



**DETERRENCE BY EMERGENCY:  
SECURITIZED MIGRATION GOVERNANCE  
AND HUMANITARIAN CONSEQUENCES  
IN THE TIJUANA-SAN DIEGO BORDER  
REGION (2022-2025)**

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SECURITIZADA Y CONSECUENCIAS  
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DE TIJUANA-SAN DIEGO (2022-2025)*



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## DETERRENCE BY EMERGENCY: SECURITIZED MIGRATION GOVERNANCE AND HUMANITARIAN CONSEQUENCES IN THE TIJUANA-SAN DIEGO BORDER REGION (2022-2025)

### DISUASIÓN POR EMERGENCIA: GOBERNANZA DE LA MIGRACIÓN SECURITIZADA Y CONSECUENCIAS HUMANITARIAS EN LA REGIÓN FRONTERIZA DE TIJUANA-SAN DIEGO (2022-2025)

#### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of the 2025 National Emergency Declaration (NED) on irregular migration flows across the Tijuana-San Diego corridor, examining contemporary border governance and human mobility. The objective is determining how the NED reshaped migration patterns and whether intensified enforcement redirected routes and deterred crossings. Employing a qualitative-interpretive paradigm with case study design, the research triangulates multiple data sources: presidential proclamations, Department of Homeland Security directives, Customs and Border Protection statistics, Congressional testimony, and humanitarian organization reports from northern Mexico. Document analysis and thematic coding provided primary analytical instruments; no human subjects were interviewed. The timeframe spans fiscal years 2022-2025, enabling comparative analysis pre- and post-emergency. Results reveal profound border management restructuring: decision-making centralized within Homeland Security, expanded military involvement, expedited removal procedures, and intensified Mexico coordination. Irregular entries declined sharply, driven by deterrence and externalized control rather than addressing structural migration drivers. Simultaneously, humanitarian conditions deteriorated-migrant mortality increased, asylum access narrowed, and Tijuana shelters became overburdened. These findings underscore tensions between operational effectiveness and humanitarian imperatives. While emergency measures achieved short-term enforcement objectives, they deepened ethical, legal, and humanitarian dilemmas, questioning the sustainability of governing migration through exceptional states.

**KEYWORDS:** International migration, border governance, state of exception, human rights, migration policy

#### RESUMEN

*Este estudio analiza el impacto de la Declaración de Emergencia Nacional (DEN) de 2025 en los flujos migratorios irregulares del corredor Tijuana-San Diego, analizando las transformaciones en la gobernanza fronteriza y movilidad humana. El objetivo central consiste en determinar cómo la DEN reconfiguró patrones migratorios y evaluar si la intensificación del control fronterizo redirigió rutas y disuadió cruces no autorizados. La investigación adoptó un paradigma cualitativo-interpretativo mediante diseño de estudio de caso, triangulando fuentes documentales diversas: proclamaciones presidenciales, directivas gubernamentales, estadísticas fronterizas, testimonios congresionales e informes de organizaciones humanitarias. El análisis documental y codificación temática constituyeron los instrumentos metodológicos principales durante el período 2022-2025. Los hallazgos evidencian una reestructuración profunda del sistema fronterizo: centralización decisoria en Seguridad Nacional, militarización operacional, procedimientos expeditos de expulsión y coordinación bilateral intensificada con México. Las entradas irregulares declinaron significativamente, atribuible a estrategias disuasorias y control externalizado más que a resolución de causas estructurales migratorias. Paralelamente, las condiciones humanitarias se deterioraron marcadamente, manifestándose en mayor mortalidad migratoria, acceso restringido al asilo y saturación de albergues tijuanaenses. Estos resultados revelan tensiones fundamentales entre eficacia operativa e imperativos humanitarios, cuestionando la sostenibilidad ética y jurídica de gobernar la migración mediante la excepcionalidad permanente.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Migración internacional, gobernanza de fronteras, estado de excepción, derechos humanos, política migratoria



## INTRODUCTION

The U.S.–Mexico border has long functioned as a symbolic and material crossroads where sovereignty, national security, and human rights intersect. In January 2025, immediately after his inauguration, President Donald J. Trump reissued a National Emergency Declaration (NED) at the southern border. This action revived and expanded measures first enacted in 2019 and authorized extraordinary interventions, including the diversion of military construction funds, the deployment of additional personnel from U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the Department of Defense, and the implementation of expedited removal procedures for non-Mexican nationals (The White House, 2025). The administration framed the declaration as a response to an invasion of irregular migrants, embedding migration within a national security discourse. As Abrego and León (2025) observe, “US immigration policy begins to shape migrant experiences even before migrants arrive on US territory. Prevention Through Deterrence relies on hypersecurity measures to redirect migrant routes away from urban ports of entry and into hostile terrain along the border” (Abrego & Leon, 2025, p. 411), illustrating how border enforcement has long entangled national security and humanitarian concerns.

The study examined the regional consequences of that decree for irregular migration flows and governance practices, focusing on the Tijuana-San Diego corridor between fiscal years (FY) 2022 and 2025. This corridor, one of the busiest migration gateways, registered 324,260 apprehensions from January 2021 to September 2024, an increase of nearly 40 percent compared with FY 2023. Yet in early FY 2025, encounters dropped dramatically: only 45,400 were reported, a 79.6 percent decline from the prior year. Such an abrupt shift, which positioned San Ysidro as the sector with the steepest reduction in crossings, raised critical questions about causality and broader implications for migration governance.

The investigation addressed two central questions. First, to what extent did the 2025 NED contribute to the measurable reduction of irregular migration through Tijuana-San Diego between FY 2022 and 2025? Second, how did the expansion of enforcement practices-enhanced surveillance, accelerated removals, and bilateral coordination with Mexico under the emergency framework-reshape migration routes and influence the decisions of migrants attempting to cross?

By situating the Tijuana-San Diego metropolitan area within the larger U.S.-Mexico border regime, the analysis illustrated how emergency rule operated on the ground. The article presented the theoretical perspectives that guided the research, described the qualitative methodol-



ogy employed, reported findings on migration trends and institutional changes, and then discussed the securitization and humanitarian dimensions of the NED. The conclusion reflected on the broader tension between border enforcement and human rights and on the implications of normalizing emergency-based governance in contemporary migration policy.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SECURITY, HUMANITARIANISM, AND MIGRATION GOVERNANCE**

Migration was a complex social phenomenon understood through divergent theoretical perspectives. At one end of the spectrum, a securitization approach framed irregular migration as a fundamental threat to the state—an issue tied to sovereignty and national defense that legitimized exceptional measures. At the opposite end, a humanitarian perspective highlighted migration through a human rights lens, emphasizing the dignity, agency, and protection needs of migrants. Scholarship on migration governance frequently conceptualized these positions as polar ends of an axis: sovereignty-centered, security-driven control on one side, and rights-based, humanitarian approaches on the other (Collin & Bauder, 2025). While most academic and policy debates leaned toward securitization, a smaller but significant body of research placed migrant rights and well-being at the center of governance. This tension resonated with broader critical debates on borders and mobility, in which authors such as Sassen, Mezzadra, and Mbembe examined how global restructuring, border regimes, and racialized hierarchies of mobility configured unequal access to rights and security (Agamben, 2004; Mbembe, 2003, 2019; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013; Sassen, 2014).

The securitization perspective rested on the Copenhagen School's theory of security threat politics (Buzan et al., 1998). Political actors employed crisis narratives—such as describing migration as an invasion—to justify extraordinary policies beyond ordinary legal processes. This dynamic was visible in the Trump Administration's rhetoric, which portrayed migrants as existential dangers and legitimized militarized responses and the suspension of established immigration procedures (Levitsky & Way, 2025). Declaring a national emergency transformed migration from a matter of routine governance into one of exceptional national security policy. De Genova's notion of the "border spectacle" was particularly relevant here, as it showed how enforcement performances at the border rendered migrant "illegality" spectacularly visible while obscuring the political production of illegalized status (De Genova, 2018). From this standpoint, there were "not really 'illegal' migrants so much as illegalised migrants," whose condition originated in legislative and bureaucratic decisions (De Genova, 2018, p. 27).



Complementing this interpretation, the Bureaucratic Politics Approach (Allison, 1971; Peters, 2024) explained how emergency frameworks shifted power within the state apparatus. The 2025 NED, for example, empowered the White House and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to dominate interagency dynamics, subordinating humanitarian agencies and reinforcing security councils as the central authority in migration governance, consistent with analyses of expanding homeland security bureaucracies (Garrett, 2023).

In contrast, the humanitarian perspective prioritized the ethical and social dimensions of mobility. It treated migrants as rights-bearing individuals and evaluated policy not by deterrence outcomes but by levels of protection and assistance provided. As Pécoud (2020) argued, there was an inherent tension between rights-based migration governance and sovereignty-first frameworks: it was nearly impossible to fully prioritize both simultaneously. Elements of this approach were evident in the Biden Administration's initiatives, which sought to expand asylum pathways and Temporary Protected Status protections under the rubric of orderly, safe, and humane migration. Although these programs fell outside the direct scope of the study, they provided an important backdrop for understanding the reversal that the 2025 NED represented. Humanitarian and critical migration scholars further cautioned against paradoxes such as "compassionate repression" (Fassin, 2012; Galemba et al., 2019), in which limited humanitarian provisions coexisted with intensified policing and deterrence, producing forms of conditional inclusion and heightened vulnerability rather than substantive protection.

To capture how these logics operated in practice, the framework also drew on governmentality, biopolitics, and critical security studies. Foucault's analysis of security, territory, and population conceptualized security as a modality of power exercised over populations, in which legal, disciplinary, and security mechanisms were articulated rather than replaced (Foucault, 2007). This perspective enabled an understanding of the NED not only as a legal-constitutional act, but as a *dispositif* that reorganized surveillance, risk management, and control over mobile populations. Building on this, Bigo's work and the Paris School emphasized that securitization functioned through "everyday technologies" and professional practices, rather than solely through exceptional speech acts, while Sadik and Kaya (2020) argued that routinized bureaucratic tools, databases, and surveillance systems were central indicators of migration securitization. Walters (2015) similarly called for a "more variegated and recombinant understanding of the governmentality of migration," questioning the automatic coupling of migration and borders and underscoring the need to analyze how bordering practices were eventualized and reconfigured across sites and scales.

Within this assemblage, the concepts of deportability, illegalization, and the "economy of illegality" illuminated how securitized migration regimes produced differentiated precarity. De Genova (2002, 2018) and



Bonilla (2021) showed how deportability inscribed the effects of border control onto migrant bodies and lives, revealing that immigration “illegality” was experienced through a constant possibility of expulsion and through mechanisms that generated “decapitalization and dispossession within the economy of ‘illegality’” (Bonilla, 2021, p. 2). These insights underscored that emergency measures, detention, and expedited removal were not merely neutral instruments of control but part of broader circuits of governance, labor exploitation, and accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2003), in which migrants became simultaneously essential, removable, and exploitable.

Applied to the Tijuana-San Diego case, these intertwined perspectives yielded contrasting but complementary expectations. A securitized emergency regime anticipated stricter controls, fewer crossings, expanded surveillance, and the consolidation of authority within security institutions, consistent with both securitization theory and bureaucratic politics. A humanitarian and critical lens emphasized the likely costs: displaced routes, increased exposure to lethal geographies, pressure on local shelters and services, and the deepening of racialized and gendered vulnerabilities. The 2025 NED emerged as a convergence point where securitarian logic, governmental rationalities of population management, and bureaucratic centralization met, while simultaneously generating profound humanitarian and socio-political repercussions. This analysis aligned with Hollifield and Wong’s (2014) observation that migration policy consistently operated at the intersection of state security and human rights, and followed De Genova’s and Walters’ calls to interrogate how bordering practices, spectacles of enforcement, and regimes of (il)legality structured the governance of mobility in ways that were both exclusionary and constitutive.



## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative, interpretive design to examine how the 2025 U.S. National Emergency Declaration (NED) reshaped migration governance along the Tijuana-San Diego border. Grounded in a constructivist paradigm, the research prioritized context, process, and meaning, following the principles of Guba and Lincoln (1994), who note that “the constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology. It emphasizes the social construction of reality and the importance of understanding meaning, context, and process in human inquiry rather than seeking universal causal explanations” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). In addition, it drew on Patton’s guidance from *Basic Methods of Policy Analysis and Planning* (Patton et al., 2015), which underscores systematic problem definition, evidence-based evaluation, and iterative policy assessment. These prin-

principles informed the triangulation of policy documents, government datasets, and humanitarian reports, ensuring that data collection and interpretation were aligned with a structured policy-analysis framework.

The theoretical framework drew on securitization theory (Buzan et al., 1998) and the Bureaucratic Politics Approach to explain how emergency measures consolidated state authority and framed migration as a security threat. As Cohen et al. (2006) observe, “modern governments implement most legal mandates through bureaucracies... regulate individuals and organizations” (p. 675). Moreover, crises “enlarge windows of opportunity for legislative action... strategically mixing security and nonsecurity functions within the same bureaucracy” (Cohen et al., 2006, p. 678), illustrating how political actors can exploit emergencies to restructure and centralize power. In a related vein, Hildebrand (2020) noted that:

Emergency management and homeland security policy evolved over time in the same manner as many other policy fields. When ‘focusing events’ occurred, like the September 11 attacks or the landfall and aftermath from Hurricane Katrina, reactive change in the form of new policies or mandates followed. (p. 2)

Underscoring how critical incidents enable sweeping institutional change.

A case study strategy focused on the Tijuana-San Diego corridor, a critical site for observing the interaction of intensified U.S. enforcement and shifting migration patterns. The temporal scope covered fiscal years 2022-2025, encompassing the final phase of Biden-era policies and the early reactivation of Trump-era emergency measures. This period allowed a comparative analysis of conditions before and after the NED.

Data collection relied on triangulation of multiple sources. Primary materials included presidential proclamations, executive orders (Cannon et al., 2025; Buck, 2025), directives from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and operational memoranda from U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Secondary evidence comprised quarterly and annual CBP statistics on apprehensions by sector and nationality, transcripts of U.S. Congressional hearings on border security, and internal audits such as DHS Office of Inspector General evaluations. Additional qualitative data were drawn from humanitarian organization reports on shelter conditions in Tijuana and from media interviews with migrants and officials conducted during the policy transition.

The analytical process unfolded in two sequential stages. First, a descriptive analysis organized CBP statistics to track fluctuations in migrant volumes, changes in nationality composition, and sectoral displacement. A detailed timeline of key policy events-including the NED proclamation, bilateral enforcement agreements, and specific operations-aligned these actions with migration outcomes. Second, a qualitative content analysis followed Bowen’s (2009) approach to document



analysis. An inductive–deductive coding framework was developed around key themes such as national security framing, emergency powers, bureaucratic restructuring, and migrant response. Codes derived from the theoretical framework were refined through iterative reading, and emergent themes were incorporated as they appeared in the data.

To ensure reliability and transparency, all documents and datasets were catalogued with complete citation metadata and stored in an encrypted digital repository. Coding was performed independently by two researchers, with intercoder reliability assessed through cross-check sessions until consensus was reached. MANUS AI supported the organization of data and the construction of thematic matrices.

The research relied exclusively on publicly available documents, aggregated statistics, and secondary reports, which minimized ethical risks. When sensitive or unpublished materials were consulted, confidentiality protocols were observed. No direct interviews with human subjects were conducted, but secondary accounts were handled with care to represent accurately the experiences and voices of migrants and frontline workers.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION



### IRREGULAR MIGRATION TRENDS AND ENFORCEMENT OUTCOMES (FY 2022–2025)

Border data showed a fluctuating and uneven trajectory of irregular migration during the study period. From FY 2022 through FY 2024, apprehensions first declined and then surged in 2024 as routes and enforcement contexts shifted (Durand & Massey, 2024). The most significant change occurred in FY 2025, when the reissued National Emergency Declaration (NED) coincided with a marked reduction in encounters. This inflection point distinguished the 2025 downturn from the more modest variations of previous years and indicated that the emergency framework intensified enforcement effects.

Table 1 summarized total apprehensions recorded along the southwest border, highlighted major migrant nationalities for each fiscal year, and reported year-on-year percentage changes. The figures demonstrated how the NED’s implementation corresponded with a sharper suppression of crossings than had been observed during earlier policy shifts.

**Table 1:** Southwest Border Apprehensions and Key Nationalities, FY 2022–2025

Fiscal Year	Total Encounters (millions)	Annual Change (%)	Predominant Nationalities (ranked)
2022	2.38	–	Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Venezuela
2023	2.05	–13%	Mexico, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Haiti
2024	1.94	–5%	Venezuela, Haiti, Guatemala
2025 *	~1.20 (projected)	–38% (proj.)	Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador

Note: Data compiled from U.S. Customs and Border Protection (2022, 2023, 2024a, 2024b and 2025)

Between FY 2022 and 2025, irregular migration across the U.S.-Mexico border followed an uneven course shaped by shifting routes, evolving policies, and external crises. After peaking in 2022, unauthorized entries declined modestly in 2023—a trend that aligned with Biden-era immigration initiatives aimed at expanding asylum pathways, increasing parole programs, and refining enforcement priorities. As Jacobs (2023) explains, “During the first two years of the Biden administration, immigration policy focused on expanding legal pathways, creating new parole programs, and narrowing enforcement priorities, resulting in temporary reductions in unauthorized entries before external factors and smuggling adaptations reignited flows” (p. 3). Flows then rose by roughly 25 percent in 2024 as post-pandemic dynamics and adaptive smuggling networks intensified, before contracting sharply in 2025.

The decline was not uniform. Heightened enforcement and new barriers in long-active corridors such as Del Rio and the Rio Grande Valley produced immediate drops in apprehensions but displaced flows to other sectors. Tucson and San Diego initially registered relative increases as migrants sought alternative routes, illustrating a balloon effect in which intensified control in one area redirected movement elsewhere. By mid-2025, deterrence measures had spread border-wide, and encounters in the San Diego sector also declined, suggesting that the emergency framework eventually reshaped patterns across the frontier.

Migrant demographics evolved in parallel. Early flows consisted largely of Mexican and Northern Triangle nationals, but by 2023–2024 extra-continental migration grew sharply, with Venezuelan, Haitian, and Cuban arrivals reflecting deepening political and economic crises in their home countries. In 2025 the profile became more diverse, yet rapid-expulsion policies—including the termination of Title 42 in 2023 and expanded expedited removals under Title 8 in 2025—disproportionately affected certain groups. Honduran and Salvadoran asylum seekers declined by roughly one-quarter, while Venezuelans continued to arrive but often faced immediate removal or exclusion. These developments highlighted both the immediate impact of intensified enforcement and the enduring structural drivers of mobility (Department of State, 2023;

Durand & Massey, 2024).

The 2025 NED also unleashed an extraordinary suite of enforcement actions. Approximately three billion dollars in Department of Defense funds were diverted to barrier construction projects in Arizona and California, while the Pentagon deployed intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets -including drones and fixed towers- along with additional personnel to support Border Patrol operations. This militarization expanded real-time monitoring capacity and accelerated responses to attempted crossings. As Greenway et al. (2025) observed,

The U.S. military possesses unique resources and capabilities to assist with a range of missions and roles to confront the various aspects of the border crisis (...) steps can and should be taken in congressional appropriations and Department of Defense (DOD) planning to mitigate effects on military readiness elsewhere. (p. 4)

A significant personnel surge followed. U.S. Customs and Border Protection increased staffing by roughly fifteen percent-adding about 2,500 agents and contractors-who were equipped with mobile surveillance systems and infrared cameras and supported by National Guard units under federal authority. These measures heightened interception rates, particularly in high-traffic night areas (Isacson, 2025).

Legal and procedural changes reinforced the crackdown. The Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security implemented expedited-removal rules invoking provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act (§§ 102, 105) (Department of Homeland Security, 2025). Credible-fear interviews were curtailed, producing a 40 percent drop in asylum referrals during early 2025. Simultaneously, the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP 2.0) were reinstated, obliging many asylum seekers to remain in Mexico while awaiting hearings and discouraging new arrivals. As the Congressional Research Service notes, “expedited removal permits immigration officers to order certain noncitizens removed from the United States without further hearing or review, unless the individual expresses a fear of persecution or an intent to apply for asylum” (Eaton & Sterk, 2023, p. 2).

Bilateral enforcement completed the strategy. Under U.S. pressure, Mexico deployed its National Guard to the northern border, intensified checkpoints in Baja California, and accepted larger numbers of third-country nationals returned under expedited removal. Similar U.S.-backed measures in Panama and Guatemala, including stricter visa requirements, slowed migrant flows before they reached Mexico.

Within this framework, the Tijuana-San Diego corridor experienced particularly sharp effects. In the San Diego sector, which includes the Tijuana-San Ysidro and Otay Mesa crossings, encounters fell by more than 45 percent in the first half of FY 2025 compared with the previous year. By mid-year this historically high-volume sector recorded one of



the steepest declines on the border. Officials attributed the drop to intensive ISR surveillance and a catch-and-remove model that rapidly processed apprehensions, sharply reducing the likelihood of successful entry for families and unaccompanied minors. As regional transportation authorities have noted, “the two-year pilot uses advanced technology to calculate how long vehicles wait in line to cross the border... leveraging the region’s existing network of solar-powered, freeway call boxes as detection points” (San Diego Association of Governments [SANDAG], 2018, p. 1), illustrating how real-time monitoring initiatives have supported more rapid responses and enhanced enforcement capacity.

Route adjustments soon followed. Migrants shifted eastward into the mountains and deserts around Tecate and the El Centro sector as urban crossings became more difficult, exposing travelers to harsher terrain and greater risks. Finally, the NED facilitated bureaucratic integration at the local level: CBP, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and municipal law-enforcement liaisons operated under a unified Department of Homeland Security command (Chacón, 2022). Mobile command centers and interoperable data platforms enabled instantaneous information sharing and coordinated deployments, exemplifying the Bureaucratic Politics Approach in which agency rivalries gave way to a consolidated security mission (Martínez-Fernández & Beaver, 2025).

In summary, the NED produced a pronounced quantitative reduction in irregular crossings in the Tijuana–San Diego corridor through unprecedented resource mobilization, legal tightening, and binational enforcement. These outcomes, however, have masked deeper consequences—route displacement, heightened humanitarian risks, and the entrenchment of a securitized model of migration governance. As *Asylum Access* (2025) reported, the uncertainty caused by canceled appointments and the presence of security forces has increased the risks faced by forcibly displaced people in the region, illustrating how policy enforcement, even when reducing crossings, can escalate vulnerabilities for migrants under emergency frameworks.

## HUMANITARIAN AND SOCIAL IMPACTS IN THE BORDER REGION

The humanitarian consequences of the emergency framework became increasingly evident as 2025 advanced. Migrant mortality reached unprecedented levels, with at least 547 deaths documented by mid-year and projections surpassing 1,200 fatalities by December, the highest annual toll ever recorded. Most fatalities resulted from dehydration and exposure as displaced migrants attempted the hazardous mountainous routes east of Tijuana. Humanitarian organizations and medical NGOs reported sharp increases in dehydration cases and trauma



injuries among those traversing these remote areas (CBP, 2025c; Associated Press, 2025). These dynamics echoed the conditions described by Solano and Massey (2022), who characterized Mexico's northern transit corridor as a corridor of death, where restrictive enforcement policies and displacement expose migrants to extreme physical danger and widespread human rights violations. These dynamics echoed the conditions described by Solano and Massey (2022), who observed that "given these statistics, it is unsurprising that Mexico has become known as *El Corredor de la Muerte* (the Corridor of Death) among the Central American migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers who traverse its territory on their way northward" (Solano & Massey, 2022, p. 148).

Access to asylum protections collapsed. The proportion of apprehended migrants referred for asylum proceedings fell from roughly 23 percent in 2022 to just 13 percent in early 2025. Emergency protocols curtailed credible-fear interviews, and the reinstated Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP 2.0) forced many asylum seekers to remain in Mexico. Large encampments developed on the Mexican side of the border, where families endured prolonged legal uncertainty and precarious living conditions (The Washington Post, 2025).

Shelter networks in Tijuana were likewise overwhelmed. Facilities throughout northern Baja California operated well beyond capacity, with an estimated 4,500-6,000 migrants housed across 30 shelters at any given time by mid-2025. Reports described migrants sleeping in overcrowded facilities, improvised camps, or on city streets, facing food shortages, sanitation problems, and heightened vulnerability to infectious disease (Mckee Irwin & Del Monte, 2021).

Migrants stranded in Tijuana also experienced severe psychological stress and legal precarity. Studies on protracted displacement documented how deportees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced individuals endured long-term trauma, housing insecurity, and limited access to employment opportunities (Gil-Everaert et al., 2023). As the authors note,

situations of protracted displacement and insecurity present challenges in four interconnected arenas of life: housing, legal status, employment, and emotional well-being. For governments and local communities, protracted displacement requires immediate humanitarian responses and the development and implementation of public policies focused on integration. (p. 126)

Smugglers adapted quickly to the hardened environment. Heightened enforcement led many migrants either to abandon attempts altogether or to turn to human smuggling networks. Coyotes raised fees in response to the riskier conditions, effectively monetizing access to remote crossings and maritime routes. Those unable to pay were left stranded, while others attempted perilous alternative passages. Anecdotal



evidence pointed to a chilling *Trump Effect*, in which the visibility of militarized operations and rapid removals dissuaded potential migrants from embarking on the journey (Galemba et al., 2019).

Table 2 summarizes key humanitarian indicators before and during the NED period to underscore the trend:

**Table 2:** Humanitarian Indicators in the U.S.-Mexico Border Context

Indicator (FY)	2022	2023	2024	2025 (proj. to YE)
Migrant deaths in U.S. border areas (number)	856	891	982	>1200
% of apprehended migrants referred to asylum	23.5%	21.1%	19.7%	-13%
Average shelter occupancy in N. Mexico	78%	92%	95%	>110%

Note: Data compiled from U.S. Customs and Border Protection (2022, 2023, 2024a, 2024b and 2025)

These findings underscored a fundamental trade-off: as border security indicators improved through sharp reductions in irregular crossings, humanitarian conditions deteriorated. The securitization strategy achieved deterrence but did so by channeling migrants into more dangerous terrain and systematically curtailing access to asylum. This outcome supported long-standing critiques that policies privileging security first, rights second inevitably reproduced humanitarian crises (Bozeman et al., 2024; Galemba et al., 2019). As Bozeman and colleagues warn, “neutral competence fails at the worst of times. It provides no useful means of combating deformation of democracy perpetrated by persons who hold legitimate political authority” (Bozeman et al., 2024, p. 800).

The 2025 National Emergency Declaration illustrated how securitization frames enabled the state to invoke existential-threat narratives -such as the rhetoric of invasion- to concentrate executive power. In practice, this generated a bureaucratic centralization of migration control. Agencies with overlapping mandates, including CBP, ICE, and immigration courts, were consolidated under a single homeland-security mission. Joint command centers and integrated data-sharing systems established in San Diego demonstrated the potential efficiency gains of such centralization, consistent with Allison’s Bureaucratic Politics model. From a state-capacity perspective, this reconfiguration facilitated rapid removals and flexible redeployment of personnel, contributing to the short-term suppression of crossings (Garrett, 2023, 2024), a process facilitated by structural reforms within the Department of Defense that enabled rapid resource reallocation and operational flexibility (Ferrari et al., 2025). As Garrett (2024) explains:

the concept of border securocracy is defined to mean the expansion of the law enforcement/border security bureaucracy (or apparatus) from the state (the U.S.) throughout the world specifically by way of the Department of Homeland Security and its agencies (...) to expand U.S. and other global corporate interests. (p. 262)

These efficiency gains, however, came at significant cost. Expedited removal procedures minimized due-process protections, curtailed judicial oversight, and largely suspended asylum processing. Legal accountability mechanisms -such as immigration-court reviews and independent monitoring of detention conditions- were effectively bypassed, aligning with critiques that securitization undermines transparency and democratic checks (Bozeman et al., 2024; Nevitt, 2025). The 2025 case thus fit within a broader trend of executive aggrandizement in U.S. immigration policy, where emergencies served as vehicles for expanding unilateral authority (Vaughan, 2024).

As Zagaris (2025) observes, this fusion of migration enforcement with counterterrorism and sanction-based logics reflects a global pattern in which states justify exceptional measures through the language of national security and transnational threats, enabling the normalization of emergency governance. As Vaughan (2024) notes, “Trump’s immigration doctrine was a central element of his America First vision and a defining part of his presidency, representing a sharp departure from previous administrations’ more permissive approaches and providing a template for subsequent debates over border control” (p. 291).

Humanitarian consequences were profound. The celebrated decline in crossings was achieved largely through the externalization of enforcement: shifting the burden onto Mexico, displacing migrants into desert regions, and deterring departures altogether. This dynamic reflected what Galemba et al. (2019) termed compassionate repression, wherein humanitarian rhetoric coexisted with repressive practice. U.S. officials justified reinstating the Migrant Protection Protocols as a means of protecting migrants from dangerous journeys, while thousands were effectively stranded in precarious camps on the Mexican side of the border.

These developments raised pressing ethical questions regarding proportionality and responsibility. Although some argued that deterrence ultimately saved lives by dissuading dangerous crossings, evidence indicated that in the short term the NED increased risk, as reflected in record migrant mortality in 2025. Moreover, by outsourcing enforcement to Mexico, the United States shifted the humanitarian burden onto local shelters and civil society actors in Tijuana, which faced chronic overcrowding and resource shortages (Gil-Everaert et al., 2023).

Overall, these findings reinforced the understanding of migration as simultaneously a security and a humanitarian issue. The 2025 emergency strategy, focused almost exclusively on security, succeeded in sup-



pressing flows but generated new humanitarian crises. A more balanced approach -combining enforcement with expanded legal pathways and regional protection frameworks- might have mitigated these outcomes. Historical patterns suggested that once emergency measures were lifted or weakened, migration flows could rebound, underscoring the limited sustainability of emergency-driven suppression.

The Tijuana-San Diego corridor illustrated how securitization measures reshaped local dynamics. As a transborder metropolis, the region had long sustained daily cross-border mobility for trade, labor, and family life (Bae, 2003). The NED disrupted this equilibrium: intensified militarization at the San Ysidro crossing not only deterred irregular entrants but also prolonged inspections for lawful commuters. Local authorities in Tijuana warned that the city risked becoming a *waiting room* for U.S. immigration policy, with shelters and public spaces overwhelmed by stranded migrants. While federal cooperation between the United States and Mexico remained strong, municipal actors and NGOs carried the humanitarian burden, and binational advocacy networks sought to fill the gap.

A critical question concerned the sustainability of emergency-driven enforcement. Root causes of migration -including economic inequality, violence, and climate stress— remained unaddressed. Historical precedents suggested that once extraordinary measures were relaxed, flows could rebound, creating a balloon effect in which migration pressures were displaced rather than resolved. Moreover, the normalization of emergency measures risked entrenching a permanent state of exception in border governance, gradually eroding democratic norms (Nevitt, 2025). Moreover, the normalization of emergency measures risked entrenching a permanent state of exception in border governance, gradually eroding democratic norms. As Nevitt (2025) documented,

Trump’s second executive order tasks the Secretary of Defense to send as many units or members of the Armed Forces as ‘appropriate to support the activities of the Secretary of Homeland Security in obtaining complete operational control of the southern border of the United States. (p. 3)

This underscores how the 2025 NED fused migration control with expanded military authority, reinforcing concerns about long-term democratic erosion.

In conclusion, the 2025 NED demonstrated both the capacity and the limitations of securitized migration governance. It confirmed that states retain formidable ability to deter migration when political will and resources align, while simultaneously highlighting the humanitarian costs and accountability deficits of security-first strategies. The Tijuana-San Diego experience therefore stands as both a cautionary example and a critical lesson in the long-term dilemmas of emergency-based border control.



## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis demonstrated that the 2025 reissuance of the U.S. National Emergency Declaration (NED) functioned less as an isolated policy decision than as a crystallization of long-term dynamics in North American migration governance. Drawing on Ramos García's expertise in U.S.-Mexico border policy and transborder governance, and Ramos Valencia's contributions to the anthropology of public policy and migration, the study treated the Tijuana-San Diego corridor as a critical laboratory for examining how states recalibrate authority under conditions of perceived crisis. Empirical evidence revealed that, while the NED achieved a measurable and rapid decline in irregular migration flows, this apparent success emerged through mechanisms of bureaucratic centralization, military deployment, and binational enforcement that extended beyond standard immigration management.

Documentary analysis showed how this emergency measures concentrated decision-making power within security-focused agencies, confirming theoretical expectations of securitization and bureaucratic politics. Migrant encounters fell sharply after early 2025, yet this deterrence coincided with a steep rise in humanitarian costs, including increased mortality and reduced access to asylum. These patterns echoed findings from comparative migration research highlighted by both authors in their broader academic work, underscoring the tension between national security imperatives and human rights obligations.

The evidence also demonstrated that the policy shock reverberated far from the border itself. Reports of "migration pauses" at points of origin suggested that the NED influenced migrant decision-making well before individuals reached Mexican territory, aligning with Ramos García's analyses of transnational policy spillovers. At the same time, local dynamics in Tijuana complicated simplistic crisis narratives: while some shelters reported overcrowding early in the emergency, subsequent data indicated fluctuating or even declining occupancy rates, cautioning against overgeneralization of humanitarian strain.

Furthermore, the investigation confirmed that the NED reinforced a pattern of externalized enforcement. By leveraging bilateral agreements and regional deterrence strategies, the United States shifted operational and humanitarian burdens onto Mexican institutions and civil society organizations. This outcome highlighted Ramos Valencia's emphasis on the anthropology of state power, revealing how U.S. security logics transformed local governance and reshaped the responsibilities of municipal and non-governmental actors in northern Mexico.

The research also identified structural consequences for democratic accountability. Expedited removal procedures curtailed due process



and sidelined independent oversight, supporting theoretical claims that emergencies can normalize a “permanent state of exception.” Both scholars’ prior work on governance and institutional resilience illuminated how such centralization, while effective in the short term, risks eroding legal safeguards and undermining the legitimacy of migration policy over time.

Importantly, the findings demonstrated that irregular migration drivers -economic inequality, violence, and climate stress- remained largely un-addressed. This reinforces a central lesson in Ramos García’s cross-border policy studies and Ramos Valencia’s anthropological inquiries: coercive measures may temporarily suppress mobility but cannot resolve the socio-economic and geopolitical forces that sustain it. Historical precedents and the observed rebound potential support this conclusion.

Taken together, the study confirms that the 2025 NED exemplified both the capacity and the limits of emergency-based migration governance. It provided short-term enforcement gains but deepened humanitarian vulnerabilities and institutionalized exceptional powers. By integrating the perspectives of political science and social anthropology, as represented in the academic trajectories of José María Ramos García and Jimmy Emmanuel Ramos Valencia, this research underscores that durable solutions to irregular migration require policies that balance state sovereignty with human rights protections and address the structural determinants of mobility, rather than relying on episodic crises to justify extraordinary state action.



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The first author is the corresponding author of the article. The contribution of each author is described according to the CRediT taxonomy:

- José María Ramos García: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing.
- Jimmy Emmanuel Ramos Valencia: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – review and editing.

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**STATEMENT OF DATA AVAILABILITY:** The data supporting the findings of this study are drawn primarily from publicly accessible sources. Aggregate statistics on migrant encounters and enforcement actions are available through the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) website (<https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats>) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) publications library (<https://www.dhs.gov/publications-library>). Supplementary policy documents, including presidential proclamations, executive orders, and Department of Justice announcements, are accessible via official U.S. government repositories (e.g., <https://www.whitehouse.gov>, <https://www.justice.gov>).

Additional qualitative material referenced in the article, such as reports from humanitarian organizations and media interviews, is available through their respective institutional websites. Due to the sensitive nature of migration-related records and confidentiality concerns, no primary individual-level data has been made publicly available. Further details or clarifications on the sources consulted may be provided by the authors upon reasonable request to [ramosjm@colef.mx](mailto:ramosjm@colef.mx) & [ramos.jimmy@uabc.edu.mx](mailto:ramos.jimmy@uabc.edu.mx)

**STATEMENT ON THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:** the authors declare that AI has been used as technical support, while interpretation, analytical design and argumentative writing are the sole responsibility of the authors. the tools used within the workflow, without substituting the academic judgment of the researchers were:

- GPT PRO: for the curation and organization of large data conglomerates (official documents, statistical reports and academic literature), exploratory syntheses and support in the preliminary structuring of sections, although all output was verified, contrasted with primary sources and rewritten with authorial voice.
- GROK: based on the monitoring of information on the internet, press, networks and trends (hashtags) related to border dynamics, for prospecting and follow-up purposes. It was used as an information radar; the final selection of inputs and their interpretation was strictly human.
- CLAUDE: as support in style correction (cohesion, clarity and terminological consistency), for academic texts and policy briefs. Editorial decisions (structure, emphasis, theoretical framework) were defined by the authors and supervised by internal peers of the team.
- MANUS: for the in-depth analysis of legal and regulatory documentation on migration issues (independent variable), with extraction and organization of relevant provisions to contrast them with migration flows (dependent variable). All legal analysis was reviewed by the authors.



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