Emigration, Violence, and Human Rights Violations in Central Mexico[1]

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Abstract: In the United States Mexican immigration contributes to lower crime rates by reviving marginalized neighborhoods. However, in Mexico emigration and remittances introduce conspicuous consumption into local economies without contributing to the type of economic growth that would allow non-migrants to access social mobility. As a result, the social strain generated by entrenched migrant cultures may increase the appeal of drug trafficking and other forms of illicit employment to those that are unable to migrate or do not directly benefit from the welfare provided by diaspora communities. In this article I develop a theoretical model for understanding the relationship between emigration, crime, and human rights violations. I contend that emigration drains migrant-sending communities of the exact types of economic, human, and social capital that typically mitigate crime. Given this, although temporary, and insanely risky, drug trafficking increasingly represents one potential alternative for young individuals residing in migrant-sending regions who desire to participate in the consuming culture de jour but lack the means to do so. In turn, entrenched black-markets facilitate the emergence of other extra-legal practices, including human rights violations.

Keywords: Emigration, violence, drug trafficking, and human rights.

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Introduction

In the years following WWII ally forces spearheaded the creation of the World Bank (WB, 1944), the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 1945), and the General Agreement on Trades and Tariffs (GATT, 1947). Together, these institutions were designed to assuage the deep social and economic inequalities that appeared to seed conflict in the world during the first half of the 20th century. Then, on December 10th, 1948, inspired by Immanuel Kant's concept of perpetual peace, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was intended to reduce violence and conflict around the world by making long-term commitments to spreading economic development and democratic governance. Informed by men like T.H. Marshall (1949), and later, Seymour Lipset (1959), member countries reasoned that without improving access to basic education, health care, and employment, the ideals outlined in the Human Rights Declaration stood little chance of coming to fruition. In this sense, if the convention's goal was democratic peace, their means of achieving it was economic development.

Violence has dropped precipitously around the world since 1948 (Pinker 2011); still grave human rights violations continue to occur. In fact, some of the most blatant crimes against humanity followed the UN's declaration, including genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Sudan, and most recently, Syria and Iraq. Still, human rights violations have taken place unevenly across time and space, which leads to a basic question. Why do such does violence occur in some places but not others?

Extant research highlights at least three factors that help us understand these irregular patterns: (1) regime type, (2) institutional structures, and (3) rule implementation. Clearly, each of these factors is extremely important. Nonetheless, a fourth condition—the social context from which human rights violations emerge—plays an equally important role in determining when and where human rights violations play out.

In this article I focus on the social context in which recent rising violence and human rights violations have occurred in modern Mexico. Specifically, I argue that such trends, at least in part, are related to social, economic, and cultural deficits forged by decades of mass emigration.

Migration and Violence

Available data suggests a relationship between countries with high emigration levels and violence. For example, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, all of which have large diaspora populations, rank among the world's most violent countries. In fact, as recently as 2012 Honduras topped the list with 91 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. On the other hand, other countries in the region have relatively low emigration rates, including Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay. These countries also happen to be among the region's safest nations, recording much lower homicide rates. In 2012, for example, Chile reported merely 3 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants.

While crime rates in Latin America support the emigration-homicide hypothesis, empirical research in the US suggests a similar notion. Extant research shows an inverse relationship between immigration and violence in urban cities across the US. Specifically, researchers find that immigrants revitalize local neighborhoods (Feldmeyer 2009; Lee et al. 2001; Martinez 2002; Martinez et al. 2004; Reid et al. 2005) by strengthening social organizations such as churches, schools, and NGOs (Ebaugh and Curry 2000; Feldmeyer 2009; Ousey and Kubrin 2009), rejuvenating local economies (Vélez 2009; Portes and Zhou 1993), attracting investment in areas previously lacking business capital (Reid et al. 2005), and ultimately, make crime less profitable (Martinez 2002). As Lyons and colleagues point out (2014:624), "Contrary to much public opinion and political rhetoric, our research joins a chorus of others in suggesting that immigration generally makes neighborhoods safer."

If the influx of immigrants into urban cities in the US contributes to a decrease in violence, it seems plausible that the outflow of emigrants in Latin America may contribute to the type of social environment that fosters violence and facilitates human rights violations in migrant-sending regions.

To be clear, emigration obviously affords emigrant-prone regions with certain benefits. The exodus of working-age individuals to the U.S. over the last several decades has provided Latin America with an escape value for men and women that otherwise might have had a hard time finding stable employment. Moreover, emigration has spurred an unprecedented flow of cash transfers from migrants abroad back to family and friends in hometown communities, which helps reduce the pressure on local authorities to create jobs while simultaneously subsidizing social and economic wellbeing. These trends are evident throughout the developing world. In fact, at an estimated $454 billion, migrant remittances significantly outpace foreign direct investment in developing countries (World Bank 2014).

Still, although migrants are to be lauded for their herculean efforts to improve the wellbeing of those they leave behind; mass emigration also incites a number of unintended consequences within migrant-sending communities. Previous research demonstrates that emigration is associated with higher inequality (Adams 1989; Adams, Cuecuecha, and Page 2008; Barham and Boucher 1998; Milanovic 1987), family and communal disintegration (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Smith 2006), and wavering support from local governments, who experience less pressure from constituents as migrants begin to emerge as social welfare providers

(Goodman and Hiskey 2008; Adida and Girod 2011; Doyle 2013). Given this, it is not altogether surprising that while remittances clearly provide short-term benefits to loved ones back home, over the long run, they correlate with lower levels of human development (Waddell 2015).

This leads to a key question. All else equal, does emigration foster the type of social environment where violence would be more likely to occur?

I address this question via an extensive review of existing research, and a case study of the state Michoacán, Mexico. I divide my article in three sections. In the first section I evaluate existing studies regarding emigration and crime. My analysis demonstrates that emigration may very well drain migrant-sending communities of the exact types of economic, human, and social capital that are typically associated with lower crime rates. These observations lead into the second section, where I review extant research concerning the relationship between emigration and development. I find that emigration contributes to social settings in which violence would be more likely to occur. In the third section I develop a theoretical framework that sheds light on the potential mechanisms driving crime in emigration-prone regions of the world. Although I believe the tenets of my theory may very well hold true in other parts of the world, the majority of my research concerns Mexico. With this in mind, I draw on examples from modern Mexico throughout, and use data from the state of Michoacán to evidence my theory. Given the dearth of research in this area, it is my hope that this theoretical framework will serve as a point of departure for future studies concerning the relationship between emigration and crime.

Crime and Immigration in the US

Xenophobia runs deep in US history, but in recent decades, Latin Americans have emerged as the principal target of nativist angst. In response, draconian laws have popped up across the country. In 2010 the Arizona legislature passed SB1070, which led to a series of harsh immigration laws in other states, including HB87 in Georgia (2011), and HB56 later that year in Alabama. A common thread across these waves of xenophobia is the depiction of immigrants as violent pariahs that stir up unrest in otherwise peaceful communities. One of the most recent public figures to draw a connection between immigration and crime is the Republican Party's frontrunner for the 2016 elections, Donald Trump. In 2015 in a public statement he asserted,

> "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending the best. They're not sending you, they're sending people that have lots of problems and they're bringing those problems. They're bringing drugs, they're bringing crime" (Walker).

Mr. Trump's stance assumes two things about US society; (1) communities with fewer foreigners have less crime, and (2) immigrants cause violence. Fortunately, he is wrong on both accounts. Since the 1990s crime in the US has actually dropped, and there is absolutely zero compelling evidence to demonstrate an association between immigration and higher crime. In fact, in recent decades the violent immigrant thesis has been turned on its head by empirical studies that demonstrate an inverse relationship between immigration and crime.

Crime rates peaked in the early 1990s in the US, and then dropped quickly over the next decade, which is the same time frame in which immigration began to tick upward (Sampson 2008:2). The negative correlation between immigration and crime during the 1990s draws into question the common stereotype of immigrants as catalysts of violence. If immigrants cause so much crime, why is their presence in urban cities associated with lower crime rates?

In one of the first empirical appraisals of crime and immigration, Butcher and Piehl (1999) use data from the Uniform Crime Reports and the Current Population Survey to assess the hypothesis that immigrants incite higher crime rates in urban cities. While their estimates do report relatively higher crime rates in cities with high levels of immigration, they find zero evidence for a relationship between increases in crime and higher immigrant concentration (460). In a second stage of analysis, the authors use data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to compare crime rates among immigrant youth with their native born peers. The authors find that immigrant youth between the ages of 15 and 23 are less likely than natives to commit crime (482).

Subsequent research corroborates these findings. In fact, while political pundits continue to deride immigrants for planting seeds of violence in US neighborhoods, social scientists have amassed an overwhelmingly strong body of evidence documenting an inverse relationship between immigrant concentration and rates of violence (Feldmeyer 2009; Kubrin and Ishizaw 2012; Lee et al. 2001; Martinez 2002, 2006; Martinez, Stowell, and Lee 2010; Reid et al. 2005; Wadsworth 2010; Lyons et al. 2013). Crime rates in the US peaked in the early 1990s, and have fallen since. Still, they did not fall uniformly across communities. Rather, crime rates fell drastically in many cities, dropped only slightly in others, and even increased in some locations. Across the board, however, crime rates fell the most in city neighborhoods that had higher concentrations of immigrants. And when compared to neighborhoods with low rates of immigration, districts experiencing high rates of immigration tend to have lower rates of drug-related crime and violence (Kubrin and Ishizawa 2012; Lee et al. 2001; Martinez et al. 2004; Martinez et al. 2008; Stowell and Martinez 2007; Sampson 2008; Lyons et al. 2013; Wadsworth 2010).

Challenges to the aforementioned studies have focused on questions of endogeneity and potential selection bias. For example, perhaps immigrants, who are attracted to booming economies, simply happen upon cities while they are at their best. In other words, maybe it’s not that immigrants contribute to lower rates of crime so much as they are attracted to areas that are economically active, and thus, less likely to have high rates of crime to begin with. If this were true, however, one would expect individual level data to follow similar patterns of crime across native-born and foreign-born populations. However, researchers find that just living in close proximity with foreign-born populations results in a lower probability of committing crime, and when compared to native-born citizen of similar social standing, immigrants have lower offense rates across the board (Butcher and Piehl 1998; Desmond and Kurbin 2009; Sampson, Morenoff, and Raudenbush 2005).

So what is it about immigrants that predispose them to less criminal activity? The principal explanation has come to be known as the "immigrant revitalization" theory, which argues that immigrants revitalize neighborhoods that previously suffered from economic, political, and social disadvantages (Feldermeyer 2009; Lee et al. 2001; Martinez 2002; Martinez et al. 2004; Reid et al. 2005). According to this line of thought, immigrants revive social organizations and strengthen neighborhood solidity through community engagement and strong family ties. Immigrants also contribute to stronger institutions including schools, churches, and non-governmental organizations (Chinchilla, Hamilton, and Loucky 1993; Ley 2008; Theodore and Martin 2007). In turn, social cohesion and stronger institutions fosters better communication amongst neighbors, which makes it easier for informal systems of control to curb violence and defend the interests of the community (Ebaugh and Curry 2000). In addition, immigrants typically operate on tight budget constraints and in consequence, they establish residence in economically deprived communities (Vélez 2009). In this manner, immigrants contribute to the economic revitalization of marginalized districts by injecting capital into local economies and redeveloping areas of the city that were left behind by social-economic shifts in the 1970s.

Immigrants, who typically have slightly higher fertility rates than native populations, also help developed countries curb depopulation trends, which aids the host country in the long run by stabilizing population growth and guaranteeing a young working population for the next generation (Reid et al. 2005). Related to this, immigrants also curb crime by bolstering two-family households (Ousey and Kubrin 2009), which "discourage family disruption, substance abuse, and other forms of deviance, which taken together protect residents against violence" (Graif and Sampson 2009:257). Finally, immigrants, and especially undocumented immigrants who live in a state of constant risk, are particularly likely to follow laws and statutes as a means of flying under the official radar. Moreover, the vast majority of immigrants come to the US in order to improve their lives, and more often than not, they are willing to go to drastic measures to avoid anything that might compromise their plans.

In short, immigrants are predisposed to commit as little crime as possible (Sampson 2008). These results are consistent over time and hold up under the scrutiny of checks for selection bias and potential endogeneity (Ousey and Kubrin 2009). Thus, at least in the US, immigrants revitalize communities by contributing to urban renewal, fostering community and family cohesion, and driving economic revitalization. This outcome is partially due to a process of self-selection in which immigrants, even before entering the US, have lower propensities to commit crime. Existing studies demonstrate that immigration serves as a selection process in which, compared to their compatriots back home, immigrants are less likely to commit crime, and hold relatively higher aspirations for their future (Butcher and Piehl 1998; Kubrin and Ishizaw 2012; Stowell et al. 2009; Tonry 1997). As Kurbin and Ishizaw (2012, 150) point out, "Immigrants do not represent a cross-section of the sending population…the self-selection of migrants into the United States in search of work and economic advancement suggests they may have strong incentives to remain law-abiding and to avoid interactions with the criminal justice system."

Given this, within migrant-prone regions in the developing world one might expect to find that emigration contributes 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 US. In other words, emigration to the developed world may well foster social breakdown in the developing world.

In 2006 the newspaper *Investor's Business Daily* (IBD) published a short article titled, "Fencing in Human Capital" (2006). The author pointed out that although migration stimulates consumption as families spend remittances in local economies, in the long run, migration may spur a pernicious cycle in which individuals become dependent on remittances for income, thus lowering their incentive to participate in entrepreneurial opportunities. In time, argued IBD, remittances lead to poverty and increase the likelihood of "social unrest" and "[t]he picture darkens when one considers that the highest-remittance states [Michoacán, Guanajuato, Jalisco] border poorer states where there already is insurgency or recent unrest — like Oaxaca, Chiapas and Guerrero."

Has emigration underpinned a process of social upheaval in central Mexico? Specifically, do migrant remittances contribute to the types of environments in which one might expect social unrest to emerge? In the space that remains I analyze these questions in further detail.

Effects of Emigration in Mexico

Academics, journalists, and lay citizens have long focused on the violence along the US-Mexico border. Until recently, far less attention was lent to violence in Mexico's interior. However, over the last several years the world has taken note of the escalating tensions between rival cartels in central Mexico, as well as the often highly visual displays of homicides. Still, while violence has certainly intensified since the War on Drugs was launched in 2006, violence in central Mexico is hardly a new phenomenon. In the case of Michoacán, for example, homicide levels were high throughout the 1990s, and while the violence of this early period captured less attention, the death tolls rivaled those of today. So, what are the roots of violence in emigration-prone regions like Michoacán?

Experts generally cite territorial rifts between rival drug cartels when asked about the underlying causes spurring violence in Mexico. And while disputes over territory do in fact drive tensions between cartels, they do not explain the why so many individuals are willing to join up with cartels in the first place. Cartels depend on loyal foot soldiers and collusion with government officials, and modern Mexico is rife with both. Thus, while territorial disputes explain extreme levels of violence, they do little to help us understand the ease with which cartels are able to recruit accomplices. I argue that emigration out of Mexico has contributed to social conditions that would facilitate the supply of laborers within the drug trafficking world.

Robert Merton (1938) argued that if individuals lack the means through which to obtain culturally accepted goals, they become more likely to pursue socially established goals through non-conventional means. In rural Mexico, migration has long been the culturally accepted means through which to obtain material success. Still, while emigration provides many people in Mexico with the means through which to pursue material success only a relatively small percentage of Mexicans actually emigrate. In fact, as of 2013, only 1% of Mexico’s 122 million citizens resided in the US (Zong and Batalova 2014). In effect, many young Mexicans are left searching for alternative means through which to achieve their material goals.

Towards a Theoretical Framework of Crime and Emigration

Research regarding immigration and crime in the US tends to ebb and flow with actual immigration rates. In the early 20th century high immigration fueled an active research agenda in the social sciences concerning issues like immigrant assimilation and acculturation (Park and Miller 1921; Park and Burgess 1924; Park, Burgess, and McKenzie 1925; Shaw, McKay, and Cottrell 1929). In fact, much of Robert Park's early work, which set the very foundation for American Sociology, was influenced by research he conducted in the 1920s alongside students in diaspora communities near the University of Chicago. During this time period Chicago, like many cities in the US, experienced rapid urban growth, and notable spikes in criminal activity. At the time, theoretical explanations of crime focused on the individual pathologies of criminals—i.e., genetic and psychological differences. However, in the 1920s sociologists at the "Chicago School" began to argue that most crime was likely a product of social pathologies related to social, cultural, and economic inequalities (Short 2002).

The Chicago School shifted the attention of criminologists away from biological traits and toward the study of social ecologies. The principal assumption of social ecologists lies in the belief that while human beings are indeed rational actors, their decisions are almost always bound to environmental constraints (Hawley 1968; Einstadter and Henry 2006).

The study of the relationship between social environs and criminal activity inspired researchers to revitalize Émile Durkheim's functional analysis of crime. According to Durkheim's anomie theory, large social change—such as mass emigration to the city—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 that 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 argued that ecological factors influence criminal behavior (Bursik 1988; Bursik and Grasmick 1993; Sampson and Groves 1989; Sampson, Morenoff, and Earls 1999). They contended 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, which 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, in analyzing the environment in which criminals live we may very well gain a better understanding of what drives people to commit crime in the first place.

For many years it was assumed that immigration might actually fuel criminal activity by contributing to social strain. After all, immigrants predominately settle in economically and socially marginalized areas with high levels of social disorganization, and in addition to speaking foreign languages, they bring new cultural norms and values to the table. However, in recent decades social scientists have found an inverse relationship between immigration and crime (Tonry 1997; Mears 2001; Thomas 2011; Bursik 2006; Morenoff and Astor 2006; Martinez and Valenzuela 2006). As mentioned above, researchers working in this vein find that homicide levels in immigrant neighborhoods are uncharacteristically low despite the fact that said neighborhoods suffer from the same types of social disorganization as other minority communities (Martinez and Lee 1998). Explanations for this outcome focus on the fact that immigrants, imbued in strong family networks and cultural capital, are able to mitigate environmental factors that might otherwise foster criminal behavior (Moore and Pinderhughes 1993).

These advances lead to important questions regarding social organization in migrant-sending regions. Namely, what is the long-term impact of mass emigration on the welfare of individuals living in emigrant-prone regions?

The Effects of Mass Emigration on Migrant-Sending Communities

Research in Africa, South Asia, and Latin America reveals that migration and remittances significantly reduce the number of people living in deep poverty within migrant-sending communities (Adams 1991; Adams 2006; Ajayi *et al.* 2009; Anyanwu and Erhijakpor 2010;

Fajnzylber and Lopez 2007; Gupta *et al.* 2007; Lachaud 1999). In a cross-national study of 71 countries Adams and Page (2005) find that every 10 percent increase in remittances per capita results in a 3.5 percent reduction in the number of people living in poverty. The World Bank (2006a) documents similar trends in Nepal, where increases in remittance transfers were associated with sharply declining poverty rates between 1995 and 2005. Coupled with the fact that global remittance flows currently outpace foreign direct investment (Ratha et al. 2010), it is not at all surprising that migrants have emerged as key agents in economic development initiatives around the world. This is particularly evident in countries like Mexico, where government officials work side by side with migrants in development projects. In 2002 Mexico launched 3x1 para migrantes, which matches migrant contributions to local development projects 3 times over. Each year the program invests millions of dollars in roads, bridges, electricity grids, schools, healthcare clinics, computer labs, and small businesses across Mexico. Existing research finds that investments made through the 3x1 program improve on the development effects of raw remittances (Waddell 2015).

Despite the potential for remittances to improve wellbeing, extant research reveals that emigration typically fosters conspicuous consumption and exacerbates local inequalities within migrant-sending communities (Mines and de Janvry 1982; Reichert 1981; Stuart and Kearney 1981; Wiest 1973). This later point is related to the fact that even in the most disadvantaged communities migrants tend to be among the more educated and financially better off (Lucas 2005; Stark 1991). As a result, only the select few are able to migrate, which means that the benefits of emigration—including cash transfers, access to social networks, and investments in human capital—are spread unequally across migrant-sending communities. At their root, migrant remittances are a personal transfer in which individuals who have left selectively send cash and material goods to those members of the community that they most care for. For this reason, remittances generally aggravate local inequalities, especially at the beginning of the migrant cycle (Adams 1989; Adams, Cuecuecha, and Page 2008; Barham and Boucher 1998; Milanovic 1987; Mckenzie and Rapoport 2006).

Subsequent research documents a slightly different trend, finding that while remittances do indeed spur local inequalities they also indirectly stimulate employment, investment in public infrastructure, and income (Adelman, Taylor, and Vogel 1988; Adida and Girod 2011; Calderón et al. 2008; Durand et al. 1996). Work by Stark, Taylor, and Yitzhaki (1986) in central Mexico demonstrates that the effects of emigration on economic development outcomes appear to follow a Kuznets curve-like trend, in which pecuniary differences within communities first rise as individuals begin to migrate but in time fall as more individuals leave and begin to send back a portion of their income (Stark et al. 1986; Taylor 1992; Taylor et al. 2008). Still, in countries with well-established cultures of migration the back end of the curve is often decades removed from the beginning of the migration cycle.

Might remittances actually contribute to economic decline? Despite a great deal of research regarding the development effects of emigration, the relationship between remittances and economic development is not well understood. In Mexico, for example, remittances are more likely to be spent on consumer goods and housing than invested in activities that would improve household productivity (Durant et al. 1996; Taylor et al. 1996). De Brauw and Rozelle (2003) reveal a similar trend in China, where they find that migration is correlated with a 20 percent increase in consumption trends but is not significantly associated with investments in productive ventures. Still, a number of researchers find that migration reduces risk and liquidity constraints at the household level (Stark and Levhari 1982; Rosenzweig and Stark, 1989), and ultimately, stimulates investment in entrepreneurial activities (Adams 1991; Dustmann and Kirchkamp 2001; Woodruff and Zenteno 2001; Black et al. 2003). In addition, research in Bangladesh (Mendola 2004), China (De Brauw et al. 2003; Rozelle et al 1999), and the Maghreb region (Garson 1994) finds that while migration reduces household income due to labor loss, it does not result in lower crop yields. Instead, remittances act as substitutes for household income previously earned in the fields while at the same time facilitating the adoption of modern farming techniques. Together, these factors stabilize crop yields even as the supply of labor shrinks.

Despite this, subsequent research suggests that over the long run migration, and remittances in particular, may actually contribute to economic decline (Waddell 2015). Although the mechanisms driving this outcome are not entirely clear, it appears that remittances ultimately deter community members from participating in the labor market (Azam and Gubert 2005). Research in this vein finds that if remittances are large enough to provide for the welfare of the entire household they can have the perverse effect of discouraging individuals from working (Gubert, F 2000; Germenji and Swinnend 2004). Azam and Gubert (2005:1334) find that, "the more insurance is provided by the migrants, the less incentive their families have to work." These findings resonate with earlier research that concluded that remittances flows ultimately hindered development efforts (Lesch 1990; Handoussa 1991; Shafik 1995), and were associated with the "stagnation of agricultural production and sharp decline of area under cultivation" (World Bank 1984:1).

Still, while there are clearly negative effects of emigration for families directly connected to diaspora communities, the moral hazards related to emigration are likely to be most pernicious for those individuals that receive little or no help from families abroad. In developing regions around the world, and especially in rural communities, emigration is often seen as the best means through which to achieve material success. This is particularly 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.

Still, only a relatively small percentage of society actually 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 televisions, electronics, other 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 development. In this sense, while emigration introduces conscious consumption to marginalized communities in the developing world, it does not appear to stimulate the type of economic development that would permit individuals not directly tied to diaspora communities to partake in mass consumption.

In other words, while remittances initially contribute directly to the improved welfare of some individuals, and even stimulate employment within communities of origin as migrants build second homes and partake in the consumption of goods in local markets, in time they inhibit the types of policy environments that would improve the welfare of those they leave behind over the long run. Research by Adida and Girod (2011:19), for example, demonstrates that access to clean water and drainage improves in Mexican municipalities that receive relatively higher levels of remittances. These authors also reveal, however, that local governments reduce their support for communities as financial transfers from abroad increase. In a panel study of 18 countries in Latin America, Doyle (2013) comes to a similar conclusion, arguing, “the repeated receipt of remittances will bolster income, and economic security of recipients and therefore reduce the income risk. Over time, this will alter the preferences of recipients for welfare transfers. . . . [In time] this will translate into reduced support for political parties who advocate redistribution. The upshot is a reduction in government spending on welfare and social security” (p. 24). Goodman and Hiskey (2008) summarize this line of research by arguing that “[while remittances are] perhaps a constructive solution to the development failings of the state in the short term, at some point the transnational community will reach its limits in terms of what it can provide citizens, thus forcing those individuals to turn back toward a state that may have already left them behind” (p. 185).

Thus, while emigration is clearly a complex process with multiple potential outcomes, in many cases it appears to aggravate social inequalities while restricting access to the types of productive sectors that would allow one to partake in the luxuries that remittances afford select members of the community. In the absence of other sources of employment, local residents may become more likely to carve out alternative forms of obtaining social prestige. This is particularly clear in modern Mexico, where drug trafficking has emerged as a particularly lucrative means to acquire material success.

Crime and Emigration in Modern Mexico

Existing research on migrant-hometown communities focuses on the economic development effects of emigration within local villages and townships. Far less attention addresses the social consequences of emigration (Hugo 2002:14). In particular, with the exception of occasional discussions in the popular press, there is surprisingly little discussion lent to the relationship between emigration and crime. This intellectual lacuna is especially surprising in Mexico and Central America, where emigration rates and crime rates have increased at similar rates over the last two decades.

Emigration to developed countries fundamentally changes the nature of society in migrant-sending regions by aggravating social and economic inequalities and altering economic development. In this sense, the mass exodus of largely working-age individuals sets in motion a series of events that eventually undermines economic stability in the community in question. Thus, although not at all unavoidable, emigration appears to foster an environment in which violence is more likely to occur.

In order to truly understand deviant behavior one must examine the social circumstances that condition opportunities structures within society. According to Robert Merton (1938), "It is the conflict between culturally accepted values and the socially structured difficulties of living up to these values which exerts pressure toward deviant behavior and disruption of the normative system." In other words, social deviance is a product of the relationship between the available *means*, such as education and employment, through which one is able to achieve *cultural goals* that are widely accepted within society, such as material success.

With this in mind, residents in migrant-prone regions within the developing world likely face one of five options,

(1) Attempt to achieve cultural goals by conforming to migration trends and moving to a larger regional economy or abroad.

(2) Innovate by attempting to achieve cultural goals outside of the traditional institutional means available.

(3) Adhere to cultural goals by pursuing subsistence farming and/or ranching, thus rejecting material success while concurrently upholding traditional norms.

(4) Retreat from social norms and institutions altogether.

(5) Rebel and attempt to redefine social norms and institutions.

These options are displayed below in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

In the case of migrant-sending regions across Mexico, *conformity* lies in pursuing the "American Dream," which is typically achieved through multiple trips to the US or larger regional economies, and is defined by economic stability and material success. Migrants frequently signal their social ascension to the rest of the village by building homes with modern amenities, such as garage doors, balconies, flat screen televisions, and even Jacuzzi tubs (Lopez 2015). They also typically bring back new model cars and trucks and send remittances to their family members, thus securing their new social standing in the community while simultaneously stimulating a culture of conspicuous consumption within the village. Finally, in many communities migrants take it upon themselves to actually rebuild their hometown communities by investing in communal development projects such as roads, bridges, communities centers, and church renovations, to name but a few. Still, as Lopez (2015:38) points out, "The price of improving the domestic dwelling is abandoning it, and investments in the community can end up producing new social and spatial divisions within it. Absence is a necessary precondition for migrants to realize their dream house."

Nonetheless, while millions of migrants live in the US, at 10 percent of the Mexican population, only a relatively small portion of society has ever actually resided abroad. Furthermore, while remittances may help lift many people out of poverty, as the previous section revealed, they do not appear to generate new avenues of employment for working-age youth. Following Merton's logic, the ostensible success of those who are able to leave may place strain on those left behind due to the fact that villagers typically embrace the cultural goals brought back by migrants but lack the means through which to achieve them. As a result, it is not at all surprising that some people within migrant sending-regions seek material success by engaging in organized crime such as drug trafficking, extortion, and kidnapping.

This notion is supported by available data on disappeared persons in Mexico. As Table 2 reveals, between 2005-2015, nearly 26,000 individuals disappeared. With an average age of 27, the vast majority of them were of working age, and roughly 72% of the victims were men. Although it is impossible to know the exact circumstances surrounding these individuals' respective disappearances, these figures draw a profile of young, working age individuals who deviated from social norm as a means of pursuing opportunities unavailable to them through the traditional means of production, and in the end, it has cost many of them their lives.

[Table 2 about here]

In the 2015 documentary *Cartel Land*, which provides first-hand accounts of rising conflict in the state of Michoacán, an unidentified man, who is seen producing methamphetamine, states, "The United States is where most of the drugs are sold. All over the United States. What can I say? We know we do harm with all the drugs that go there. But I repeat, we have few resources. We are poor. If we were doing well, we would be like you [referring to the men filming], traveling the world and doing good work like you guys." The man, who is wearing a camouflage bandana over his mouth and has a large caliber rifle slung over his shoulder, turns to the men standing in the background, all of whom are heavily armed. "We will do this as long as God allows it," the man says. "As long as He allows it, we will make drugs. Everyday we make more and we are going to make more. Because this is never going to end, right? Right, guys?" The shadowy men in the background confirm their boss' prediction with ominous nods.

More than 150,000 have died since the War on Drugs was declared by then-president Felipe Calderón in 2006 (Jornada 2012); still, relatively few individuals in migrant-sending regions are willing to go to such extremes to achieve material success. With this in mind, social strain also frequently prompts what Merton refers to as *ritualism.* In the context of rural Mexico, ritualism may involve strictly obeying the conventions of traditional norms, such as thanking God for his benevolence each Sunday despite working for unsustainably low wages and living in deplorable conditions. The ritual of framing suffering in the here and now as a test of one's faith arguably helps many inhabitants cope with their inability to achieve material success.

Still, according to Merton, in some people social strain triggers both rejection of cultural goals as well as the social means available to achieve them. Drug addicts, alcoholics, and vagrants characterize this response, which Merton labels *retreatism.* Unconventional lifestyles may define social pariahs, however, it is their willingness to live beyond traditional norms that is most disquieting. As social psychologists have long understood, nonconformity of this nature provokes a reaction at the neural level that is very similar to the sensation one undergoes when in physical pain (Aronson 2012:21). In other words, social withdrawal hurts, and while it is ultimately an individual choice, it is clearly a symptom of social dysfunction.

Finally, social strain can result in *rebellion* as well. Social rebels are similar to retreatists in the sense that they reject cultural goals and the conventional means to achieve them. However, rebellion is a form of counterculture that involves redefining cultural goals and creating news means through which to obtain them. In modern Mexico the Zapatista revolution serves as a good example of rebellion but many other examples come to mind as well. In Michoacán, the cartel known as *Los Templarios* or the Templar Knights, infamously holds its members to a strict social code that ostensibly requires adherents to fight against materialism, injustice, and moral deterioration.

Evidence from Michoacán, Mexico

Michoacán, Mexico provides a particularly fitting setting to analyze the relationship between emigration, crime, and human rights violations. Michoacán is annually among the top remittances-receiving states in Mexico, and in recent years, the state has experienced a considerable spike in crime, including both homicides and disappearances. In this section, relying on data from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) and the National Population Council (CONAPO), I explore the potential relationship between emigration, homicides, and disappearances across 113 municipalities in Michoacán.

Table 3 displays descriptive statistics for the data used in this section. As the reader will note, there were nearly 1,600 homicides registered in Michoacán between 2005-2015, with a mean of more than 8 homicides per 100,000 residents. As is evident, 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 time period just over 1,000 people disappeared in Michoacán, with a mean of 1.5 disappearances per 100,000 inhabitants.

[Table 3 about here]

Emigration in the developing world is generally higher in economically deprived regions. Thus, if emigration and lethal 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, Graph 1 plots homicide rates per 100,000 inhabitants with human development levels across

Michoacán's municipalities. As the reader will note, homicide rates are significantly lower in municipalities that have higher levels of wellbeing. This trend follows general tendencies around the world in which violence drops in areas where inhabitants have relatively better access to health care, education, and income.

[Graph 1 about here]

The least developed regions of Michoacán also happen to be the state's most rural areas, where migration rates are typically much higher. Given this, it is not surprising that welfare in rural Michoacán depends a great deal on remittances from abroad. However, as Chart 1 and Chart 2 illustrate, respectively, rural areas also report higher rates of homicides and disappearances.

[Chart 1 about here]
[Chart 2 about here]

Still, as Graph 2 reveals, the relationship between crime and remittances is not linear in Michoacán. Rather, homicides appear to rise with remittance levels up until a certain threshold, where they eventually drop off rather abruptly. This finding corresponds to existing research that demonstrates that remittances drive up social and economic inequalities—both of which are highly correlated with crime rates—before eventually spurring an equalizing effect as more and more people relocate abroad. In fact, previous research in central Mexico demonstrates that the effects of emigration on economic development outcomes follow a Kuznets curve-like trend, in which pecuniary differences within communities first rise as individuals begin to emigrate but in time fall as more individuals leave and begin to send back a portion of their income. At least in the state of Michoacán, the relationship between remittances and homicide rates follow a similar trend. Nevertheless, few regions in Michoacán appear to have reached the threshold point at which the multiplying-effects of remittances spread through communities and homicide rates begin to drop off.

[Graph 2 about here]

Conclusions

In this article I provide a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between mass emigration, social change, and violent crime, including human rights violations. 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). Although my study relies on research conducted around the world, my focus is largely on Mexico, where emigration and crime rates have rose precipitously in recent decades. As I have demonstrated throughout this manuscript, emigration drains migrant-sending communities of the exact types of economic, human, and social capital that foster government accountability and mitigate crime. Given this, it is not at all surprising that human rights violations, and crime rates more generally, are typically high in emigration-prone regions of the world.

In the US mass immigration has fundamentally altered social environs in migrant-settling regions by injecting them with economic, social, and human capital. In effect, violent crime rates in marginalized neighborhoods across the country have dropped. Although this flies in the face of popular understandings of immigration and crime, a well-established literature documents the inverse relationship between immigrant concentration and crime in US cities. In Mexico mass emigration has also deeply altered social life, but in many cases, it has not been for the better.

While diaspora communities aboard clearly provide migrant-sending villages with the economic capital they previously lacked, 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 their newfound prosperity. In effect, over the last several generations mass emigration have 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 are left behind as local economies stagnate and job sources dry up.

Thus, 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 cloths, stories of trips abroad, and of course, access to basic welfare including healthcare, and education. The stark inequalities introduced to migrant-sending communities through emigration feeds a culture of conspicuous consumption in which non-migrants naturally desire to participate. Given this, 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 18-40, which is also the general profile for the large majority of the estimated 26,000 people that have gone missing in the last decade as well as the more than 100,000 victims that the War on Drugs has left in its wake.

In this sense, in recent years Mexican drug cartels have provided migrant-prone communities with the types of capital that the government and diaspora communities are seemingly unable to deliver (McDonald 2009:20). This helps explain how cartels have been able to make such quick inroads within communities while concurrently taking control of official institutions. The most successful cartels have been found to control large percentages of local police forces as well as government institutions at the municipal, state, and even federal level (Castillo García 2009). Collusion between cartels and the government 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 currently affecting migrant-sending regions across Mexico, the social conditions necessary for mass violence seemingly already existed.

As Mexican human rights activist Maria Luisa Ruelas explained to me in October of 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, non-lethal violence is a constant in many parts of rural Mexico. This 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 makes 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 non-migrants 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 hyper-masculine culture with no means of validating their virility. Capital flight and social emasculation in rural Mexico parallels the situation of millions of young minority males in the U.S. 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 assuage current levels of criminal activity. In this sense, if there is a basic lesson to learn from all this it may be that extreme violence and human rights violations are best combated through extensive social welfare programs that work to mitigate the social and economic barriers that impede people from living meaningful lives in the first place.

Unfortunately, cash-strapped government officials in Mexico are unable to invest the type of money in society that would curb the appeal of working for drug cartels. And although drug trafficking injects stagnant economies with initial economic activity, the long-term effects are unfortunately similar to the impact of remittances on economic development. Regarding the potential economic benefits of drug trafficking, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (1998:14) concludes that,

> "A number of producer countries have started to suffer from what is generally known as "Dutch disease" leading to stagnation or even contraction of other, non-drug-related sectors, which makes their economies even more dependent upon a single illicit commodity."

Thus, while drug trafficking may ostensibly afford communities the ability to achieve material success in the short run, over time the boom and bust cycles inherent to trafficking illicit goods is detrimental to local economies. Calderon and colleagues (2013:30), for example, find that violence associated with territorial disputes between rivaling cartels in Mexico has a negative effect on labor force participation and employment. Specifically, they discover that, "those municipalities that saw dramatic increases in violence between 2006 and 2010 significantly reduced their energy consumption in the years after the treatment." Based on this, the authors conclude that while drug trafficking may offer immediate economic benefits to individuals living in rural Mexico, as well as within marginalized urban communities, over the long run the violence associated with trafficking forces local business and residents to invest in security and protection, thus whittling away at business revenue and household savings. Related to this, Solís González (2013:24) reveals that,

> "Unemployment and the falling purchasing power of salaries has deteriorated the conditions of production and the labor force, obligating people to migrate to the US or to fall into the informal economy, thus increasing the potential labor force of drug cartels."

However, in time, faced with increasing competition, cartels and their institutional allies are forced to turn on local citizens in order to finance the increasing costs of maintaining their territories (Calderon et al. 2013). Citizens, thus, are forced to pay quotas and hefty ransoms to cartels, as well as bear the psychological weight of kidnappings and violence. At some point, residents are pushed so far that they begin to retract investments in local businesses, and in many cases, seek refugee in regions with less violence. Thus, a cycle that began with emigration ends with emigration, and the social, economic, and cultural deficits forged by decade of mass exodus become more entrenched.

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Table 1 Strain Theory in the Context of Migrant-Sending Communities

Adaptation	Cultural Goals	Institutional Means	Examples
Conformity	+	+	-Education, large-scale farming/ranching, and emigration.
Innovation	+	-	-Organized crime, extortion, etc.
Ritualism	-	+	-Subsistence level farming, and ranching
Retreatism	-	-	-Pauperism, alcoholism, drug addition, etc.
Rebellion	-/+	-/+	-Rural insurgence, revolution.

Source: Adopted from Robert K. Merton. 1938. "Social Structure and Anomie." *American Sociological Review* 3:672-682, p. 676.

Note: (+) indicates acceptance, (-) signifies rejection, and (-/+) refers to rejection of current cultural goals in favor of new values and norms.

Table 2 Basic Profile of Disappeared in Mexico 2005-2015*

	Gender	Average Age
Male	18,732	28.61
Female	7,186	25.49
Total	25,918	27.43

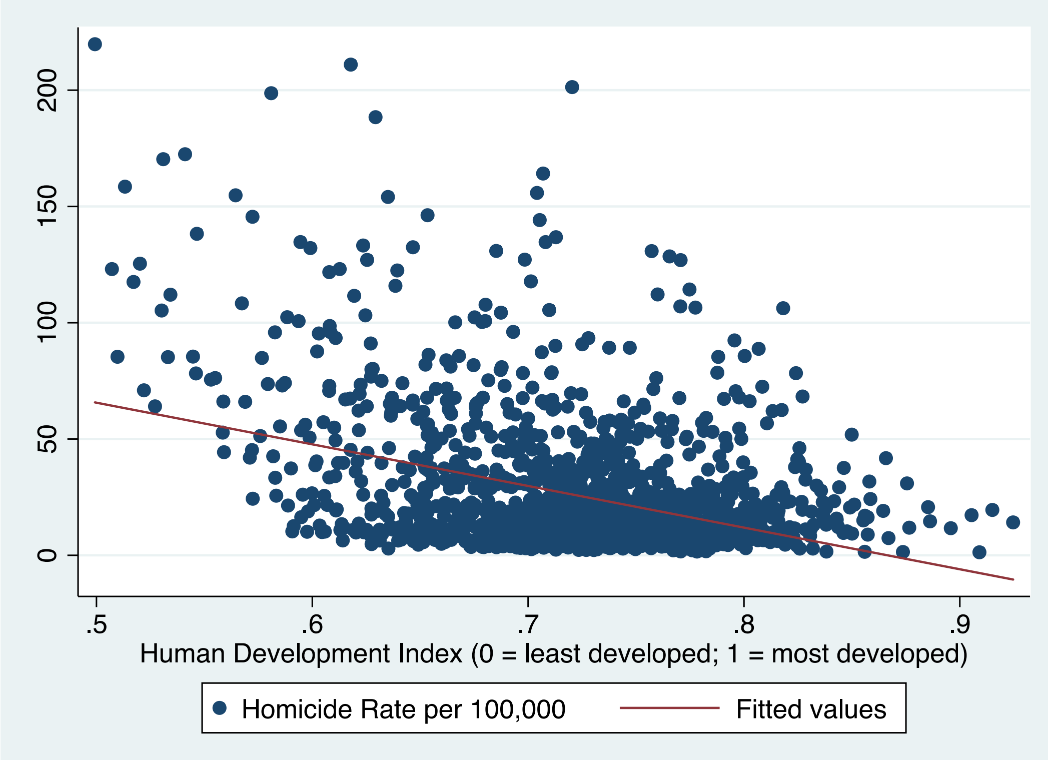
Source: Registro Nacional de Datos de Personas Extraviados o Desaparecidas (RNPED).
*Data reports through April, 2015

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics for Homicides and Disappearances in Michoacán 2005-2015*

	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Max
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

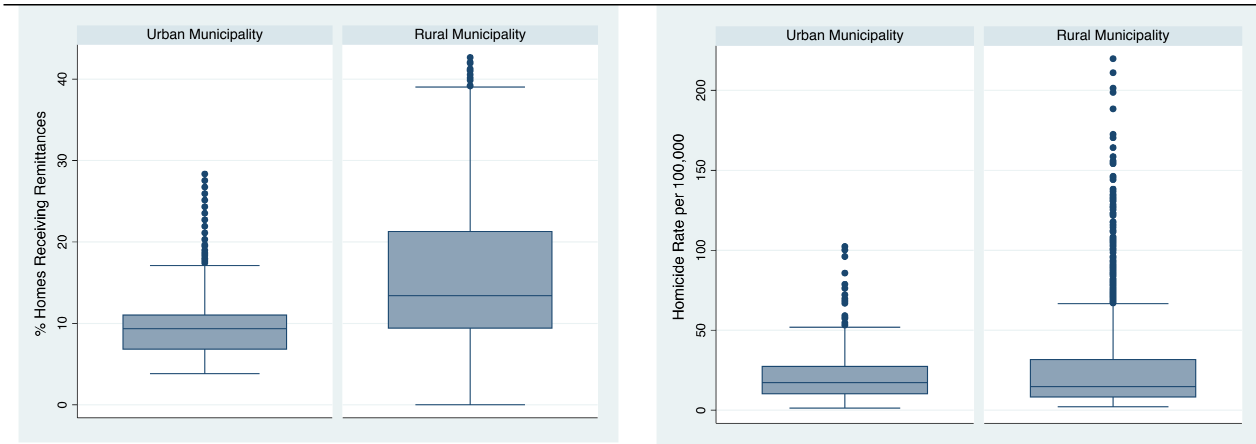
Source: Registro Nacional de Datos de Personas Extraviados o Desaparecidas (RNPED) and INEGI.
*Data reports through April, 2015

Graph 1 Homicide Rates per 100,000 by Human Development in Michoacán, 1990-2010



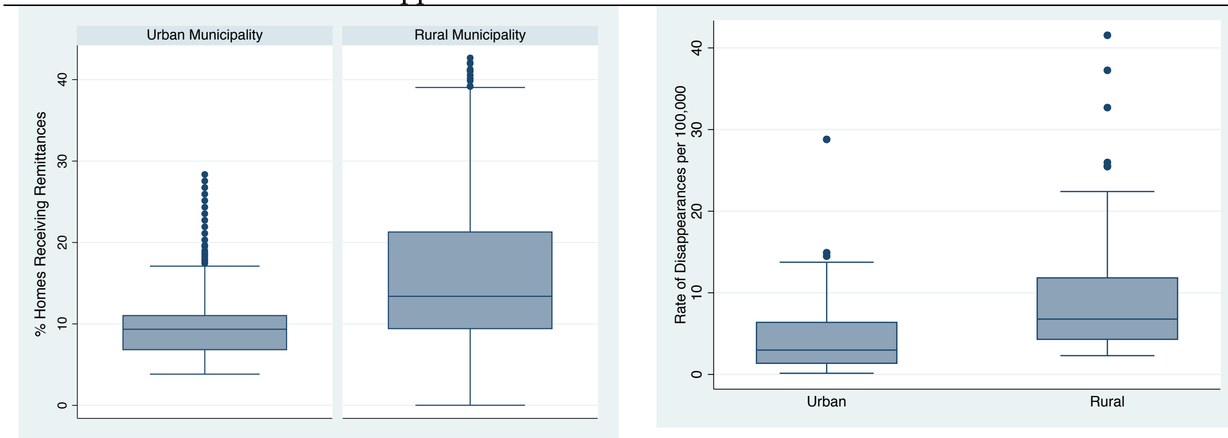
Source: INEGI.

Chart 1 Remittances and Homicide Rates across Urban and Rural Sectors of Michoacán



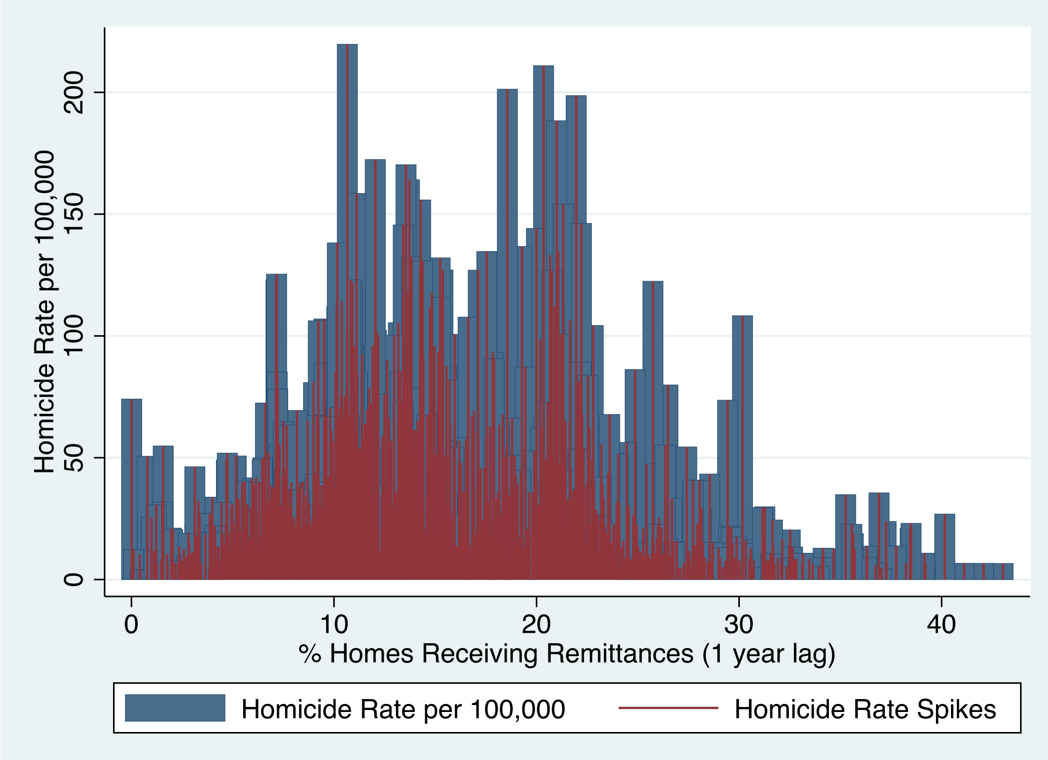
Source: INEGI.

Chart 2 Remittances and Disappearance Rates across Urban and Rural Sectors of Michoacán



Source: INEGI.

Graph 2 Homicide Rates per 100,000 by Percentage of Households Receiving Remittances



Source: INEGI.