to solve development problems, and this process, in time, facilitates government desertion (185). Related to this phenomenon, Adida and Girod (2011: 19) find that access to clean water and drainage improves in Mexican municipalities that receive relatively higher levels of remittances. However, these researchers also reveal that local governments reduce their support for communities as financial transfers from abroad increase. Finally, in a panel study of eighteen countries in Latin America, Doyle (2013) finds that over time, remittances “translate into reduced support for political parties who advocate redistribution” (24).

The adverse effects of emigration extend beyond the economic and political spheres. For example, while existing research demonstrates that in Mexico migrant fathers remain ostensibly involved in the lives of their offspring (Nobles 2011), fathers also report a decreased sense of obligation to their children (D'Auberterre 2000). In addition, the absence of fathers in migrant households is associated with a number of social issues. Children growing up in households with a migrant father have lower rates of immunization, are less likely to be breastfed, have increased odds of illness (Schmeer 2009),

report lower educational aspirations (Nobles 2011), and are more likely to drop out of school (McKenzie and Rapoport 2006). In a field survey conducted in Mexico, UNICEF researchers found that children of migrants were more likely to be associated with teen pregnancies, alcohol abuse, drug use, robberies, and imprisonment (Cortes 2008: 22–23). Finally, in the case of El Salvador, Heidrun Zinecker (2007) finds that emigration and remittances have contributed to high levels of violence by reducing pressure on local government, increasing relative deprivation by driving up inequality, and undermining the types of social capital that would typically discourage violence (Zinecker 2007: 22).

Available evidence demonstrates that emigration and remittances aggravate social inequalities while restricting access to the types of productive sectors that would allow those left behind to enjoy the material luxuries that remittances afford select members of the community. In these situations, and in the absence of other sources of employment, it would not be particularly surprising if some residents turned to criminal activity as a means of acquiring material success.

A Theoretical Model for Understanding Migration and Violence in Modern Mexico

According to Émile Durkheim's anomie theory, large social change—such as mass emigration to the city or another country—disrupts the values and norms that moderate human interaction and, in consequence, incites criminal behavior (Durkheim [1897] 1951, [1883] 1951). Robert Merton (1938) built on Durkheim's work, contending that relative deprivation best explained criminal activity. In doing so, Merton shifted from anomie's focus on the breakdown of cultural norms toward a theory that emphasized structural strain to explain why some people resort to criminal activity while others do not (Lanier et al. 2015: 219). He argued when criminal behavior is most likely to emerge: "When a system of cultural values extols, virtually above all else, certain common symbols of success for the population at large while its social structure rigorously restricts or completely eliminates access to approved modes of acquiring these symbols for a considerable part of the same population, that anti-social behavior ensues on a considerable scale" (1938: 680). Building on anomie and strain theory, social disorganization theorists have argued that ecological factors influence criminal behavior

(Sampson, Morenoff, and Earls 2005). They contend that one should expect crime to be higher in neighborhoods with elevated unemployment, lack of access to education, poor infrastructure, dilapidated housing, and weak institutions. As Shaw and McKay (1972) point out, in these situations transient populations further diminish the quality of relationships among residents, and this diminishment promotes social isolation. Finally, as Thomas (2011:385) argues, “If residents are unable to sustain routine contacts and relationships and if organizations are nonexistent or have weak foundations of economic and social support, the more social decay and disorganization a neighborhood experiences, and we should observe higher crime rates there.” In other words, if focusing on individuals as perpetrators of crime sheds light on who breaks the law, by analyzing the environment in which crime takes place we may very well gain a better understanding of what drives people to commit crime in the first place. Despite this research, there is very little discussion concerning the potential relationship between emigration and violence within migrant-sending regions around the world. This intellectual lacuna is particularly surprising in Mexico, where emigration rates and crime have increased at similar paces over the last two decades.

Roughly 10 percent of Mexico’s 122 million citizens live in a country other than Mexico, and the majority of these individuals have left their country in the last two decades. During this same period, crime rates have increased dramatically, especially in high-migration regions. Between 2005 and 2015 an estimated 164,000 people were victims of homicide, and an additional 26,000 people were disappeared (Breslow 2015). As Table 6.1 reveals, with an average age of twenty-seven, the vast majority of disappeared people during this time frame were of working age, and roughly 72 percent of the victims were men. Although it is impossible to know the exact circumstances surrounding these individuals’ disappearances, their basic profiles are very similar to that of many migrants. Consequently, it seems at least plausible that increased levels of violence may in part be related to the fact that the ostensible success of those who are able to emigrate places strain on those left behind to achieve similar levels of success. This may be particularly true in rural areas, where emigration and poverty rates are significantly higher and the culture of emigration is extolled as a principal form of social mobility. To the degree to which this is true, it seems likely that in recent years the lasting effects of emigration have contributed to the number of young people willing to participate in criminal activities such as drug trafficking, extortion, kidnapping, and corruption. In the next section, as a

Table 6.1. Basic profile of disappeared in Mexico, 2005–2015

	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Average age</i>
Male	18,732	28.6
Female	7,186	25.5
Total	25,918	27.4

Source: Registro Nacional de Datos de Personas Extraviados o Desaparecidas (RNPED). <https://rnped.segob.gob.mx> (last consulted: March 1, 2016).

Note: Data reports through April 2015.

means of further exploring this possibility, I analyze qualitative data gathered in Michoacán, Mexico.

Evidence from the Field: Michoacán, Mexico

Michoacán provides a particularly fitting setting to analyze the relationship between emigration, crime, and human rights violations. Next to Guanajuato, this central Mexican state sends more people to the United States than any other Mexican state, and it typically receives more remittances than other states in Mexico. Michoacán has also experienced a considerable spike in crime in recent years, including homicides, disappearances, and human rights violations.

Two separate episodes in 2015 shed light on the nature of violence occurring in Michoacán. The first took place on January 6, 2015, in Apatzingán, where eight civilians were killed by Federal Police officers who were apparently trying to break up a demonstration by self-defense groups. The second incident occurred on May 22 in Tanhuato, where Federal Police killed forty-two civilians at a compound that was allegedly being held by a criminal organization. Despite clear evidence of extrajudicial killings, no police officers have been charged in either case (Human Rights Watch 2015). Apatzingán and Tanhuato are examples of what the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) recently described as a “serious human rights crisis” (2015: 32). The report details evidence regarding forced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, torture, citizen insecurity, injustice, and widespread impunity (2015).

Events like these lead to an important question. Does mass emigration and the transfer of remittances back to Michoacán contribute to rising violence by

reducing pressure on officials to respect and protect human rights? This section attempts to answer this question in two stages. In the first stage, I analyze data trends regarding emigration, homicides, and disappearances across 113 municipalities in Michoacán. In the second stage, I introduce the reader to qualitative evidence from a community named La Peralta, which is located in northern Michoacán near the border with Guanajuato.

Data Trends Across Michoacán

Table 6.2 displays descriptive statistics for the data used in this section. Data is from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) and the National Population Council (CONAPO). There were nearly 1,600 homicides registered in Michoacán between 2005 and 2015, with a mean of more than 8 homicides per 100,000 residents. There was substantial variation across Michoacán's 113 municipalities, with homicide rates ranging from close to 0 all the way up to 177. During this same period just over 1,000 people disappeared in Michoacán, with a mean of 1.5 disappearances per 100,000 inhabitants.

Emigration in the developing world is generally higher in economically deprived regions. Thus, if emigration and crime were to correlate in Michoacán, we might expect that homicide rates would be highest in the state's least developed municipalities. With that in mind, Figure 6.1 plots homicide rates per 100,000 inhabitants with human development levels across Michoacán's municipalities. As expected, homicide rates between 1990 and 2010 are significantly lower in municipalities that have higher levels of well-being. This trend follows general tendencies around the world in which violence drops in

Table 6.2. Descriptive statistics for homicides and disappearances in Michoacán, 2005–2015

	<i>Obs.</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. dev.</i>	<i>Max</i>
Homicide Rate per 100,000	1,574	8.59	17.68	177.02
Disappearance Rate per 100,000	1,004	1.52	4.21	41.54

Source: Registro Nacional de Datos de Personas Extraviados o Desaparecidas (RNPED) and the National Institute for Statistics and Geography (INEGI).

Note: Data reports through April 2015.

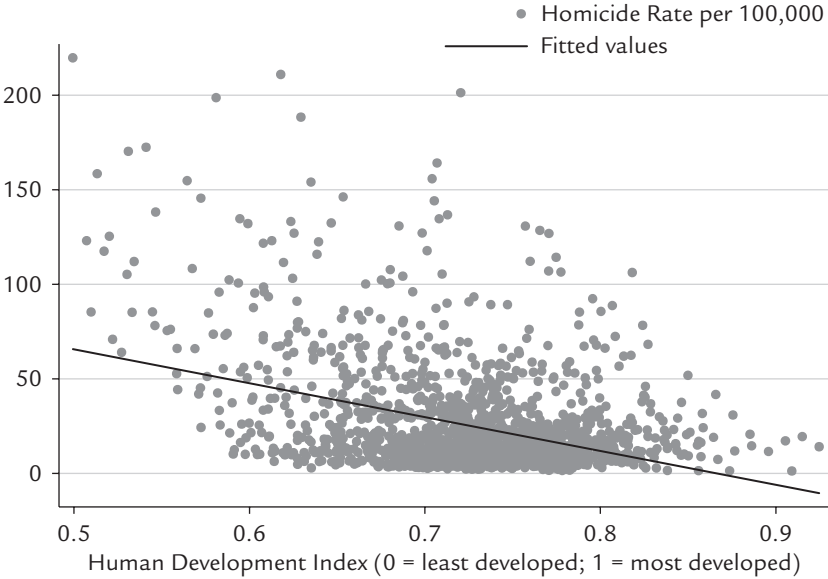


Figure 6.1. Homicide rates per 100,000 by Human Development in Michoacán (1990–2010). Source: Based on data from INEGI.

areas where inhabitants have relatively better access to health care, education, and income.

Michoacán’s least-developed municipalities are typically located in rural areas; thus we should expect rural municipalities to have higher homicide rates, which, as Figure 6.2 reveals, is in fact the case. Only 34 percent of Michoacán’s municipalities surpassed the state’s average of 13 homicides per 100,000 residents during the period 2000–2010. However, among these high-homicide municipalities, nearly 80 percent are located in rural municipalities with less than 58,000 inhabitants. While criminals may prefer to dump bodies in rural locations, it appears that migration rates and remittance flows also play a role in explaining where homicides occur most frequently. Homicide rates are substantially higher in municipalities where more households receive remittances. In fact, while only 31 percent of rural municipalities fall into the high-homicide category (more than 13 per 100,000), an astonishing 84 percent of these are municipalities in which at least 8 percent of homes report receiving remittances. This finding demonstrates that in Michoacán, substantially more homicides occur in municipalities reporting

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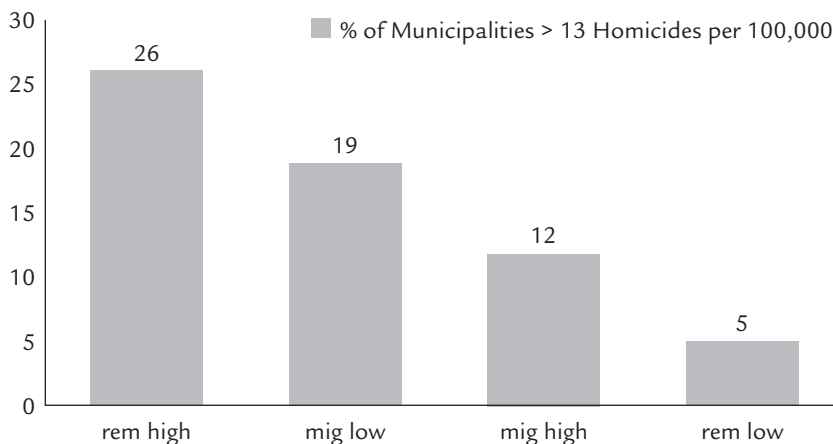


Figure 6.2. Homicide rates across municipalities. χ^2 significant at $p < .001$.

above-average remittance flows. This association holds across all municipalities in Michoacán ($r = .31$; $p < .05$) and is particularly evident in rural municipalities ($r = .42$; $p < .001$). In turn, homicide rates are substantially lower in municipalities where less than 8 percent of homes report having ties to migrants abroad.

La Peralta, Michoacán

In this section I use qualitative evidence from the field to shed light on the potential relationship between mass emigration out of Michoacán and high levels of crime within migrant-sending regions. I draw on interviews conducted in and around a village named La Peralta, which is located in a municipality along the border of Michoacán and Guanajuato. I use pseudonyms for both my interviewees as well as the physical locations that I reference in my discussion. To do otherwise would place the lives of my informants in danger.

La Peralta is a small ranching town located in north-central Michoacán along the border with Guanajuato. The town is near a larger town of nearly seventy thousand inhabitants that serves as a stopover point on the way to Guanajuato. Merchants from both states frequently travel through the village on their way to larger regional markets. Like other towns in the region,

migrants have been leaving La Peralta for larger regional cities like Querétaro and Morelia for decades. A smaller percentage of residents go to the United States, but everyone in town knows someone who lives *al otro lado* (on the other side). The town's population hovers around 2,300 people, but approximately 15 percent of the town's native-born population resides in the United States. Most residents have family living in either Michigan or Illinois, but recently, migrants have been settling in less traditional receiving states like Arkansas, North Carolina, and Georgia. *Los paisanos*, or migrants, have played a fundamental role in local development. In addition to the support family members receive from remittances, the town has several Home Town Association groups that have contributed substantial amounts of money to public-works projects through the remittance-matching program "3x1 para migrantes." Still, despite these efforts, the majority of residents living in La Peralta are steeped in deep poverty, with few employment options within the legal market. As a result, more and more residents have joined the ranks of criminal organizations operating in the area. This is particularly true for young men. In the space that follows I share excerpts from my interviews in the region, which help shed light on the complex relationship between migration, the state, and criminal organizations.

During a field visit to Mexico in June 2016 I met up with a man named Enrique, who manufactures furniture in northern Michoacán. As he pointed out, tension in the area has been compounded by the war on drugs. We spoke on a street corner in southern Guanajuato, where he was selling wooden chairs and tables. He was sitting in the shade alongside a wall-sized mural that depicted a map of the United States and Mexico upon which the artist had painted *paisanos* harvesting crops. In the Pacific Ocean, in turn, the artist had painted a picture of downtown Chicago, and in the Atlantic Ocean there was a depiction of the small town Enrique and I happened to be in. The mural is representative of the ubiquitous nature of transnational connections within the region, and not surprisingly, Enrique's life was emblematic of such networks. At the time, his son was living in Atlanta, and his daughter, who had recently been deported, was trying to cross back into the United States via Arizona. Enrique and his wife were raising one of their grandchildren, whom his son had left behind but was afraid to try and smuggle into the United States until he was older. According to Enrique, his life has been deeply affected by the federal government's war on drug trafficking, which has completely disrupted the local economy and stripped the market out from under his furniture business.

I used to employ 12 men. We would travel as far as Chiapas to sell our furniture and small tin stoves. A lot of our product would sell here locally but now that it's so hard for migrants to come back, few see any purpose in purchasing material things in Mexico. They still have their houses but they never come anymore and so the economy has been hit hard. Plus, now that the federal government is trying to weed out the *carteles* [and so] the *narcos* are finding other places to wash their money into the legal market and we're left with nothing. But it never occurs to them [the government] that *narcos* are the only ones providing jobs in these areas and that in combating them they are really just taking away good paying jobs and creating more foot soldiers for the *narcos*. Their businesses might just be fronts but they still employ people, they feed families! (June 2016)

Like others I interviewed, Enrique made a point of distinguishing between outside groups, such as the Army and the Federal Police, and the local government. The problem, he pointed out, is that local elites include both government officials as well as *narcos*, and to a certain degree, they depend on one another. This point also came up in a conversation I had with a secondary teacher named Francisco. We met in June 2016 on the side of the road where his sons were selling watermelons in between classes to try and help with the bills. Francisco had taught that morning in Peralta, and he was on his way to a nearby town where he gives a class in the afternoon. Francisco, who worked for years in California, frequently peppered his conversations with English words and phrases. Regarding violence, he made the following point:

Look, everyone knows who they are. It's a small town. Many of the current *narcos* went to school with me or we played *fútbol* together. But there's nothing you can do. The government knows too and they don't do anything because they benefit from cartel wealth in the form of bribes, payoffs, and quality of life. For them it's a win-win. The *narcos* bribe them, plus they spend their money locally and make major investments in businesses, which are all subsidized by *narcódolares*, and government officials and their families are their best clients! Look, for example, someone recently opened a private gym and day spa in town. It's got beautiful marble floors and stunning Turkish baths in the changing rooms. Now, look around this place, who has money to go to a day spa? I can't afford it! I'm selling watermelons just to keep

the lights on! Perhaps people like you or *los paisanos* go to these places when they come back but let's be honest, the day-to-day patrons are people working for the government. These are the indirect benefits of money laundering and they may seem inconsequential but for the local elite, many of whom long for the amenities of the city, the benefits are enormous. Plus, it gives the illusion that officials are bringing progress to *el rancho*. (June 2016)

Francisco often returned to his point that local government had a lot to gain by turning a blind eye to *narcos*. However, as one of my informants from the Mexican military clarified, even if officials wanted to combat criminal organizations, they would run up against the blurred lines between law enforcement and the rank and file members of cartels.

The lines between local law enforcement and *los narcos* are very blurry around here. Many of the law enforcement agents work for both sides. A few years ago, the state police made a big deal about the alleged corruption in a municipal police force just down the road from here and so they came in and removed all of the agents. They let more than 100 officers go and they replaced them with state officers for a few weeks. Then they made a big deal about the fact that the new municipal officers would be hired only after taking a lie detector test and going through a whole new series of training sessions. But it's all for show. A few months later most of the officers were back on the force. Who else were they going to hire? This is a small town and only so many people are willing to risk their lives to become a police officer right now. And they all know the truth, if you work for the police, you work for the local *capo* because *el capitán* is on the take and you need the extra cash. That's just the way it is and this is what we're up against when we get sent into these small towns. No one trusts us and no one wants to talk to us and I don't blame them because they have to live here, we don't. (July 2015)

Later, in June 2016, I spoke with a municipal officer named Carlos. He worked the night shift near an OXXO store just off the main plaza. After some small talk, he asked me what I was up to. I explained to him that I was looking into issues related to corruption and violence. He took a look around to see who might be watching, and after a few glances in each direction, he quietly offered up his thoughts on the matter:

It's not just the material benefits that you have to consider. Look, if you ask me, does the government participate in these types of atrocities? Well, in some cases yes but usually it's much more subtle than that. They're complicit in the crimes but not directly. Look, it's like this. You see, government officials and traffickers know each other. Many times they grew up together but even if they didn't, the *narcos* are the only ones with money in these *ranchos* and the government depends on money, right? So of course they know each other! For God's sake, I know who the local players are! Everyone does. But we don't apprehend them. It doesn't work like that. Officials benefit from the *narcos* and the money they spend on all the businesses they set up and who knows how much they benefit from unwritten agreements! But more recently, as things have heated up, officials have also benefited from their *pactos* with *narcos* in the form of security and enforcement. If they're on the take and something happens, they look the other way, and if they need someone to disappear and they've already got a working relationship with someone, well, they can make that happen too. You get the idea. So, you see, it's not like they directly hire *narcos* to take care of their dirty work but they might as well because everyone knows how it works! (June 2016)

What is particularly telling, given the common knowledge most people have in La Peralta regarding the presence of criminal organizations, is the fact that relatively little information ends up in the pages of local newspapers. This is especially true when it comes to the type of investigative journalism that would publicly connect government officials with organized crime. With that in mind, I share an excerpt from an interview I conducted in December 2015 with Claudio, the editor in chief for one of the region's most circulated newspapers.

We know it's going on but we don't ask questions about it. Government officials and *narcos* have worked together for a long time in these regions and now that things are hot [violent] it's not surprising that government officials are being accused of being complicit in murders and human rights violations. I mean, Ayotzinapa is in the news because it was so blatant but those kinds of things happen around here all the time but on a much smaller scale. Someone starts asking the wrong questions and pretty soon they're nowhere to be found. But nobody is

looking into these cases because they're fearful they might turn over the wrong stone but if you were to add up all the disappearances, well, they'd probably run into the thousands. We've had to place reporters on paid leave for months at a time because they begin receiving death threats for articles they publish on homicides. Around 2011 we started a policy of only reporting the facts that the government provides us with in homicide cases that we think might be related to *los carteles*. As a consequence, the government has complete control over what the public ends up seeing in these cases, which means that indirectly *los narcos* control what the public ends up reading. It's not right but it's a matter of life or death, so we decided it's just not worth it to do investigative reporting on these issues. (December 2015)

A local journalist, whom I refer to as Roberta here, corroborated Claudio's account. As she pointed out, cartels frequently employ *halcones*, or falcons, to spy on the police and the press.

We never know when they're watching but they are. We all use two cell phones, one for personal use and one for the job and we never give out our personal number under any circumstances but despite that, we've all received death threats on our personal phones. I've also received anonymous tips on my phone. Once a man with a muffled voice called and addressed me by my first name. I started to sweat as he was talking to me but I was afraid to hang up. He told me to go to an abandoned lot, that there was something worth writing about there. I went out there with a colleague and there was nothing to be found. As we were leaving the location I received another call. It was the same voice. He said he was busier than he thought and hadn't got around to our delivery. He told us to come back the next day and so we did and there were two dismembered bodies and a sign with a message for a rival cartel. It was chilling. He was clearly watching us and who knows how he got my private number but he had it. And that's the kind of thing we can't report. Instead, we simply report the basic facts. Two men in their mid-twenties, found dead near such and such place. That's where the story ends. (June 2016)

Another journalist, named Mariana, who has since left the profession but continues to volunteer for an NGO that works with issues related to

disappeared journalists, supported Roberta's claims but went a step further in arguing that many government officials are deeply complicit in the crime and human rights violations taking place in central Mexico. We've spoken on multiple occasions, but this is an excerpt from a discussion we had in June 2016.

I don't have firm numbers but local officials are clearly implicated in these crimes and it runs right up the chain of command. You remember when they detained the attorney general [of Michoacán]? I mean, that's just one example but that's the very individual who should be cracking down on corruption and instead, he's contributing to it! And we know it. Eventually we get to know the *halcones* who work for the *narcos* because we see them at all the crime scenes. We don't know their names but we remember their faces. Occasionally, when we get tips, we're the first ones on the scene and sometimes, in these cases, they're already there. Once, I was at a crime scene before officials ever showed up. Not surprisingly, a *halcon* showed up shortly after me. We exchanged a few words and went about our respective business. My photographer was taking photos of the bodies when I noticed the man send a text. A few minutes later I got a call from [my] editor. He told me to leave immediately. We wouldn't be reporting on the murder. Apparently he'd received a call from above. This type of thing happens a lot.

Mariana's comment refers to one of the federal government's early raids on Michoacán in which federal officers detained the attorney general, twenty high-ranking officials, and at least ten mayors. It's easy to see such apprehensions as progressive steps toward ending drug trafficking in Mexico, but as an informant close to one of the then-detained officials pointed out,

Many see this and say, "You see, it's all his fault. Now things are going to improve and we'll all be safe again." But it's not that simple. I know this person as a friend and he is a good person but his life was under constant threat. He couldn't go anywhere without his body guards, which usually number between six and ten heavily armed men. Furthermore, he received death threats from rival groups and these are people he knows are capable of carrying out their threats. So what else can he do other than turn a blind eye? What would you do? More

importantly, what will the next person to hold his office do? He's going to face the exact same pressures. (December 2015)

As these interviews reveal, in La Peralta, and likely elsewhere in Michoacán, government officials are at least partially complicit in the crime currently affecting their citizens.

Turning back to migration, in most cases, migrants are not directly involved in the violence unfolding on the ground in places like Michoacán, but as the next exchange clarifies, mass emigration out of Mexico likely contributes to the types of social conditions from which one would expect crime to emerge.

I met Roberto in 2013 during a field visit to a migration-prone town in southern Guanajuato. He works at a local university, where he teaches economics courses. Roberto and I met up again in July 2015 and June 2016. During my most recent field visit, we met up at a restaurant in town, which is alleged to be a front for a criminal organization trying to wash money into the legal system. The establishment was well kept and clearly overstaffed, and despite the rural location and an ample menu, the prices were surprisingly low. Roberto chose a table inside, well removed from the more frequented tables on the cobblestone patio, and as he spoke he kept his head low, and like my other informants, his voice fell into a whisper when he mentioned local officials and individuals purportedly working for cartels. As he pointed out, there is a clear connection in the region between economic decline, migration, and crime.

Money hides corruption and lubricates the system but the machine is run by the foot soldiers. You have to understand, this region's economy was decimated by NAFTA.¹ After 1994 the swine industry all but collapsed and the production of grains and beans was never the same. Nobody was rich but they could make ends meet back then but now, it's nearly impossible. That's why so many left in the 1990s. They went to Chicago, Los Angeles, Tucson, New York, wherever they could find work and they sent money home, which revealed a new way of living to local residents. Suddenly people were building cement homes, watching T.V. on big screens, and driving big trucks. But migration isn't an option for everyone and now the local economy is worse than ever because no one wants to farm or ranch. If you work the fields all day you only get paid \$4-5 dollars! And so, you

see, not everybody could leave and now it's more difficult for them to go north anyways because of the border security and the higher *coyote* fees. So, for many young people, especially young men, the best option to get their hands on material things is by working for the cartels. It's dangerous work but the *narcos* know that their foot soldiers are replaceable because there are so many young men looking to earn a quick buck. It's a terrible cycle but it shouldn't surprise anyone. (June 2016)

As Roberto shows, migration and remittances introduce conspicuous consumption and inflation into local communities, and in doing so, they fundamentally change the opportunity structures. However, they also create social fissures that have lasting impacts within communities. According to Rodrigo, who teaches social sciences at the same university that Roberto works at, years of emigration contributed to the disintegration of the family unit in many small localities across Mexico, and this, in turn, has left the countryside littered with a generation of young people who lack direction in life.

When you think about it there have been wars over money, so it's not impossible to think that remittances have contributed to violence but not where you might think. Remittances provoke violence in the household. Couples, divided by thousands of miles, fight over how the money should be spent, who can spend it, whether or not to spend it or save it, and many times even though the man isn't present, he administers how the remittances are spent. What is worse is the fact that remittances aggravate an environment that is already marked by domestic violence and a culture of *machismo* that has its roots in *la conquista*. And all of this is related to the current violence we see. In my opinion, it's the root of it. (June 2016)

Shortly after I talked with Rodrigo, I met up with Chucho, whom I'd talked with several times in the past. Chucho, who now lives in Guanajuato near the border with Michoacán, was himself a migrant, but once he had a family he decided to return to his hometown in order to be with his family. As he put it, "I didn't want my children to grow up without a father. I'd seen how poor my friend's relationship with their kids was and I didn't want that to happen to me. So, I came back." Since his return he's found employment working construction and helping out with government development projects. Like

Rodrigo, Chucho feels that family divisions and remittances are related to the recent waves of violence central Mexico has been experiencing.

There's a great deal of problems within the family. These are kids that grow up without a father or without a mother and then they find themselves of an age when they should be working but they've had everything handed to them because of the remittances and so when it comes down to it they don't want to work. So, they get involved in other forms of contributing to the family and they simply get involved with the wrong people. But once they go that direction there's really no turning back. It's not easy to get out alive. (June 2016)

The case of Rogelio Gutierrez, alias "El Flaco," helps highlight the relationship between migration and violence in the region. El Flaco's father worked for years in the United States. Like many other migrants from his hometown, he was accustomed to working for six months in the United States and then returning home for six months. Then, suddenly, in 2006 he came back for good with a sizable fortune in cash. "He claimed that he was working for a cleanup crew in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and one day, to his great fortune, he found a room full of cash that had been abandoned," a local source told me. "But everyone knows the truth. He'd been involved in drug trafficking for years and it appears he simply decided to cut his ties with the organization and return home to ranch." By then, however, El Flaco had gotten involved with local traffickers in order to earn his own money.

When his father came back with all the money El Flaco started to get a big head. His mom never could control him, and with his father gone for long periods of time, well, he seemed destined for trouble. For a long time he just acted like a *capo* but then he must have decided to try and take control of *la plaza* and that's when things got out of control. When he tried to take over the oil ducts [pipelines] they'd had enough. (June 2016)

Official accounts report that El Flaco was traveling west on a highway near his hometown when an oncoming truck intercepted him. He was kidnapped at gunpoint, but for reasons unclear to the authorities, the kidnapper's vehicle left the highway. With authorities in close pursuit, the kidnappers killed El Flaco in the cab of the car and fled on foot. Authorities were on the scene

immediately, and they even apprehended several suspects, but as it turned out, they were merely fieldworkers who happened to be in the area at the time of the shooting. “Well, that’s what they printed,” said a young woman who grew up just down the street from El Flaco. She went on to explain,

But that’s not what happened. El Flaco was taken from his truck just like they said but a bystander must have called the police because a patrol unit quickly fell into pursuit. The assailants swerved off the road into a nearby field but they killed Flaco before they fled the scene. The authorities were right behind them but somehow the killers managed to simply disappear into thin air. But obviously they didn’t get away. The authorities let them go. And that’s what they do when they are in on the crime. They just let the criminals go.

I asked her why the authorities would let the aggressors go.

Look, there is drug trafficking in this area but what the criminals really want to control are the [illegal] oil ducts, and that’s what Flaco was trying to do. The problem is that the oil ducts are run by criminal organizations that have deep connections with workers at PEMEX. Insiders let them know when oil will be coming through, what grade [of fuel] it will be, and how much time they’ll have to tap the duct before it starts flowing. They say a good milking, as they call it, can net 100,000 US dollars. With so much money at stake, *los carteles* are involved but obviously the government is involved too. So you tell me, why would the authorities let El Flaco’s killers go? It’s pretty obvious. (June 2016)

I ran my informant’s version by several other sources, and they gave similar descriptions of the facts. One, however, drew a connection between El Flaco’s upbringing and the eventual unraveling of his family.

El Flaco’s father was one of the few people that I know that was able to clean his hands of whatever he’d been involved in there in the US and come back here and put his money to good use. He bought land, tractors, trucks, and houses, but his family had been unravelling for years in his absence. He died a few years after he came back, then his wife died, and as all this was happening his youngest son, El Flaco, who

had also been the most spoiled, got involved in drugs. They'd always given him everything. His mom bought him everything he wanted with the money his father sent but eventually he wanted things his father's money couldn't buy. He had money but he wanted to control the region it seems. But I think it all started to fall apart when his father began to leave. And it's the same story in all these little towns. Everyone thinks migrants will save the village but that's not how it usually works out. (June 2016)

Together, these excerpts reveal the complex relationship between emigration, crime, and human rights violations in central Mexico. It is unclear to what degree these results can be generalized beyond this region, but at least in the state of Michoacán, it appears that events in La Peralta reflect the types of activities taking place elsewhere in the state. As these accounts demonstrate, decades of emigration appear to have forged the types of social environments from which one might expect relatively more young individuals to turn toward organized crime as a means of getting ahead in life. This, in part, helps account for elevated levels of violence across the state.

Conclusions

In this chapter I provide a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between mass emigration and violent crime, including human rights violations, in Michoacán, Mexico. Instead of focusing on the types of economic and political factors that researchers generally use to explain state-sponsored violence, I analyze the social conditions from which criminals have emerged in the State of Michoacán, Mexico. My analysis is rooted in the idea that in order to understand fluctuations in crime, one must examine both the perpetrators as well as the shifting social environments from which these individuals emerge (Shaw and McKay 1972). My study relies on qualitative research conducted in central Mexico, where emigration and crime rates have risen precipitously in recent decades. My findings indicate that emigration drains migrant-sending communities of the exact types of economic, human, and social capital that foster government accountability and mitigate crime and human rights violations. Based on this, I argue that emigration has indirectly contributed to rising violence by creating the types of social environments in which crime would be more likely to occur.

This outcome appears to be deeply rooted in the lasting effects of emigration and remittances on small towns. Diaspora communities abroad provide villages with the economic capital they previously lacked, but they simultaneously deprive villages of the type of human capital (education) and social capital (collective engagement) that would best allow those left behind to capitalize on incoming remittances. In effect, mass emigration has peppered the Mexican countryside with thousands of well-maintained ghost towns, in which remittance-funded homes sit empty most of the year and local economies grind to a halt in every month except December, when migrants return home for the holidays. This arrangement might work out all right if all working-age individuals were able to emigrate, but that is not the case. Instead, many individuals—in fact, most individuals—are left behind as local economies stagnate and job sources dry up.

Given this, a large percentage of working-age men and women find themselves trapped in a social environment in which the successful few, namely the families connected to migrants, exhibit their material success to the rest of the village in the form of modern homes, new cars, fancy electronics, new clothes, stories of trips abroad, and, of course, access to basic welfare including health care and education. The stark inequalities introduced to migrant-sending communities through emigration feed a culture of conspicuous consumption in which nonmigrants naturally desire to participate. Given this situation, it is not necessarily surprising that the foot soldiers of cartels, organized crime, and militia groups share a very similar profile with migrants. Cartels typically enlist young males between the ages of eighteen and forty, which is also the general profile for the large majority of the estimated thirty-one thousand people who have gone missing in the last decade, as well as the more than two hundred thousand victims that the war on drugs has left in its wake.

Mexican drug cartels have provided migrant-prone communities with the resources that the government and diaspora communities are unable to deliver (McDonald 2009: 20). This helps explain how cartels have made such quick inroads within communities while concurrently taking control of institutions. The most successful cartels control large percentages of local police forces as well as government institutions at the municipal, state, and federal levels (Castillo García 2009). In turn, collusion between cartels and government officials helps account for Mexico's dismal human rights record.

Still, while conspicuous consumption, social and economic inequalities, and voids of human and social capital likely triggered the deadly wave of

violence affecting migrant-sending regions across Mexico, the social conditions necessary for mass violence already existed. As Mexican human rights activist Maria Luisa Ruelas explained to me in October 2015, “It seems much more complex than people leave and as a result there is violence. I mean, I get the connection I just think that local nuances are very important. You have to understand, these are violent places anyways. There is a lot of violence against women in the countryside, and there are countless local aggressions that don’t necessarily lead to deaths but there is no lack of violence in these regions, even in areas where migration is less prevalent.” What Maria Luisa, who works in Guerrero for the organization Tlachinollan, points out is the fact that even though not all places experience extremely high homicide rates, nonlethal violence is a constant in many parts of rural Mexico.

This leads to an extremely important point, which helps explain why emigration triggers violence in the first place. As Maria Luisa explains, migrants leave highly patriarchal social environments where males are expected to be the sole bread earners and women grow up being told they will stay at home and raise children. And while such norms are not as generalizable as they might have been in the past, by and large males still make up the bulk of Mexican migrants. This is particularly true in the countryside. Thus, emigration provides some males with a means of achieving traditional cultural goals by accessing economic stability in external labor markets. Not everyone is able to emigrate, however. In fact, the large majority don’t end up leaving, and unlike their grandparents, who lived in a pre-NAFTA Mexico, many nonmigrants are unable to fall back on traditional means of earning a living, such as farming or ranching. As a result, countless young males grow up in a hypermasculine culture with no means of validating their virility. Capital flight and social emasculation in rural Mexico parallel the situation of millions of young minority males in the United States who grow up in jobless ghettos (Wilson 1996). Like the inner-city joblessness that Wilson describes, young males in migrant-sending regions grow up in highly masculinized social spaces in which there exist few employment alternatives and where, in recent decades, cartels and organized crime are among the few enterprises offering a path to social mobility. With this in mind, until meaningful efforts are made to address the underlying development issues that persist in migrant-sending areas, it may very well be impossible to decrease the current levels of criminal activity.