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The development-security nexus and its contribution to shrinking space for international protection: a review of the interaction of development policy discourse with US border externalisation in Latin America

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is the author's own original work, and that all sources used are properly referenced.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nathan Akehurst', written over a horizontal line.

Nathan Akehurst
in Bogotá, 18th May 2023

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In recent years the US has vastly expanded its border control apparatus beyond its own physical borders, forming partnerships to control migration with countries across Central and South America. These have tied together migration control, the military and security, and development cooperation in new and wide-ranging forms.

There is a growing literature on border externalisation and its effects. However, there are significant gaps in understanding how the rise of US (and wider Global North) externalisation policy impacts development actors' policy thinking about migration, and the practical consequences of shifting ideas. I aim to investigate the content of any recent changes in the development sector thought about migration and development as a result of US externalisation.

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Abstract

This study evaluates effects of the “development-security nexus”, a widespread framework merging development and security policy, on international protection and migrants’ human rights, via its relationship to US border externalisation in Latin America. Externalisation refers to the creation of US infrastructure controlling migration downstream, effectively pushing its border south. This process has involved militarisation, detention, and surveillance; is linked to human rights violations and unequal inter- and intrastate relations; and structural undermining of the international protection system. Meanwhile, externalisation and enforcement has been fused with aid, migrant protection, and development policy. This study aims to determine if there is a relationship between development-security discourse and the role of externalisation in shrinking the space for international protection in the US-Latin American context, with reference to years 2008-2023. Secondly, it assesses effects of development-security discourse and externalisation on conceptions of migration governance in the state and development sector. To do so it analyses US government documents, and interviews with migration governance practitioners. Three processes are uncovered that mark the “developmentalisation” of externalisation. The first is the presentation of enforcement as a development aim. The second is a “humanitarian border governance” concept that combines security and protection, the effects of which are highly contested. The third is the presentation of migration control as a development aim. This study contends that the security-development link has thus reframed how migration policy is understood; flattening contradictions between protection and control, embedding US security interests within development thinking, and contributing to narrowing access to international protection.

Key words: Externalisation, border governance, development, security, migration

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2. Introduction

2.1 Externalisation as threat to international protection

In 2004, United States Customs and Border Patrol (US CBP) commissioner Robert Bonner argued for the US to “extend our zone of security where we can do so, beyond our physical borders—so that [US] American borders are the last line of defense, not the first.” (CBP 2004). This politicised definition of externalisation serves as a reasonable statement of aims for a policy approach which since the late 1990s has played a dramatically increased role in US migration policy.

In more neutral terms, externalisation refers to countries developing border management infrastructure beyond their own national borders (Stock et al 2019). The term covers many interventions; including preventing movement through actual or threatened force, such as checkpoints, patrols, fences, and detention architecture; redirecting people along preferred routes; or using surveillance to predict movement and increase the sophistication of control (Muñiz 2022). Externalisation may be undertaken by the externalising country (e.g., the establishment of a US border post in a foreign airport), or through transactional partnerships financing the delegation of responsibility. It has involved, but is not limited to, significant increases in the size, reach, and militarisation of border forces. It also covers a variety of more passive interventions, some of which will be assessed later in this study and some of which are less relevant to this study’s focus.

Externalisation is often framed as a necessary response to dramatically increasing migration and asylum-seeking that has necessitated renegotiating standard interpretations of the 1951 Refugee Convention’s principles. Whether this is the case (and it is worth remembering that these principles flow from the response to a numerically vast post-World War II refugee emergency), it is true that asylum claims and irregular border crossing attempts have increased, both at US borders (Pew 2021) and internationally. Externalisation aims to reverse this by decreasing migration management costs through early interception in transit countries. It has long faced criticism; indeed the “externalisation” term and literature has largely been exogenously developed in the field of critical study, not by practitioners. FitzGerald (2019) situates externalisation in a long-run process of preventing asylum seekers from reaching ground where they can make legal claims, a tradition “as old as asylum itself.” Shrinking space for asylum is often an explicit goal, as investigations into CBP have demonstrated (Washington and Olivares 2022). The delegation of responsibility to transit countries can also remove a country’s migration policy from accountability to its own human rights standards (Pacciardi and Berndtsson 2022). Additionally, frustrating movement along established routes can incentivise people embarking upon more dangerous routes (Fontana 2022), increasing vulnerability. There is significant literature on the relationship between externalisation and human rights

abuses; including privacy rights, unwarranted use of force, unjustified imprisonment, and injury or death (Frelick et al 2016).

There is less comprehensive criticism of externalisation's effectiveness on its own terms; perhaps because public critics tend to be motivated by ethical or political concerns more than operational ones, and perhaps also because those who manage and gain from the system are not incentivised to publicly assess its effectiveness. There is, however, significant evidence of operational weakness (e.g. Nevins 2010) that will be revisited. Regardless, the externalisation project continues to expand principally across the Global North, including the US, UK, Australia, and the European Union (Pacciardi and Berndtsson 2022). This study focuses on the US' externalisation in Mexico, the Northern Triangle countries, and Colombia, along a south-north route toward continental US borders. It argues that a development lens is critical to understanding the process. Despite existing to secure (perceived) US interests, externalisation has interacted with and shaped conceptions of migration governance far beyond those used by US border forces, bringing (among others) development actors¹ into its ongoing growth. This study is therefore concerned with the "developmentalisation" of border control and migration governance, which places externalisation within combined frameworks of development and security.

2.2 Externalisation and development-security in theoretical context

The political definition of externalisation espoused by US border security figures such as Bonner or former DHS secretary John Kelly (Woody 2017) presupposes hierarchical structures in which powerful states delegate the policing of their frontiers. Therefore the critical externalisation literature is concerned not only with migrants' rights, but also critical development theories of power; such as the core-periphery model inherited from the dependency school, in which US-Latin American relations have always been a central case study (Cardozo and Faletto 1979). Post-dependency approaches meanwhile deal with more complex models of power than core and dependent states alone. Winters and Mora Izaguirre (2019) develop these arguments, looking at how externalisation structures relations within as well as between states.

Successive border externalization interventions, with names such as 'Operation Hold-the-Line' and 'Smart Borders Initiative', ensure a gradual extension and melting together of the US and Mexico's southern borders but do not constitute a straightforward process. Instead, it is infused with power hierarchies and conflicting and consists of many different back-and-forth phases.

Several critiques flow from this contextualisation of externalisation within geopolitical and economic hierarchy. One is that harsh border controls are manifested in response to circumstances causing displacement which are a function

¹ Humanitarian and relief actors are considered as within the scope of development actors for this study's purposes.

of global inequality (Haas 2010), and secondarily, the subordination of migrants along wealth and racial lines implied by global hierarchies legitimise harsh controls (Isakjee et al 2020). Another critique deals with the interstate relations consequences springing from hierarchical chains of migration control, which are particularly relevant given the fraught history of US-Latin American relations. This critique raises externalisation's ability to empower problematic actors within transit countries; for instance through empowering forces who are party to conflicts within the transit country, as in Guatemala (Miller 2019, Grandin and Oglesby 2019)². A further critique emerges from a reading of regional migration governance (Margheritis and Pedroza 2022); wherein several countries including Costa Rica, Brazil, and Argentina have sought to move away from force as a core component of migration management, and US involvement may have provided countervailing incentives.

The system is more complex, though, than a simple series of hierarchical contracts between states. Externalisation may be primarily a security policy; both extending US border security and increasing US intelligence capacity and influence over transborder movement elsewhere. However, two complications to this view exist. Firstly, externalisation is not undertaken entirely without consent and support from governments in transit countries and therefore it becomes an act of security cooperation; which harmonises a US internal security policy with the security policies of allies. The second complication is a central concern of this study; the role of development policy in widening the scope of externalisation.

The “development-security nexus” plays a dominant role in development policy thought. It describes a cluster of ideas originating in peacebuilding (Nilson 2020), that link security and development interventions. These operate from the premise that security is a necessary condition for development, and perhaps owe an older heritage to Hobbesian views of the role of states as security guarantors first. Development-security proceeds from enlightened self-interest; the “security” of donor and beneficiary states are assumed to be essentially identified; leaning on a broadly liberal school of international relations (Sorensen and Soderbaum 2012), which can be problematic when applied to migration governance. The development-security doctrine plays a dual role operationally; asking security forces to assume an active role in development, while asking development actors to engage with security.

In the 1990s, Buzan (1998) and other members of the Copenhagen School advanced a framework for security studies that extended the discipline beyond traditional military conceptions and into spheres such as environment and development. Within the same project, Waever (1993), advanced securitisation theory, which described the framing of an issue in security terms as not merely analytical exercise but one that generates new understandings and priorities. In this account, defining an issue (like

² A BORTAC training programme for Guatemalan border guards also took place in Colombia, adding to the complexity of interstate relations on this issue.

migration) as a security concern is a “speech act” that discursively reframes the understanding of and approach to an issue. Emmers (2010) expanded on the distinction between the “politicisation” of an issue; e.g., its inclusion within normal public policy discussion, and its “securitisation”, or definition of an issue as an existential threat demanding extraordinary measures. Subsequently, development actors sought to securitise issues in order to access resources and prioritisation from security-focused states. Elbe (2006) explored the problems with this approach related to HIV/AIDS, assessing how a security-led focus could supersede and disrupt rather than supplement public health aims. Sorensen and Soderbaum (2012) assessed the nexus’ shortcomings comprehensively in 2012. Other critics went further than Waever, identifying development-security as a new vector for domination in the world-system and dependency theory tradition, raising its role in legitimising increasingly radical and militarised interventions carried out by the Global North (Reid 2012). The US’ interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan became key critical case studies; from the role of aid agencies in achieving foreign policy aims, to the direct militarisation of aid through programmes such as CERP (US Army 2017), which placed development funds directly with US military commanders to disburse in line with battlefield aims.

Externalisation was a concurrent case where security justifications were invoked to legitimise actions surpassing liberal-democratic norms. Such cases were theorised by Agamben (2005) as a “state of exception”, and described as the primary means of repression in liberal democracies. Scholars continued developing Agamben’s conceptual categories to frame analyses of migration in Latin America (Cowen and Gilbert 2008). The study of theoretical and practical reinforcing linkages between US militarisation of domestic policing, border control, foreign aid and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan was further developed by Graham (2010) among others. In this period security assistance expanded; by 2017 the US operated security assistance programmes in 85% of countries (Isacson and Kinoshian 2017). A disproportionate number, such as the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative and the Colombian Strategic Development Initiative³, were in the Americas. Often they are difficult to separate from the extensive history of military intervention in the region; indeed Latin American border guards today are trained at the contemporary incarnation of the School of the Americas, a site known for its military training of numerous human rights abusers and dictators in the region (Hiemstra 2019).

Through connecting development to crime, security, and migration control, these programmes create new rationalisations for security action, but also allocate resources to humanitarian and economic development activities. As this study will explore further, the erasure of potential contradictions between security and development policy has significant consequences for how the latter functions. The three-decade history of the US externalisation project contains valences,

³ Both programmes were security for development programmes, aimed respectively at interdicting transnational crime and increasing development in areas where armed groups operated.

complications, and contradictions; but a transition can be charted from a “hard” security policy to a more complex iteration of the development-security nexus.

If one reads development-security discourse as discursively suturing the strategic interests of Global North powers and universal development and security outcomes, migration management is ideal for such an endeavour. Migration is highly contested in US domestic politics, whilst operationally development agencies and border forces have differing approaches to migration. Development-security depoliticises and neutralises contested policy space by merging multiple areas; crime and policing, defence and security, humanitarian action, and economic development; and relatively novel areas such as global public health (Blue et al 2021) or climate adaptation (Miller et al 2021). It blurs political distinctions between a securitarian control-first approach and a liberal assistance-first approach. It enables new migration control partnerships across sectors - civil services; military and police forces; business; and development (Akkerman 2018), and invests all in the system. In doing so it creates potential incentives to downplay risks. The form in which these incentives are first discursively constructed and then operationally manifested is this study’s key concern.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research methods

This study analyses contradictions in narratives and impacts of US externalisation through document and interview analysis rooted in a framework of development and security theory. First it establishes the conceptual framework underpinning externalisation and defines the US-Latin American externalisation project based on a review of literature. It then analyses externalisation narratives and their role in outcomes through cases that collectively enable an overview of the externalisation project. This study is periodised from Q1 2008 to Q1 2023. Though externalisation begins in the 1990s and some reference is made to earlier events, the 2008 Mérida Initiative marks the formalising of development-security doctrine in a major externalisation deal which this study contends had a shaping effect on all subsequent policy. It is therefore a useful starting point to discuss the process.

Data for this study was gathered through document analysis and semi-structured interviews throughout Q1 2023, in a mixture of in-person and online interviews aimed at reaching data saturation, with no new core themes emerging during collection. Reaching saturation was aided by using methods that enabled the triangulation of findings across a broad range of sources.

Document analysis rests principally on the examination of documents issued by United States Government (USG) agencies (principally the executive branch, State Department, and DHS and enforcement agencies under its command) - strategy documents, reports, working papers, legislative documents, press releases, public statements. Documents from INGOs (principally UNHCR and IOM) - briefing papers, training materials, and evaluations - were also analysed, along with grey literature. Documents were identified through searches of open-access online databases using simple and Boolean searches, references in secondary literature, and suggestions from research participants. These documents (n=110) presented a collective picture of official development discourse(s) which could then be compared with field experience.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with respondents (n=14) with direct experience implementing or responding to externalisation policy. Informed consent was gathered and most interviews were recorded and transcribed, though some respondents requested no recording due to professional sensitivities. Collectively, interviews cover NGOs of all sizes working on resettlement, advocacy and rights, security, and direct aid. Interview questions focused on respondents' awareness of externalisation and perceptions of its consequences, awareness and perceptions of development-security discourse in relation to migration, and view of US agencies' role in shaping migration policy beyond US borders. Respondents were identified

through the author’s professional and academic network, through searching out respondents online, and through field visits. Interviewee countries are the US, Mexico, Colombia, and Guatemala. The data gathered through these methods was coded into 48 unique codes across six categories, including sector, operational role, and country. This coding facilitated identifying different ways in which respondents conceptualise migration governance, security, development, and externalisation, and identified distinctions. Mixing national settings and organisation types provided an overview of contact points with the region affected by externalisation, rather than fully representing a sectoral or country perspective.

Findings are presented in three sections. The first covers the developmentalisation of externalisation policy discourse from US state agencies, principally in reference to interdiction, enforcement, and returns in Mexico. The second explores how development-security discourse connects humanitarian agencies and the enforcement agenda through surveillance technology and interoperability. The third section explores further entanglements between development and migration control through externalisation; principally the framing of development as a migration control aim. Finally, analysis and fieldwork is reintegrated with theory to articulate conclusions.

The US-Latin American context is selected for three key reasons. Firstly, relatively straightforward south - north migratory routes allow for simpler analysis of policy in relation to movement patterns. Second, US strategic reach in Latin America is greater than most externalisation cases (although this creates some analytical challenges around disentangling border management from interrelated histories of US interventions in the region.) Finally, US externalisation in the region is currently advancing, leaving lacunae in the analytical literature.

3.2 Definitions and scope

Table 1: Externalisation areas and policy effects (created by author)

Area of work	Aid to reduce migration	Interdiction and enforcement	Redefining asylum and protection policy	Law enforcement on smuggling and similar
Level of intervention	Examples			
High level strategy	Root Causes Strategy	Merida Pillar 3	"Remain in Mexico"	Bicentennial Framework
Operational cooperation	Economic/ investment cooperation	Border guard training schemes	Deportations cooperation	DEA / police joint work schemes
Funding	Sembrando Oportunidades programme	Funding for Mexico southern border surveillance	Protection Transfer Agreements	Funding for new police units
Shaping approach of external actors including:				
Lat Am governments	INGOs / civil society	Private providers	Peer powers	Policy community

Table 2: Externalisation actors and related outputs (created by author)

Actor	Outputs
Political leadership	
Executive	Executive orders, setting overall strategy and budgets, direct relations with other country leaders
Legislature	Shaping overall strategy and budgets, advancing specific interests
Government departments	
Foreign	Diplomatic relationships through embassies, funding for development initiatives
Interior and Defence	Departmental cooperation with foreign govts, setting strategy, shaping asylum policy, funding of security programmes
State agencies	
Border forces	Own operations, joint operations with partner forces, joint operations with CSOs or humanitarian/ development efforts, training or funding partner forces
State aid agencies	Humanitarian and development programmes aimed at reducing migration
Law enforcement	Own and joint operations with a migrant interdiction element
Nonstate	
National NGOs	Recipients of funding for externalization-linked programmes
Private providers	Lobbying to seek new markers, developing and shaping systems

This study evaluates how discourse structures relationships between actors, within a system defined with reference to secondary literature and informed by respondents. Simplified descriptions of this system are provided at Table 1 and 2.

Strategy and funding for US externalisation is set politically; through presidential executive orders and legislation. It is managed through government departments, mostly the State Department and DHS, with DoJ and DoD notably involved. Operational delivery is compartmentalised; with most security functions being delivered through agencies like CBP and ICE, which also exert upward shaping pressure (as well as other federal enforcement agencies, local police forces, and the military - notably Southern Command). ICE personnel select and train foreign country immigration officers in Colombia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Panama. The CBP's Border Patrol Tactical Unit (BORTAC) has trained and equipped border forces in Belize, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, and Peru. (Miller 2019, Hiemstra 2019). Meanwhile traditional aid and development work is delivered through USAID among others.

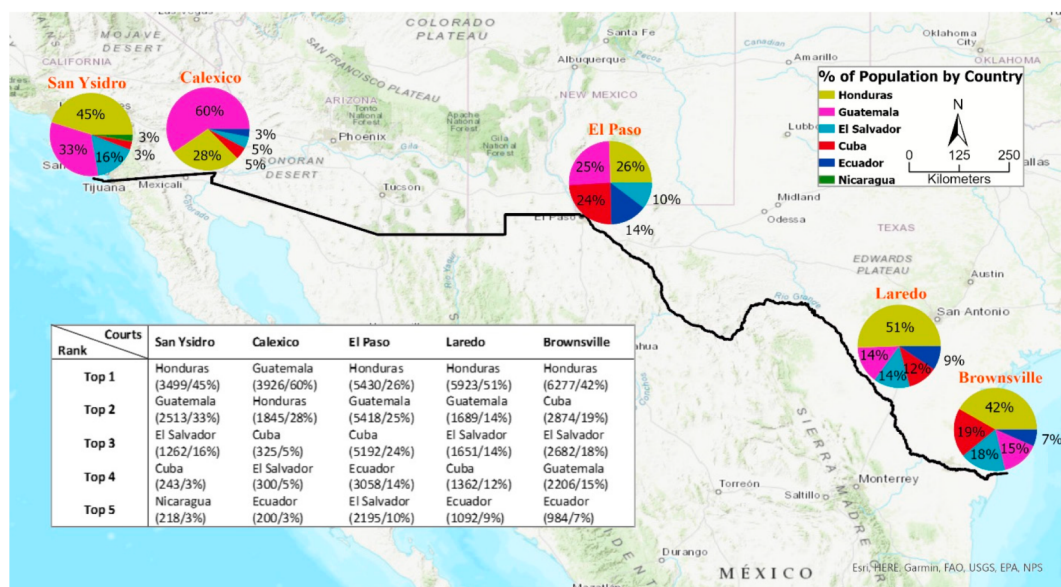
This machinery interfaces with external partners in several ways. High-level diplomatic and political relationships with counterparts in other countries structure policy, as do operational partnerships between government departments or lower-level partnerships between forces. Funding and training flows at all levels into state machinery in externalisation countries, the international system, localised NGOs,

and private providers (the latter who also shape policy through lobbying. The US apparatus also touches other Global North externalisation apparatuses, for instance via the EU’s Latin American migration programme (EU-LAC, 2023). Some transit countries are also developing nascent externalisation processes.

Critical study has provided general externalisation theories. Yet there is a paucity of empirical study analysing the functionality and effects of the actually-existing system at large; and what exists often focuses on individual countries or programmes, is produced by campaigners rather than in universities, or is concealed in non-public documents such as programme reports to donors or security-classified files. Attempts at whole-system or longitudinal studies of system effects are complicated by the externalisation regime’s dispersal and weak definition.

What coheres this contingent yet stable system? Executive command and control theories provide limited assistance; there is no one responsible body. More useful is Palumbo and Bellamy’s conception (2010) of a shift from “government” to “governance”; a neoliberal institutional arrangement which disperses power whilst aiming to ensure outcomes through rules and oversight. This implies a system where shared discourse plays a central role in shaping and disciplining operations; a shared language of expectations replaces a chain of command. There is also no single governance body; and complex interrelationships between actors. This study therefore hypothesises that narrative plays a central role in translating power into action; hence the discursive focus of this study. From this understanding two theoretical contentions can be derived; that externalisation discourse has experienced a “developmentalisation” - drawing migration control into development policy; and that this process masks tensions between competing aims in migration policy, whilst facilitating a security strategy based in shrinking asylum rights.

Table 3: Nationalities arriving at US/Mexico border, 2021 (Blue et al 2021)



The above map (Table 3) demonstrates noteworthy migration patterns. Externalisation is most pronounced in Mexico, which is unsurprising given its role as the sending or final transit country for all people moving overland from Latin America to the US. Further control chains exist across the Northern Triangle and Central America, in which several countries are migrant-sending as well as transit countries. The dangerous and difficult-to-navigate Darien Gap jungle between Colombia and Panama provides a natural barrier between South and Central America but it is still frequently crossed by migrants from South America, notably Venezuela since its recent economic and political crisis. Most others moving toward the US from below the Darien Gap are also South American citizens, although some African migrants opt for a South American route - in one case infrastructure guarding Europe has relocated migrants to Argentina (Vammen 2019). Colombia is the southernmost country studied, as the prominence of US externalisation decreases significantly further south.

4. Discussion of findings

4.1 Developmentalising US security strategy

The Mérida Initiative as definitive shift

Externalisation in the Latin American context was mapped on to infrastructure from the US' decades-long drug "War on Drugs" in the region, with most policy initially an outgrowth of aggressive counter-narcotics measures, alongside an increased post-9/11 emphasis on border security. As such, the securitisation and militarisation of migration was inevitably embedded at conception, as was a humanitarian discursive element, given the notorious record of cartel human rights abuses, including of migrants. Arguably, so too was the widely-documented drug war dynamic of long-run failure to engage fully with evidence of failure (Global Commission on Drug Policy 2010).

These elements can all be seen in the 2008 Mérida Initiative, a landmark in US-Mexico relations. The ambitious programme, jointly funded through the State Department and USAID, was contemporaneously framed principally as a counter-narcotics initiative. Its "four pillars" are clearly in line with development-security thinking; articulating an argument that links law enforcement capacity-building to border security, criminal justice reform, and ultimately building "resilient" communities. "Resilience" has been identified as an evolution of development-security discourse (Reid 2012) to a political economy of risk management that facilitates permanent, not limited, intervention. The permanence of Mérida-style initiatives provides a case of this resilience doctrine in practice.

The framing of Mérida is striking for mostly absenting migration control from its stated objectives. The Congressional bill authorising the initiative (US Congress 2008) does not reference migration, irregular or otherwise. The "overview" document intended for broader public consumption references border security principally regarding contraband, with only one small reference to migration control - "the illicit flow of drugs, people, arms, and cash" (US Embassy in Mexico 2008). Even the State Department's 2017 brief on the Initiative does not reference migration control except obliquely (US State Department 2017). This framing belies the extent to which Mérida did indeed involve migration control. The 2015 Congressional Research Service (CRS) report on Mérida is clearer. Noteworthy, CRS reports are primarily intended for internal consumption, thus less consciously concerned with narrative and framing.

With U.S. support, the Mexican government has...establish[ed] 12 advanced naval bases on the country's rivers and three security cordons that stretch more than 100 miles north of the Mexico-Guatemala and Mexico-Belize borders. [Mexican] agents have taken on a new

enforcement directive alongside federal and state police forces...work[ing] with the military and the police to increase immigration enforcement efforts. (CRS 2017).

The absence of a clear migration control narrative allows the subsumption of migration within wider crime discourse. From the same CRS report; “In 2015, the U.S. and Mexican governments approved a \$75 million Mérida program to help...agencies collect, store, and share information on criminals *and migrants*⁴.” Migration references become more frequent in literature on Mérida as time advances and nearly all involve crime. By 2015 the State Department could, according to CRS reporting, count Mexico’s “apprehension of more than 150,000 Central American migrants in FY2015 and FY2016” on a list of Mérida successes alongside the capture of high profile drug trafficker Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman. One respondent, who at the time was a legal advocate for migrant rights in Mexico, noted “criminalisation rhetoric” ramping up from the mid-2000s at the same time as migrants were anecdotally increasingly likely to be victims of crime; issues from “common criminality to kidnappings” were “more present than ever” in this respondent’s caseload.

This process, termed “crimmigration” (Brouwer et al 2017), echoes more political narratives on migration by framing irregular migration as criminal activity, not a humanitarian issue. Linguistic slippages occur between discussion of crime that exploits migrants, crime committed by migrants, and the act of migration itself. Several respondents to this study identified immigration violations that were previously handled as procedural matters and later framed as crimes in both policy and communications, a shift also identified by Coleman and Kocher (2011). Either irregular migration itself is criminalised, or attributed as principally a product of smuggling/trafficking (the terms are often inappropriately conflated) that can be reduced through disrupting gangs. Consciously or otherwise, such discourse legitimises enforcement in general, invisibilises enforcement directed against migrants, or presents enforcement as acting primarily in migrants’ interests. Several frontline respondents highlighted a lacuna in this discourse that has been documented elsewhere, arguing that increasing border control itself creates a market for smugglers. Others highlighted a grey area between enforcement and smuggling. In one anti-smuggling operation, Mexican state police reportedly killed 19 people, including Guatemalan migrants, near the U.S. border (Guardian 2021), while human smuggling in Mexico has been repeatedly connected to immigration agents and the new National Guard. This causality dispute frames the difference between advocates and critics of securitisation.

Developmentalisation-externalisation discourse, through presenting stronger law enforcement as a development goal; and implicitly placing migration management within this arena (thereby also implicitly defining migration management as migration *control*) is part of the crimmigration process. Yet if developmentalist

⁴ The emphasis here is the study author’s.

discourse framed Mérida, it also framed its rejection. In 2018, incoming Mexican president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador rejected the Mérida approach to law enforcement in strong, and developmentalist, terms. “We don’t want the Mérida plan, we don’t want helicopters mounted with machine guns. We want cooperation for development” (Oré 2019). Opposite positions being framed in developmentalist terms demonstrates the depth and importance of such framing in creating a defining envelope for discussion. The post-Mérida shift was institutionalised in the US-Mexico Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities in 2021. The Bicentennial Framework overview does not mention migration control except in reference to enforcement action against human traffickers (Gobierno de México 2021). The Framework represents both a shift and a continuation of the overall outcome; flagship security cooperation initiatives that downplay the strategic centrality of migration control for the US, while in practice facilitating significant leaps in externalised border enforcement.

Externalisation and securitisation post-Mérida

In 2014, Mexico launched Programa Frontera Sur, with Mérida-linked US support that again is not widely referenced in US official communication. The programme militarised Mexican southern border regions, again to ultimately prevent access to the US southern border. Security cooperation intensified, including a 2015 law enabling US immigration officials to bear arms in Mexico. Frequent alleged human rights violations against both migrants and indigenous Mexicans swiftly surfaced (Miranda 2021, Ceceña et al 2021). Critics pointed to the 4.7% increase in crimes against migrants recorded in four implementation regions in the year following the programme (Castillo 2016). Respondent E, a staff member at a Mexico-based NGO working with migrant women at both northern and southern Mexican borders, was among several who identified widespread violent interdiction and detention incidents relating to the widely-documented Chiapas militarisation (Chiapas Support Committee 2022). Deportations increased drastically, with the Inter-American Committee on Human Rights reporting that due asylum process was not respected (OAS 2021). The US continued placing pressure on Mexico over insufficient deportations, threatening tariff increases in 2018 (Fredrik 2019). The CRS report above alleges “Mexico struggled to provide adequate protection for groups vulnerable to abuses (journalists, human rights defenders, migrants.)” Despite Lopez Obrador’s opposition to Mérida on anti-militarisation grounds, militarisation intensified, with Mexico’s new National Guard deployed in migration enforcement in 2019, with US support. Many respondents linked this to a rise in harsh treatment, an argument widely documented by human rights monitors (Amnesty 2020).

This process was followed by more general undermining of asylum. DHS termed 2019 measures to hold asylum seekers in Mexico while their claims were processed as “Migrant Protection Protocols (MPPs)” and a response to a “security and humanitarian crisis” (DHS 2019). Trump Administration officials more bluntly

referred to the “Remain in Mexico” policy; indicating a state-level preference for development-security framing despite political discourse. Multiple respondents working in aid and advocacy in Mexico and US spontaneously raised the MPPs as responsible for the most serious and sharp increase in their caseload during the period. “It changed everything”, said one. Another added,

All hell broke loose...there was no stable or safe place to wait in Mexico. [Our work turned to] trying to help people out of kidnapping situations...to people abused, kidnapped, and extorted who weren't being helped. And this was just in Mexico City, not at the borders.

Other asylum restrictions were also framed in development-security terms. In 2020, asylum rights were suspended during the coronavirus pandemic, under Title 42 (Blue et al 2021) legislation with roots in a 1944 health emergencies act. This triggered another humanitarian emergency; “shelters were overflowing”, according to one respondent. Nearly a million expulsions were carried out relating to Title 42. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) highlighted surges in smuggling around border communities (IOM 2021). In early 2023 Title 42 was temporarily extended to cover four new countries. Here the securitisation of another development policy dimension - public health - has rebounded on migration discourse. Even the contested securitisation theory debates on the 2000s AIDS crisis largely do not mention that one key early example of US externalisation was framed as an HIV/AIDS security measure. The 1990s saw unprecedented incarceration of Haitian asylum seekers in Guantanamo Bay (not coincidentally, one of the largest asylum-seeking groups at the time), regardless of their HIV status (Field 2012). In short, developmentalist narratives legitimised two of the clearest examples of externalisation-as-asylum-restriction in recent years.

Finally, increased scale of crossings, or increasing claims for international protection by those whom authorities believe are not entitled to it⁵, forms a common discursive defence of securitisation. This ranges from the “protection” framing of MPPs to the more politically belligerent framing of the Trump Administration’s proposed border wall (which is not an externalisation policy, nor was it coherently implemented, but cannot be divorced from the wider policy package.) Such an assumption precludes the possibility of non-enforcement based approaches to increased crossings, or of adverse consequences from enforcement. Two NGO respondents made the case that enforcement had increased the tensions between locals and migrants on the Mexican border that has often been framed as a function of increased numbers. “[The MPPs] referred them all to places that had always had migrants, but now without policies for accessing health, work, integration and labour. States didn’t have the resources. Of course there were tensions.”

⁵ This study intentionally avoids extended digressions on types of migrants, or the putative merits of claims for international protection, in order to retain a dual focus on international protection and on the rights of migrants more generally.

The discursive fusion of US and Mexican security

The post-Mérida era saw two Republican and two Democratic administrations, which sought to drastically distance themselves from each other on migration policy and framing, and pursued political discourse that differed sharply from state discourse or outcomes. I contend, however, that whilst political leadership is a significant variable, there is considerable discursive *and* policy continuity across administrations. Respondents offered mixed views. From one:

You see humanitarian words from [the current administration], it's no longer framed as a foreign invasion. And to be fair they have raised the cap, resettled some refugees from Latin America, instituted humanitarian parole programmes, implemented an exemption programme to Title 42 for a couple of years. But asylum is not restored."

All administrations oversaw an era in which enforcement grew while the role of development discourse grew in deployment, often serving to flatten the distinction between border security and migrant protection, or to provide a humanitarian defence of externalisation policy. This emergence and growth is a distinct feature of the post-Mérida era.

Evidence of the humanitarian argument's growth in centrality is provided by a comparison of CBP and ICE strategy documents to media releases and public statements. Externalisation projects are not commonly referred to in public statements - this study found 14 references in databases containing thousands of CBP and ICE public statements. Where they exist, references to humanitarian and development aims frequently appear - for instance in an acting CBP commissioner's statement on deportation agreements with Northern Triangle countries (CBP 2020), a memorandum with USAID (CBP 2019), and on detention as a solution to humanitarian emergencies (CBP 2019).

References to law enforcement, either directly or indirectly related to migration, are also frequent. Humanitarian and development aims appear alongside law enforcement aims frequently but law enforcement aims appear more frequently in isolation than humanitarian aims do, suggesting an (unsurprising) priority weighting. Strategic documents paint a more pronounced version of this picture. CBP's Global Engagement Strategy (CBP 2016), a key document dealing with international operations, does not mention matters relating to aid or development. A similar, if less pronounced, story can be found across ICE and CBP's strategy documents from the 2008-2023 period. This would support the view that humanitarian and development aims serve a primarily discursive, as opposed to operational, function for the security sector. Respondent L, a former senior US border agency official with experience in several countries in the region, frames these issues in terms of political administrations focusing "more on the humanitarian or security side of the coin" depending on party, being "reactive", and more

operationally, an issue of funding structures, where law enforcement agencies do not see their budgets as being responsible for humanitarian work. The respondent also extended this institutionalist view to the wider issue of militarisation, arguing that security training programmes are militarised because the only training facilities available are military, not policing.

The discussion of fragmentation between agencies speaks to a larger theme. This section concludes by merging a Waeverian critical security view of securitisation as speech-act with this study's earlier contention, following Palumbo and Bellamy and other theorists of neoliberal governance, that discursive structures partially replace clear command structures in governing externalisation. Gallaher (2016) argues that the Mérida era represented a shift in accountability structures - US and Mexican governments were made accountable to each other for policy outcomes, not to their respective publics. This argument can be extended and linked to discursive choices which helped diffuse accountability. Mexico was made specifically accountable to the US at a political rather than operational level, as US threats following perceived Mexican migration control failures indicate.⁶ In the state literature, the centrality of migration control to security cooperation was downplayed. Where it was discussed, a simultaneous push toward securitisation and law enforcement *and* humanitarian aims justified militarisation in markedly different terms, thus reducing accountability for effectiveness on either metric. This is a possible partial explanation for externalisation continuing despite strong evidence of failure to prevent migration, interdict criminals, or protect migrants (Nevins 2010). A coherent universal framework of shared security at the discursive level negated the need for one to be formed at the operational level, and distanced policy from actual outcomes. When Mexico imposed visa requirements on Venezuelans arriving in 2022, it justified its own national border policy explicitly in reference to safeguarding the US from transiting migrants (Martinez-Gugerli 2022). The discursive fusion of US and Mexican security, fostered by developmentalist arguments, appeared to have succeeded. This was, however, not the only reframing process underway.

4.2. The roots and contested effects of “humanitarian border governance”

The developmentalist origins of humanitarian border governance

“With the help of biometric technologies for identity management, IOM is now better placed to support governments, partner organizations and migrants. The responsible use of biometrics, in full respect of applicable privacy and personal data protection laws and regulations, facilitates regular and safe cross-border mobility and migration, helps to protect vulnerable

⁶ All Mexico-based respondents described the relationship as hierarchical in some form, although levels of agency that respondents attributed to Mexico differed. One respondent argued that Mexico was simply “paid [by the US] to enforce its own existing laws”, while others highlighted the shaping role of US pressure.

migrants and contributes to increasing security for all. Furthermore, biometrics has become a valuable tool in the field of humanitarian action.” (IOM 2018)

US state literature demonstrates limited engagement with evidence of adverse externalisation consequences; such as the potential of new controls to induce dangerous journeys or further reliance on smugglers (Boggs 2015), physical violence and mistreatment, or shrinking asylum rights. US authorities are not, however, blind to such risks. In 2015, the US increased funding to UNHCR to help INAMI train border officials in interviewing vulnerable people and conducting “humane repatriations” (The White House 2016). Similar security assistance projects have been framed as promoting efficiency, protectiveness, and indeed access to asylum (CRS 2023):

From FY2015 to FY2022, the State Department has spent more than \$58.5 million to support Mexico’s immigration control and border security efforts...U.S. assistance helped Mexican agencies build a more secure communications network in Mexico’s southern border area and install biometric screening equipment that interfaces with U.S. databases in all 52 of its migrant detention centers...From FY2018 through FY2023, the State Department has provided more than \$163 million through the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account to UNHCR to improve access to asylum in Mexico.

This approach exemplifies what this study terms “humanitarian border governance”, following Bendixsen’s (2020) argument describing the continuum between assisted return (humanitarian) and deportation (enforcement) policy in Norway. This study describes humanitarian border governance as a development-security approach that not only merges enforcement and development, but presents additional securitisation and externalisation as the solution to human rights risks presented by securitisation and externalisation. In doing so, it also binds humanitarian agencies into security-led programmatic architecture. If enforcement produces negative consequences, the argument runs, then enforcement should be developmentalised through capacity-building and training. Risks are framed as a result of underdeveloped security forces, not of the incentives structuring security forces’ work.

Security-protection within a development framework is a formulation historically present within Latin American regional frameworks for humanitarian response, dating back to OCAM, the 1990s-founded Central American cooperation framework for migration. OCAM’s secretariat duties are provided in turn by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN migration agency. IOM has been a key critic of shrinking asylum rights, a lobbyist for safe pathways, and produced publications criticising border militarisation and its role in risks to life (IOM 2017), while its “Missing Migrants” project highlights migrant deaths. However, as a key proponent of humanitarian border governance, it is an instructive case study in the integration of the international system into a policy envelope set by US externalisation.

I contend that the humanitarian border governance agenda has taken root because it fosters a convergence of aims; between border security agencies seeking to assuage fears of human rights risks resulting from their operations, and relief and development agencies seeking to reduce the prevalence of border violence. Yet there is also a deeper convergence of ideas here, rooted in the epistemic nature of development policy as social-scientific discipline. Mainstream contemporary thought on development and governance more generally is framed through ideas of collaboration and efficiency (OECD 2021). Across contexts, such thinking connects arguments for increased horizontal cooperation between agencies to arguments for using statistics-based technologies applied to ever-widening datasets. In short, collaborative institutions deriving policy from data-driven evidence will optimise development outcomes (Metcalf and Dencik 2019). Humanitarian border governance is grounded in such thought; and thus its tendency to facilitate further externalisation through surveillance and collaboration is not coincidental. Further evolution of development-security thinking appears through security-sector reform ideas (UN 2023) on the centrality of police and military reform in development emerging in a border context. This translation, however, elides qualitative differences between border forces and police or armed forces⁷ thus extends “crimmigration” discourse, placing migration in a comparison class with issues of law enforcement and defence.

Surveillance for both protection and enforcement

The US has pursued significant expansion in border surveillance capability; its scale is demonstrated in recent Electronic Frontier Foundation data (Maass 2023). The border surveillance market has experienced a record surge, and for-profit providers are now also a key driver of externalisation strategy and technology, contributing to overall systemic complexity (TNI 2021). From the CRS report quoted earlier, US-Mexico cooperation alone includes the \$75m Mérida program already mentioned, several large-scale telecommunications projects, and \$100m in U.S. equipment and training for securing its southern borders with Guatemala and Belize. The Joint Border Intelligence Group, which includes the border forces of the US, the Northern Triangle countries, Mexico and several other Global North countries, organises data and intelligence-sharing between authorities. Safeguards on such expansion have been limited. Flacks et al (2023) quote DHS’ own internal impact assessments in stating that ensuring the department’s standards are adhered to is “difficult”. The Flacks report covers multiple ways in which US surveillance projects can harm human rights, including those regarding non-discrimination; the right to life, liberty, and security; and the right to remedy. Besides, the extent of many state-led information sharing agreements (including with Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia and Panama) is simply not clear and concealed in secret documents. This was raised as a concern by several respondents, with one describing the US-Colombia relationship as

⁷ And the difference between migrants and criminals or enemy combatants (whilst recognising that all three categories are fluid, subjective, and often constituted together.)

a “black box.” Capabilities range in their approach from surveilling migrants themselves (e.g. biometrics) and more passive surveillance (e.g. drones or watchtowers). These can have humanitarian functions, but are also used in enforcement, with consequences including “digitally triggered violence and killings by local police in Central America to actions by the US, its allies and competitors in geopolitical contests over the control of global security.” (Bingham et al, 2023).

The state is the primary means of border surveillance cooperation, but INGOs play a significant role. IOM has been a key innovator in humanitarian border governance. Its Integrated Border Management Division argues (IOM 2019) for international, interagency, and intraservice cooperation on migration management. It points to successful collaborations where capacity-building has enabled safer reception. To support such processes, it offers capacity-building services from crisis management to efficient processing. Surveillance is central to such services. IOM’s offer includes assistance with building biometric characteristics databases on migrants. The theory is that a combination of modernisation (through technology and the use of data⁸), training (on issues such as rights protection) and sharing (within and between states and nonstate agencies) comprises a developmentalist agenda for border forces. This agenda then purportedly enables policy design that best contributes to the “security”, of both states and displaced persons. The US and Latin America have been a testbed for such programming, in areas from surveillance to detention reform. Metcalfe and Dencik (2019) provide an account of “datafication” that situates it within wider discourses of security and efficiency.

The assumption is that algorithmic processing...can serve to anticipate, conjecture and speculate on future behaviour, activities, and threats. As such, onus is placed upon prediction, which finds resonance in wider logics of security in addition to drawing from traditions within data science. The aim is to organise politics according to what Massumi (2015) has described as a wider “operative logic of pre-emption”. Such logic, in turn, provides an apparent necessity and justification for limitless measures to be taken to ward off possible threats.

Respondents raised several concerns relating to how humanitarian border governance discourse could motivate surveillance collaborations with adverse consequences. These relate to how INGOs could build or advise on surveillance systems for humanitarian purposes that may be retooled to tighten migration controls; how system interoperability and/or data sharing could fuel enforcement with adverse rights consequences; and whether sufficient safeguards exist on how INGO data is shared with border forces.

The push toward sharing datasets, and making data interoperable, has some of its earliest iterations in law enforcement⁹, such as bringing together DHS, DOD, and

⁸ Migration data collected by relevant agencies may include biometric data, biographic data, entry and exit data, travel documents, geolocation, or surveillance imagery.

⁹ With reference to state services; discounting the commercial history of data governance.

DoJ files in an environment with prior barriers to collaboration. There is also a clear humanitarian case for data collection and sharing related to emergencies (OCHA 2015.) However, data that can enable humanitarian action can also be used coercively, or to facilitate deportations. Mexican authorities shared information from 10,000 humanitarian visa applications with DHS for use in migration control, and data registration has been made a condition of release from detention (Washington and Olivares 2022). This narrative slippage occurs elsewhere. For example, EU-funded fingerprint databases in African states are framed as development programmes enabling voter registration; but also enable EU use of new fingerprint databases for migration control (Privacy International 2019). Similar risks exist with the emergent use of AI in migration control (Access Now 2022). Multiple respondents raised fears that such risks are under-acknowledged by those optimistic about the role of new technology in facilitating humanitarian border governance. “Function creep” was used by one to describe the risk, while two highlighted that a focus on efficiency in emergency aid led to deprioritising downstream rights consequences.

Further risks emerge from state demands on humanitarian agencies in an externalisation context. The EU’s MOCADDEM mechanism demands UNHCR intelligence on migration in North Africa (Statewatch 2023). The Bangladeshi state shared migrant data demanded from UNHCR with Myanmar, from which migrants were claiming asylum (HRW 2021). Humanitarian data usually enters state systems through agencies like UNHCR administering an emergency in a compulsory partnership with the state where the emergency is taking place. There are risks that such data will then be used in enforcement by the state in question, but also externalisation-specific risks that it becomes part of a wider regional network of coercion. Humanitarian agencies usually mandate that such data is not passed onward or used for enforcement, however three respondents with close knowledge of such partnerships reported that in their operational experience, such safeguards were impossible to maintain. One other respondent who was broadly critical of the links between INGOs and externalisation nonetheless insisted that data controls were robust in his experience. Regardless, the sum of these issues provide several areas of concerns regarding Latin American externalisation which were raised by respondents; unchecked enthusiasm for “datafication” contributing either to potentially lax INGO data safeguards or to risks emanating from an overall more information-rich environment; coercion by states; and sharing and interoperability between states. All of these grow as the range of data gathered and the sophistication of analytical software and AI increase.

Imprisonment to surveillance

The externalisation regime has fuelled detention estate growth inside and outside the US. Mexico now has one of the largest immigration detention systems in the world, detaining tens of thousands annually. Two respondents pointed to externalisation as

having increased the scale of detention in both the US and Mexico, not merely outsourced US numbers southward and attributed this to increasing strategic and technological cooperation. From Respondent A:

“Detention is very harmful [in the US]. People have died, there's a lack of medical care, mental health care, abuse by guards. All of that now is being outsourced...even in countries that have detention, you didn't always have the type of detention you have in the US where it is very much in line with the prison system here, it's all jails, it's all prisons. We developed the prison-industrial complex and now you see this merging now happening in other parts of the world, like Mexico.”

Respondent F raises the effect of Chiapas militarisation (described earlier) on detention, regarding the rising arrest and detention of Mexican citizens from indigenous backgrounds whose poor Spanish provided a rationale for detention on suspicion of being irregular migrants. A case in the Mexican supreme court in 2022 ruled that such internal restrictions on free movement were unconstitutional; and therefore, the detention centres housing such people also were. The overall policy remains unchanged. A further respondent claimed that externalisation played a key role, not merely through facilitating militarisation, but through US Embassy pressure on Mexican legislators not to revoke the policy.

INGOs have responded in ways concordant with an ameliorative humanitarian border governance concept. USAID, UNHCR and IOM have worked to establish or renovate quality reception centres in Central American countries, criticised by one respondent as facilitating a system of expanding detention. However, a more central campaign point has been the push for Alternatives to Detention, the term given to both an IOM-supported literature (IOM 2023). and now the Biden Administration's detention reform programme in the US, indicating a significant success for the initiative. Such schemes have been implemented in multiple countries. They tend to entail the closure of detention facilities, removing the human rights risks of detention while preserving the functions of monitoring, assisting, and potentially removing asylum seekers through surveillance technology, presented as a win-win for both former detainees and border security agencies. In the US, the programme has increased fivefold the number within the surveillance technology ambit (Syracuse, 2023). Respondents raise several risks here, in relation to privacy rights and surveillance expansion, in relation to the inhumane effects of GPS tagging as a detention alternative (Schulkind et al, 2023) and in relation to the ease of using surveillance data to transition back to detention.

Colombia and humanitarian border governance

Respondent N, a former Colombian border manager, rejects the securitisation agenda, and claims that with limited exceptions, even military and security forces tend not to frame migration as a national security issue; “Migration and crime were not as linked [as in the US]...we aimed to see migrants first as an opportunity...not as

a danger but as people with dreams who could contribute to economic growth.” Other respondents working in Colombia highlighted this difference. US respondents meanwhile highlighted a view that this distinction was made possible by the specific nature of the Colombian-Venezuelan relationship. This hints at another driver of humanitarian border governance alluded to by Respondent L; that imagining or implementing anything different is beyond the current capacity of US migration governance thought. Speaking of the detention of unaccompanied children in 2014, the respondent added; “We wanted to treat them humanely, but couldn’t simply let them go.”

Colombia contrasts with Mexico in three significant ways. First, it has only recently become a migrant-receiving rather than migrant-sending country; mostly triggered by an influx of around two million people fleeing Venezuela’s economic and political crisis. Second, it has pursued a more humanitarian-first approach, and continues to innovate, including now mulling a new definition of climate refugees (El Pais 2023). Third, this alternative approach has met with cautious US support. It is not difficult to impute that this is because the Colombian strategy is likely to reduce pressure on the US border in a way that neighbouring Mexico taking a similar approach would not.

Colombia is well within the externalisation ambit and is considered by US agencies to be a strategic partner. Respondent L, points out that the Darien Gap was previously considered a “natural barrier through which we don’t have to worry about mass migration”, something which subsequently changed very rapidly. The respondent added that the newfound strategic importance of Colombian migration control provided Colombia with new leverage in the relationship - which is currently becoming increasingly strained on migration. The Mérida Initiative was branded “Plan Mexico” by critics in a discursive turn that aimed to link it to the failures and humanitarian risks associated with Plan Colombia, the US-Colombian controversial drugs trade and counterinsurgency strategy - and one respondent remarked that Colombia was now trying to regain independence that it had lost through Plan Colombia. Another respondent raised a reported US attempt to return Venezuelans to Colombia who have a Colombian residence permit; and a trilateral conference was held between the US, Colombia, and Panama in early 2023 which agreed on a two month campaign to prevent migration through the Darien Gap. ICE and CBP meanwhile maintain missions in several Colombian cities.

Surveillance collaboration in Colombia between the US, the Colombian state, and enforcement agencies has been significant. Respondent F, a humanitarian protection worker with 10 years' relevant experience, raised the concern that the Colombian protection system is still not in line with international asylum norms, and that enforcement injustices take place in the deportation system, even whilst acknowledging generally that Colombia has pursued a welcoming strategy. However, he believes that his worst fears for how surveillance data would be used have not

been realised. Another respondent was more cautious, pointing to significant surveillance architecture installed; including compulsory iris scans and other biometric data as a condition for work permits, and a "social characterisation survey" which intensively gathers information on personal characteristics.

"There are two narratives at work; one which is to Colombians about increased security, and the other which is about providing better services, but either way, this is experimentation on a vulnerable population who are in no position to withhold consent."

Discrimination risks from facial recognition (a common theme in domestic policing) were also raised.

"[Facial recognition] doesn't prevent crime, it just finds evidence of it. And if there are a disproportionate number of migrants in the system, you are more likely to turn up a migrant."

Respondent N, meanwhile, argued that better use of humanitarian technology was possible but largely not related to data sharing - although also pointed out that improved data was enabling the faster admission of migrants.

"[When you arrive] you don't understand how things work; you need help navigating the system. So we started saying we need a tech platform to do that for people before they arrive in Colombia, to prepare for arrival...to begin the integration process before coming. We don't have it yet, just physical centres to help."

Colombia is an exceptional case but through its uniqueness helps demonstrate some of universalities of the US externalisation process; a US focus on enforcement even when it is not Colombia's primary approach; convergence on humanitarian border governance and relatedly surveillance; and the developmentalisation of discourse.

Humanitarian border guards

Developing border forces is, as established, central to the humanitarian border governance concept. IOM's 144-page manual covers training on issues including recognising gender-based violence, search and rescue, and informing migrants of their rights. Both state security assistance programmes and INGO programmes train border forces to inform migrants of their rights and facilitate lawful asylum processes. The evaluation reports of such programmes are unfortunately usually unavailable. However, respondents were generally critical of the practical applications of this discourse. Those working with detainees in Mexico (and the US) reported that detainees were rarely, if ever, informed of their rights effectively by guards. Respondent D credited the effectiveness of IOM and UNHCR's own rights information programmes, but added that their coverage was limited to the largest detention centres. She, along with several other respondents with experience of working in detention centres, were heavily sceptical of the incentives structuring training programmes for officers.

“They are supposed to read them their rights but in practice, it is unusual that they receive that information. The whole system is set up to detect, detain, and deport where you can, so teaching someone that’s been instructed to do something else is probably just confusing to them...it’s not that all immigration agents are bad people, they do work with civil society, but their job is [controlling the border.] It’s restricting asylum, not enabling it.”

Respondent I, a legal professional representing asylum seekers, was one of several who argued that the situation has in fact deteriorated in recent years, both in terms of conditions in detention, access to rights, and relationships between civil society and Mexican authorities. “Before 2018 we had a well established relationship with authorities but now it has eroded and we are seen as enemies. All contacts and cooperation have been lost.” The respondent also claimed that migrants who sought legal assistance were singled out for punishment by border authorities. Respondent E concurred; “Back in 2018, a US attorney working here in 2018 could give people wraparound services from asylum access to communicating with organisations in the US. That’s no longer the case.”

Another respondent with two decades’ experience in humanitarian work with migrants in Mexico referenced the 2010 San Fernando massacre, in which 72 undocumented migrants were murdered by the Los Zetas cartel, as a turning point in which Mexican authorities began to be receptive to criticisms of the failures of early-2000s militarisation, and argues pressure from the US was critical in reversing this decision at several key moments; “from the Obama administration in child detention in 2014...to the National Guard deployment”. She echoed the claim of deterioration; citing Mexican border agency INAMI’s cessation of participation in a citizenship council including civil society, and the replacement of INAMI’s head with a more traditional securitarian. This official is at the time of writing under trial (AP 2022) relating to the 2023 Ciudad Juárez fire, which killed 40 in a facility that respondents argued was unlawful following the 2022 constitutional ruling previously referenced. A separate respondent also pointed to several cases of customs officials blocking humanitarian aid, and the painting of those providing humanitarian aid as smugglers or allies of smugglers; another example of diffusing concepts of securitisation and (mis)uses of the counter-smuggling narrative.

For proponents of humanitarian border governance, given a development-security-derived reading of their work, there is no distinction between migration control and migration aid. Surveillance and enforcement support should undermine cross-border crime, allow more intelligent policymaking, enable training on rights protection, and allow an avenue through which INGOs can promote more humane policy to states. One respondent pointed to the creation of a special unit within Senafront (the Panamanian border force which was founded with US support) which increased capacity for search-and-rescue, and linked such work to programmes that promote safe pathways, access to regularisation, and accessing documents. Another provided a somewhat more pragmatic line of argument; that in a situation where more people are claiming asylum and states wish to take fewer, the INGO sector has no choice but

to engage with the system to ameliorate its weaknesses and advocate for safe pathways within a sovereigntist context.

There appears to be a growing rift in the humanitarian community on this concept. Some see humanitarian border governance as a pragmatic route to safe pathways, others see it as self-defeating or worsening the problem, and there are more nuanced perspectives. This is sometimes tied to a more general critique of the international system, with one respondent saying of another major international institution; “they are no longer seen as an ally [on migrant human rights monitoring] but as an extension of governments.” It is also notable that respondents critical of INGO involvement do not generally impute intent to increase enforcement risks, but the acceptance of discourses that facilitate risks. Respondents describe the issue as a “merging of agendas”, or “a lack of sufficient checks and balances” or “financial actors beating the drum of cost savings and efficiencies.” It is striking that such a rift does not appear to have been widely covered in development literature.

The evidence from Latin America suggests that more work is needed to justify an empirical link between the “humanitarian border governance” strategy and improved outcomes, and certainly that it is divisive among humanitarians. But aside from the direct risks from development actors in capacity-building and data-sharing, the convergence of the rhetoric of securitarian and developmentalist strategy and rhetoric is striking. Tazzioli (2020), in a study of UNHCR cash cards in Greece, theorised this convergence as “techno-humanitarianism” which she argues facilitates the control and entrapment of migrants by the border regime whilst not aiding asylum claims or long-term support. The aim of US enforcement is to reduce asylum applications and push border security outward, and humanitarian efforts now occur in an envelope that reinforces this aim. Programme-specific analysis flattens this dynamic; but when taking a systemwide view of the externalisation regime, the contribution of humanitarian border governance to deepening externalised interdiction and enforcement becomes more visible.

4.3 Migration control as development aim

Redefining development

“In Central America, the root causes of migration run deep—and migration from the region has a direct impact on the US. For that reason, our nation must consistently engage with the region to address the hardships that cause people to leave Central America and come to our border.” (The White House, 2022).

In the development-security account, security does not always refer to “hard” security. “Human security” (Deng 2000) or similar terminology often conceptualises security in a less traditionally securitarian sense, especially concerning displacement. This does not discount (and potentially extends) Copenhagen School concerns with the impacts of securitised framing of a sweeping range of issues. The role of

development-security discourse in expanding externalisation has thus far been discussed in two operational forms; its provision of new logics for security operations; and its provision of governance structures that integrate the humanitarian sector into externalisation. There is a third, broader function; the framing of migration control as a structural relief and development aim in itself.

Firstly, this can frame not only which asylum seekers are excluded but which are admitted; with subtle but significant potential effects. Secondly, it is linked to the use of development as a bargaining tool. A particularly aggressive example is the 2019 State Department announcement that \$450m in aid to Northern Triangle countries would be cut in retaliation for their perceived failure to prevent northward migration (also exerting a distorting effect on budgetary priorities in financially-stressed countries.)¹⁰ The third, most expansive, argument centres on the premise that development reduces migration; even though this causal claim remains deeply contested (Haas 2010). Aid is thus presented as a migration control initiative in political discourse, and applied to reduce migration. (One notable case is cash-based incentives for voluntary returns or to avoid US borders (Black et al, 2011).) A geographical bias enters (which some respondents raised); areas sending most migrants to the US border may not be those most needing assistance. Meanwhile the development sector is expected to seek funding based on whether their programmes reduce migration, not merely on whether they fulfil genuine development aims, further instrumentalising NGOs within the externalisation agenda.

Redefining asylum

In 2016, UNHCR initiated the Protection Transfer Arrangement (PTA) programme in the Northern Triangle countries (UNHCR 2016). The PTA was a novel scheme intended to provide asylum to a small number of recipients, reduce people travelling dangerous routes, and foster regional responsibility-sharing. The PTA was implemented first in El Salvador and expanded to Guatemala and Honduras in 2017. The US committed to accept individuals for resettlement referred through the PTA using their resettlement quota, and awarded UNHCR around USD2.6M over two years for implementation.

The scheme's novelty was to assess potential asylees in their country of origin. The US had also signed Safe Third Country Agreements with El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, whose governments are alleged persecutors of many claiming US asylum. Respondent B notes geographical bias; implementation was aimed at places where more migrants were reaching the US border from. As donor and resettlement country, the US narrowed the scope of eligibility from UNHCR's original proposal. A protection category for witnesses, informants, and victims of crime from organised

¹⁰ Following Bendixsen on the link between deportations and assisted return, there is also a symbiotic link between developmentalising migration control in its "positive" incarnation (humanitarian funding) and its "negative" one (aggressive bargaining.)

criminal groups or security forces was reduced to “civilian witnesses...who have assisted law enforcement...against violent gangs.” Similar tactics reduced the scope of child eligibility. From UNHCR's evaluation; “the selection criteria may not respond to the socio-political context of heightened risks in the NCA countries and therefore the PTA may not serve those people who are most at risk, or even “heightened risk”.” The programme was described as “complicated to implement” by 99% of surveyed stakeholders. From 2016-18, the PTA resettled some 140 claimants, and rejected or left waiting 1,885. The PTAs were virtually unprecedented in asylum protection in that they assessed claims in claimants' home countries, and in taking up to a year to make assessments of people who were potentially at risk in that country. PTAs are positive asylum protection schemes, not border control schemes. However, in the context of externalisation they too play a role in redefining asylum, and keeping more applicants distant. Respondent B adds:

“The US is not processing people at risk. They are trying to push alternatives even when alternatives are not according to international law. The strategy [behind the PTAs] is just to justify that the US has borders open.”

Retargeting aid

Multiple humanitarian respondents raised both US state-dependent funding structures and legislative restrictions as a constraint on migration programming. Yet there is also a wider shift underway in migration-development dynamics. One example is border enforcement is more directly tied to aid in the MoU signed between CBP and USAID in 2016. A CBP statement at the time outlined the development-security discourse involved (CBP 2020).

“Our hope is that these statistics assist USAID in targeting development in Central America, especially as we work together to improve conditions in the region, mitigate drivers of irregular migration, and undermine the false promises used by the transnational criminal groups and smugglers to deceive individuals.”

The USAID-supported Mexican Sembrando Oportunidades programme (USAID 2022) is an economic development scheme framed as preventing migration by tackling “root causes.” It covers two programmes that “offer small-holder farmers the opportunity to foster their own prosperity with agricultural inputs, a stipend, and technical assistance”, and “provide youth with opportunities for job training, a stipend, and apprenticeships.” The former was among the lowest-performing Mexican state development programmes (Ortega 2023), and as with other migration governance programmes, evidence on performance is non-transparent (Distantas Latitudes 2022). Humanitarian sector respondents were critical of these programmes, but not necessarily of the principle.

“When the US implements programmes they expect something in exchange. Although it's good if these social programmes deal with primary causes [of displacement and migration],

mostly, they don't, and anyway they are not a replacement for asylum or an excuse to diminish the asylum system." - Respondent E

Respondent G works for an organisation receiving some USAID funds directed toward migration-development programmes in Colombia. Speaking to the wider issue of USAID funding aiming to keep migrants in Colombia, he says:

My impression is these programmes are not very effective. Funding is not enough, it's not coherent with migration policy, and not coherent with the protection system here. [Focusing only on] migration control doesn't work, development needs more resources.

This theme of "root causes" discourse exerting a narrowing and insufficient effect on the scale of development policy thinking was recurrent. The one (security-focussed) respondent who did advance a causative link between development and reduced migration described it as a long-term process, not one delivered through targeted migration-development interventions.

The Root Causes strategy: a synthesis of prior approaches

In 2022 the Biden Administration introduced the US Strategy to Address Root Causes of Migration from Central America (henceforth the Root Causes Strategy.) Root causes discourse is not new, and its current iteration is framed by the Biden Administration's politics. But the discursive evolution is longer-term; a high-level attempt to frame migration policy in a period of rising displacement challenges, as well as a political response merging liberal and securitarian ideas. "Root causes" discourse sutures migration, development, and security and in so doing, undertakes ideological work to define migration reduction as an objective good, regardless of context.

"Security" may have long-standing hard security associations that are difficult to permanently alter, but the "root causes" discourse does partially reframe it in "human security" terms. Indeed, more radical theorists of "root causes" are keen to attribute Global North action, from arms sales to structural adjustment, as "root causes" of displacement (TNI 2021), although this is not how the discourse is generally used. The US' root causes papers talk about security in terms of safety and sustainability for migrants more than they do border security. Yet while the scope of the externalisation-development strategy is widened by it, the traditional securitarian elements are not notably shrunk. Previous elements like crimmigration, humanitarian border governance are folded into the new approach. The overall effect appears to be a further widening and linking of recent interpretations of security, development, migration governance, and control. This is reflected in the Root Causes Strategy.

The new approach also may reflect a response to humanitarian sector demands. "We tend to talk about people already [in the US]", says Respondent A", and the strategy's

migration justice angle addresses that rhetorically, in its aspiration to a “pathway to citizenship for the nearly 11 million undocumented migrants in our country, modernizing our immigration process, and effectively managing our border.” This formulation brings together the two elements discussed thus far - hard border security and humanitarian border governance - in defence of the third; migration control as development. The appeals to “effectiveness” and “modernization” references surveillance, security-development language, and the efficiency doctrines discussed earlier. They are also vague, allowing (perhaps deliberately) a wide envelope for interpretation by policymakers.

Among critical respondents, there were differences. They tended towards emphasising the piecemeal nature of the new approach - “\$1m goes to security dogs, the same amount as goes to human rights organisations”, said one of US initiatives in Mexico, and several held that the “root causes” approach reduced potential for expansive and longtermist thinking in development. However, others argued that the new approach is fundamental and structural - a view that appears concordant with a long discursive evolution from the Mérida period. In addition to tying economic development to migration control, the Root Causes Strategy’s “pillars” build on the Mérida and Bicentennial Framework approaches. They cover addressing economic insecurity, strengthening democracy and rights, and combating corruption, gender based violence, and organised crime. They continue to frame increasing border security budgets in non-securitarian terms; “this includes adopting budgets for security forces that enable them to be sufficiently staffed, trained, equipped, and compensated, and have internal oversight to strengthen accountability.”

Taken in tandem with the April 2023 expansion of the humanitarian border governance agenda, this represents an agglomeration and redeployment of all the discursive elements we have witnessed so far. Returning to the securitisation literature, this step can be seen as an advance in the concept of “global disaster management”, developed by Pupavac, Sorensen, Soderbaum and others (2012) in which crisis becomes permanent and remedy becomes structured around shaping ongoing processes rather than responding to events, necessitating permanent intervention.

Postscript: humanitarian border governance expands in scale

“The Department of State (State) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are announcing sweeping new measures to further reduce unlawful migration across the Western Hemisphere, significantly expand lawful pathways for protection, and facilitate the safe, orderly, and humane processing of migrants.” (DHS 2023)

The Biden Administration’s May 2023 migration strategy, announced during the course of this study, is a significant jump in synthesising many of the elements discussed.

The strategy continues to shrink space for asylum; using a twin-track approach made possible through externalisation. On one hand, it plans to restrict asylum claim rights from all those crossing irregularly - a potential international law violation although not a policy unique to the US (UNHCR 2021). Significant new funding is available for enforcement to speed up claims processing and increase deportations; an architecture that relies on relatively frictionless relationships with destination states, and also on reduction of access to legal support and due process enabled by the “state of exception” discourse discussed earlier during this study. There is also some strengthening of international cooperation against smugglers, and a plan for “disrupting smuggler narratives” (more robust evidence on the effectiveness of such discursive interventions would be a worthwhile endeavour), and the aforementioned 60-day enforcement surge in the Darien. Finally, the package involves the temporary deployment of 1500 troops to “manage” (i.e., militarise) the border response. This is a move which the current Democratic administration heavily criticised when conducted under their Republican opponents (USA Today 2023), further pointing to the presence of more political continuity than public discourse implies.

The new strategy is more than an enforcement approach. The space for enforcement is countered by (and arguably, enabled by) a “positive” form of border infrastructure externalisation, through the opening of reception centres in Colombia and Guatemala. Notably, this builds on the PTA practice of assessing asylum claims in other countries, including countries of origin. This is bolstered by increased targets for refugee admissions, if limited detail on how such targets will be met. However one respondent close to the process pointed out that the US had not consulted with Colombia, who may reject a settlement that incentivises the further treatment of Colombia as a transit country by migrants. The same respondent pointed out that acceptance targets are, in numerical terms, heavily insufficient to discourage irregular migration. Two respondents attributed the overall problem to attempting to fit enforcement goals to operational circumstances rather than rooting policy in analysis of those circumstances. “It doesn’t work”, Respondent N said of US enforcement measures, “because people try again and just keep coming back” - whilst also adding to the insufficiency argument that proposed acceptance measures in relation to Colombia are dwarfed by the 1,000 people crossing the Darien Gap weekly (IOM 2021). The insufficiency argument is bolstered by the fact that the overall policy trend remains tightening controls, or as one Mexican NGO respondent put it, “they are building a wall higher and then letting people in through cracks in it.”

The new turn is more than a disaggregated combination of enforcement and humanitarian measures. The two sets of measures are interdependent; partially of course because enforcement would be more contested without being balanced. More importantly for the purposes of this study, though, the humanitarian measures themselves deepen and strengthen the logic of externalisation and enforcement. They are technology-dependent; the announcement significantly overstates the ability of a new CBP app to enable frictionless claims, despite various issues with discrimination,

non-functionality (Pinto 2023), and privacy rights (AIC 2023).¹¹ They assume the right of the US to not merely adjudicate on the merit of an asylum claim; but on the country in which the claim is made, the manner of arrival, and with reduced independent scrutiny.

These measures assume relatively seamless integration of Latin American states' migration policies with US border policy. These dynamics cannot be divorced from the Root Causes Strategy; there is a notable bifurcation of humanitarian and development discourses between the two, but collectively they provide a synthesis of two decades of operational and discursive development in a discursive approach that seamlessly blends enforcement and protection whilst weakening asylum. Whether states will accept their role in the system is another matter. While Colombia's alternative approach to migration governance is to some extent compatible with the US' root causes strategy and desire to reduce arrivals at their own borders, the less securitarian agenda jars with the US' in other ways. For example, despite ongoing enforcement cooperation, the head of Colombian migration management agency Migración Colombia cancelled acceptance of US deportation flights of Colombian citizens in May 2023, citing "degrading" treatment on board said flights (Guardian 2023).

Whether such disputes are teething problems or a fundamental threat to the durability of the "new turn", only time will tell.

¹¹ Furthermore, CBP reportedly now uses an AI-powered system enabling the linkage of a single data point on a target with information including location data, social media posts, linked IP address, and employment history (Cox 2023).

Conclusion: Developmentalisation and its limits

5.1 Limitations of study

Due to time, feasibility and access constraints; secondary sources were primarily used to analyse security discourse, with primary sources predominantly used to provide texture and perceived impacts of that discourse in field settings. A complete review of how border security actors understand and discuss their role would require more primary interviews. Whilst this study focuses on the links between high-level discourse and policy, it would have benefitted from the additional insight of firsthand migrant experiences. The interview sample size is too small to draw robust generalised conclusions about the impact of security-development discourse and externalisation on humanitarian action. Instead, the study establishes several challenges to the dominant US state discourse that provoke further lines of inquiry for researchers.

There are some further methodological limitations. One is unavoidable selection bias in the interview sample toward NGO actors given the difficulty of accessing many security sector actors - in fact, the secrecy surrounding externalisation initiatives is a barrier to research, and itself an object of study. Selection took place through three weeks of email and phone outreach to around 50 individuals identified through a review (through both networks and online searches) of organisations in development and security spaces relating to migration and refugee protection, most of whom did not agree to interview. While translation was offered, there is a bias towards more networked individuals and those able to conduct interviews in English, however this is not overly problematic given the aim of the study is to assess perceptions of discourse and policy within the international development and security sector, in which such demographics are overrepresented. The influence of demographic factors beyond professional identity (e.g. ethnicity, gender, age, political view) in shaping perceptions is not covered, which is a potential limit. The two decade analysis period and location of different participants at random points during said analysis period may have introduced issues with recall. More quantitative study would provide additional weight in decisively answering some of the questions raised by this study and its respondents; including the material impact of externalisation initiatives on human rights violations, the changes wrought by externalisation initiatives on policy, and the effectiveness of specific interventions such as humanitarian training for guards. Moreover, the study draws evidence from some significant events that occurred after more than half of interviews had been conducted, so the overall sample cannot make claims with reference to recent events.

Relatively shallow inquiries into specific policies and programmes is unavoidable for a study attempting to understand discursive trends in a hemisphere-spanning system, evolving over three decades. This study aims to sketch a set of links between high-level development theory; policy; and practice which necessarily involves an

attenuation of analytical detail at either the theoretical and empirical level. Each of the locations, policies and programmes mentioned would benefit from a greater depth of scrutiny; as would more focused theoretical readings that connect externalisation to broader epistemic and ideological trends. We are a long way from a general systemic account of the US, and much less the global, externalisation regime and its place in the shrinking space for asylum protection. This study focuses on one component underpinning that system; a fluid set of rhetorical strategies that inform how actors generate and respond to policy.

To avoid expanding the scope of the study beyond feasibility, discussions of interrelated security and development issues that bear on migration control were curtailed; including transnational crime, climate change, geopolitical conflict and military strategy; economic shifts; historical context and demographic change. Nonetheless this study endeavours to present findings in a context-aware way which recognises that border policy does not exist in isolation. Finally, with the border control ecosystem rapidly evolving, conclusions will require revisiting within a relatively proximate timeframe.

5.2 Summary of findings

This study aims to determine if there was a relationship between development-security discourse and the role of externalisation in shrinking the space for international protection in the US-Latin American context, with reference to the years 2008-2023. It finds that there is, and that the complexity of the externalisation system and its place in neoliberal forms of international governance lend a disproportionate weight to discursive relationships in structuring processes and outcomes. It also finds that the contours of that role are fluid and variegated, exerting pushes in three key directions that overlap and yet shape the project in different forms; the classical linkage between “hard” security and development implied by enforcement cooperation; the fusion of doctrines of security, efficiency, information sharing and rights protection through the humanitarian border governance concept; and a broad definition of development-security that functions in the reverse form to “hard” security - focusing policy on delivering economic development outcomes as a means of achieving securitarian aims.

“They’re framing [migration] as a huge challenge for countries, so that sometimes countries will have to restrict rights; will have to establish policies that may seem harsh but necessary. This is the discourse that implicitly and sometimes explicitly reigns in [the INGO system].” - Respondent I, immigration lawyer and former staff member at major international human rights organisation.

Respondents in the humanitarian sector repeatedly used the language of “losing ground” or similar in respect of asylum rights, and the smaller number of security sector respondents also did not demur from the view that the shrinking space for access to asylum under Refugee Convention norms is global, or that externalisation

has helped drive it. Externalisation strategies in the US, UK, EU, and Australia increasingly mirror each other and share actors, expertise, and personnel. This study looks at one section of a much larger picture. In doing so, it finds a mixed and complex picture, and significant evolution from the US' first period of large-scale externalisation in the 2000s. Nonetheless the principles of the first period; migration control as crime fighting, militarisation of both law enforcement and migration control, presentation of law enforcement and militarisation as development issues, and the mobilisation of securitarian discourse to organise the externalisation project, continue to inform that project today.

The “developmentalisation” of the externalisation project has changed its shape and structure in contradictory forms. In some senses, the increasing involvement of humanitarian, human rights, and economic development narratives with migration control soften the harsher edges of the system. There are some routes to potentially positive impacts. First, the development-security link could mobilise more resources for development and rights protection, and the prospect of new development funding was welcomed by all Latin American respondents, albeit with reservations. Second, international collaboration could provide a means for less coercive methods of migration governance to spread in policy thought, and given a shift in policy, could facilitate the provision of further safe routes. Third, there are potential benefits at immediate points of humanitarian emergency to the existence of international networks that can be mobilised. These potential benefits, however, do not negate the issues of downplaying risks, fostering collaborations that develop new areas of risk and new avenues for state coercion, normalising alternatives to international protection, securitising new areas of public policy, and reducing accountability.

Below are some conclusions on the evolution of externalisation emerging from both document analysis and respondent interviews.

Border externalisation has gone from a novel phenomenon to a core strategy to reduce the number of migrants that reach US borders, and reduce potential access to international protection. It is often not presented as such by its practitioners. There are also few mechanisms to hold it to account for success at that measure, a dynamic perhaps assisted by the vagueness and limited evidence base of much public policy discourse. Securitarian successes cited in literature are generally increased interagency collaboration as an end-in-itself, the interdiction of particularly dangerous individuals, or the interdiction of migrants generally; but not that fewer people would have arrived absent externalised enforcement.

“Hard” development-security discourse frames US externalisation in Latin America in the 2000s, whilst a “soft” humanitarian border governance discourse complements it in the 2010s, ostensibly as a corrective to risks. In this latter discourse, border security is presented as aid, and the solution posed to risks is further expansion of border control through development programmes on efficiency

and humanitarian protection. This provides a humanitarian case for further externalisation, while retaining the securitarian elements present in the original discourse that fused migration governance, migration control, and addressing cross-border crime. This discursive shift has led to an operational shift; where externalisation was once produced by US state agencies in order to outsource border management, it is now reproduced by a complex web of state and nonstate actors with differing motives.

The externalisation agenda now rests on three discursive pillars; “traditional” development and security ideas; the humanitarian border governance concept; and the idea of migration control as development. Within the ambit of these three ideas, many humanitarian and development projects are being carried out. However, the fusion of developmentalism and migration control risks providing a set of discourses that further rationalise security expansions with the risks that it carries; surveillance technology with high potential for misuse, and a global shrinking space for international protection.

These processes have sharply divided opinion in the international humanitarian community, along with some suggestion of a split along institutional lines between larger and smaller actors. Such a split may have consequences for interagency collaboration. Some, especially in larger INGOs, partially or fully embrace the developmentalisation of migration control and advance the humanitarian border governance concept. Others view humanitarian border governance as a flawed concept based on contradictory incentives. The substance of this debate concerns whether migration control and migrant protection are ultimately compatible aims; and whether humanitarian border governance schemes are effective in practice.

In more theoretical terms this split rests on differing analyses of causality. Dominant discourse attributes increased migration (partially or wholly) to smugglers, and views enforcement as a necessary response to increased migration. Critical discourse (again often concentrated in smaller organisations) at best sees enforcement as naively generating opportunities for organised crime alongside new risks while failing to reduce migration; and at worst sees the developmentalist defence as simply an excuse for enforcement. Shared recognition of operational problems does not necessarily heal this rift; when failures of the current model are universally recognised, humanitarian border governance advocates tend to argue to expand existing infrastructure to counter new threats whereas critics tend to focus on rolling it back.

The US’ role as a regionally dominant actor has framed this process. Its creation of transnational migration control frameworks has shaped, if not necessarily been determinative of, the migration strategies pursued by other states. However, many Latin American states are exploring heterogeneous approaches to migration governance, and whilst US externalisation exerts a powerful shaping effect, it should

not be viewed as the sole factor. State strategies across Latin America are heavily divergent and all respondents raised unique conditions in their states of interest. Guatemala, for instance, seeks to strike harder bargains for their role in migrant returns and border enforcement. Colombia and indeed many other countries in the region are experimenting with new forms of migration governance, and a lower level of engagement with the US agenda even as the US considers them an increasingly important partner. One respondent argued that in spite of decades of US advice and funding to model border force structures along US lines, the approach has largely “not caught on”. The changing ways that Latin American countries frame their understanding of migration and security is becoming increasingly relevant, particularly those that are beginning to conceptualise a regional theory of migration governance. Further study in externalisation geopolitics is required.

Policy discourse in this area is often chaotic, fluid, and changes significantly based on actors and context. Common themes exist, but no universal coherence or planning in how the externalisation or migration-development agendas are framed; and are dependent in part on shifts in politics at both national and regional level.

Those in migration governance, security sector reform, refugee protection, and other related fields should critically evaluate the tensions between border control and migrant protection; the impacts of securitisation discourse; the potential limits of humanitarian border governance; and their relationship to the externalisation framework. They should also seek more robust evidence for the effectiveness of development programmes at achieving their aims; and more transparency in the presentation of that evidence.

The deeper theoretical assumptions motivating development-security in migration governance should be revisited. A critical assessment should be made of a view of interstate relations which leads to support for multilateralism and cooperation with insufficient interrogation of the qualitative underlying structures underpinning such cooperation, or of outcomes. Similar scrutiny should be applied to belief in the primacy of data-driven insights derived from institutional collaboration in informing action, and whether it has generated overly lax attitudes to increasing surveillance.

Migration and security are not incompatible policy areas. Migration governance touches most areas of public policy, and migration policy necessarily involves mobilisation and collaboration across diverse institutions and issue areas. The involvement of development and security actors with migration is inevitable; as are links between attempts to increase prosperity in migrant-sending countries; integration in host countries; immediate emergency support; and stabilisation, security, and addressing transnational crime.

It is the contention of this study, however, that the function of development-security discourse is not merely to address the development and security issues associated

with migration governance. In the model of the Copenhagen School and other critical security studies literature, this study argues that development-security discourse has a shaping and defining function. It flattens distinctions which are important to assert; between interdiction and protection; between US border security and security in general; and between development aims and migration control aims.

Development-security is not a single discourse or set of ideas; as is evidenced both by its evolution and by its evocation in defence of differing positions (e.g. for and against militarisation.) It is an evolving discursive envelope, with underlying assumptions that prioritise, or at least embed, interdiction and control within any vision of migration governance. Applied to migration, development-security sutures enforcement and protection through surveillance and then expands this nexus into economic development, whilst fostering externalisation and downplaying risks.

In the US, development-security has served to expand both a more “liberal” and a more “realist” (to borrow terms from the international relations literature) set of security interests which converge on undermining the postwar system that forms the basis of international protection. This is of concern, especially as these issues will only become more urgent as we grapple with rising displacement - which globally is reaching continuous records (UNHCR 2022). In Latin America, the number of people taking arduous journeys northwards has risen steadily and public policy has struggled to respond. Almost all respondents believe movement will continue to rise, even in scenarios of continuous regional economic growth. Climate change is playing a new and expanding role in the dynamics of human movement, both in the region and beyond. Continuing macroeconomic and geopolitical uncertainty may further compound these effects. In such a context, understanding and theorising the changing nature of migration governance, with a view to securing the goal of safe, orderly, and regular migration established in the international system, is an undertaking that will only grow in urgency.

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8. Notes

1. This thesis is drafted in British English. However, US English spellings are adhered to when quoting directly from US literature. Spanish terms are translated when not doing so would hinder comprehension for English readers.