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Claremont McKenna College

Entre Piedra y Pared: A Multi-Level Analysis of Housing and Immigration  
Policies' Effect on Undocumented Immigrants in Mexico City

submitted to  
Professor Jennifer Taw

by  
Sophia Ramirez-Brown

for  
Senior Thesis  
Fall 2021  
December 6, 2021



## Abstract

The effects of global migratory movements generate discourse between countries, opposing political parties, international media outlets, and NGOs like the UN. However, the observable impact of these movements is often felt within the cities that are hubs for migration. This thesis examines the intersection between the issues of immigration and housing in Mexico City, and how policy, public opinion, and the organization of civil society arises as a result of external influences. A key finding of this thesis is that the indirect system effects model, as presented by Stephen Chaudoin, is best for understanding the ramifications of the international environment on domestic variables. These domestic variables include the flows and types of migrants coming into Mexico and the pressures on Mexican immigration policy from the U.S. and Central America. The model reveals how variables like flows and types of migrants coming into Mexico and the pressures on national policy impact the outputs of interest: i) immigrants' needs once they are in the city, ii) civil society and political response to immigrants, and iii) attitudes toward immigrants. This reveals a distinct lack of institutional support for immigrants, most notably in the domain of housing, which is detrimental to the overall development of Mexico City. The indirect system effects model illuminates the pathways to consider with regard to the nuanced intersection of international, domestic, and local variables and relationships, thus providing a useful framework for similar future studies in intricate areas of interest.

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## Introduction

Issues existing in the intersection of international and domestic politics are multifaceted and challenging to examine. Immigration and housing deserve attention in this context. International, domestic and local immigration policies and experiences affect migratory flows into cities and the views locals have towards newcomers. City, and to an extent, state, housing policies affect people's ability to find and retain affordable homes. In larger metropolitan areas, where housing insecurity is a problem for non-immigrants, the movement of migrants into cities heightens existing tensions and influences housing policy through a new dimension. The global issue of immigration is filtered through local politics into civil society through a complex dynamic that forms policy camps in favor of and against migrants while simultaneously weighing affordable housing options in light of ever-changing city compositions. These compositions will likely undergo drastic changes as a result of the global pandemic and the slew of consequences already unfolding from the dramatic losses of life and enormous hits to regional economies. This thesis will examine the intersection of these competing ideals and agendas and how they unfold in Mexico City, one of the largest and densest cities in the world.

The genesis of this project lies with observation of a local NGO, WaterDrop LA (referred to as WaterDrop hereafter), which operates in the Skid Row corridor of Downtown Los Angeles. The members of WaterDrop distribute water and other basic necessities to unhoused people in the area every Sunday. In Los Angeles, the population of individuals experiencing homelessness increased drastically over the course of the pandemic, and an already dire housing plight was exacerbated by huge numbers of people seeking affordable housing. For context, “[one] out of every four people experiencing

homelessness in the United States [does] so in either New York or Los Angeles.”<sup>1</sup>

Volunteers with WaterDrop get to know members of the community, including recent immigrants from around the world. These people have different stories and journeys, but all identify as abandoned and left to fend for themselves on streets and in the inadequate shelters of a country they believed had promised new opportunities and equality for all.

Mexico City arose as a potential topic for study because it occupies a unique position in the international order. The city is one of the most economically lucrative in the world, and a hub of educational, cultural and political exchange in Latin America. Universities in Mexico City are renowned for their prestige, and some of the world’s richest individuals found the keys to success by doing business and investing in various elements of Mexico City’s development. However, some of the world’s largest slums are found in the same city. The borough Miguel Hidalgo, which houses the wealthiest neighborhoods of the city, Polanco, also up until recently housed the Lost City of Tacubaya, a slum that housed 300 families. Parts of the city that depend on tourism and the relocation of wealthy businesses, like the historical city-center Cuauhtémoc, reject undocumented immigrants and penalize unhoused folks. The dichotomy of wealth and poverty permeates throughout the city, and only recently have efforts between politicians and civil society at large begun to converge to solve a housing crisis that has outlived most residents.

The case of Mexico City’s domestic policy, which takes the form of civil society and political response, to the systemic pressures surrounding immigration have affected

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<sup>1</sup> Meghan Henry et. al, “The 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress,” *The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development*, 2020, 14.



local challenges, like mitigating the housing crisis confronting the city today. Unlike other states in Mexico with high immigrant populations that are located on the country's borders or coastal regions, Mexico City is located centrally in the country. As this thesis will detail, there are numerous incentives for immigrants<sup>2</sup> to choose Mexico City as an endpoint for their migratory journeys, but up until recently, Mexico City acted as a hub for traveling immigrants heading further north, particularly for those moving in caravans. Prior to recent changes in migratory patterns, policy for immigration throughout the country was underdeveloped and there was a complete lack of resources for organizations that helped immigrants. In 2018, there were only three shelters designated for migrants in Mexico City.<sup>3</sup> Thus, as immigrants began to travel to Mexico City as a destination city rather than one of transit, a lack of affordable housing availability and the criminalization of low-income and undocumented groups led to a huge increase in the number of vulnerable migrants resorting to dangerous, unsustainable housing situations.

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<sup>2</sup> The term "immigrant" is utilized loosely throughout the paper, but the focus in this thesis is on undocumented immigrants, who are some of the least privileged and most vulnerable populations in Mexico City. However, the city also contends with a large population of wealthy immigrants from Europe and the United States. This population tends to affect the arena of housing by driving up housing prices in wealthier areas of the city, a phenomenon that in turn diffuses into surrounding areas that house concentrations of lower-income residents and raise the cost of housing there. Though this phenomena has significant implications for the prices of the housing market in Mexico City, the focus on housing in this thesis reflects the broader implications of how immigration policy and a lack of affordable housing availability harm undocumented immigrants as a result of larger trends/political attitudes. Rather than addressing the significant issue of the socioeconomic demographics of different immigrants, an issue that requires much more space to properly contend with, this thesis will focus on the other influences of housing that can be traced to the variables outlined in the Literature Review.

<sup>3</sup> Lily Folkerts, "Behind the Caravan: Seeking Asylum Isn't Easy, Especially in Mexico," *Latin America Working Group*, 2018, <https://www.lawg.org/mexico-and-its-asylum-and-immigration-policies-have-recently-received-much-attention-thanks-to-president-trumps-fixation-on-the-migrant-caravan-an-annual-demonstration-in-which-central-americans-garner/>.

This thesis will undertake an examination of the intersection of immigration and housing through the manifestation of political and social interest groups. The first section, the Literature Review, will provide an overview of the relevance of understanding the complex domestic and global relationships that form interests in politics and civil society. Chapter 1 details the history and interests of the current national government in Mexico. Chapter 2 outlines immigration data and follows with policy on a national and local scale, analyzing the outcome of the convergence of multiple variables and civil society in the realm of housing in Mexico City. Following this, Chapter 3 provides a historical overview of housing in Mexico City, and describes the current housing crisis. A convergence of the data and policy in the final portion of the chapter succeeds this, and the complex relationship between immigration-housing and international-local interests unique to Mexico City will be flushed out. The Conclusion finishes the paper, which will summarize the unique relationship between the international, domestic and local variables to consider within the realm of immigration and housing, as well as the broad applicability of the indirect system effects model to future studies. This thesis is only the beginning of a field of analysis into these increasingly nuanced intersections, particularly in Mexico City.

## Methodology

In order to generate analysis, this thesis relies almost entirely on primary source data from government archives and census data from Mexico through INEGI, the National Institute of Statistics and Geography. The data from these primary sources was augmented by data from reports created by international organizations, such as the UN, OECD and ILO. Research from think-tanks supplemented the data with trends and provided a connection between specific policies and data. News articles and briefings from the central government generated information for political decisions, updates on immigration and housing crises and general accounts on incidents that were not well accounted for in reports and statistical data.

First, a comprehensive list of data on both immigrant and unhoused populations was gathered. This data was aggregated on a national level at the outset, and then consolidated regionally into data specific to Mexico City. What followed from these initial observations and analyses of trends and patterns within the data was a thorough investigation of the policies and politics that dominated both immigration and housing sectors nationally, regionally, and then locally, in each city. Once these policies had been established and understood, historical data and accounts were accumulated as well to supplement understandings of the current numbers.

Gathering information on interest groups that lobbied for particular policies required somewhat unorthodox methods of research. Information was gathered on social media sites that hosted the accounts of Mexico City-based NGOs, activist groups, and local politicians. Articles from local news stations were also used to accumulate information on the creation, policy goals and organizing efforts of these groups in the

city. New articles and opinion pieces also helped identify gradual and covert phenomena, like gentrification and the sentiments of community members toward immigrants and individuals experiencing homelessness.

### *Limitations*

The focus of this thesis is on the intersection of two largely unreported groups in any given country. In 2020, INEGI (the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico), conducted its first-ever census of unhoused people in Mexico.<sup>4</sup> The method for this data collection was individual survey groups sent out to tally and count whichever unhoused Mexicans they could find. Though this is a generally unreliable method for representing the actual population of individuals experiencing homelessness at a given time, there are few other options for acquiring this information. Prior to this survey, the government had depended on NGOs and shelters for their estimates of the unhoused population in the country. In both the United States and Mexico, there is a lack of suitable infrastructure for attributing an exact number to the unhoused population. Furthermore, the volatility of unsuitable living conditions coupled with exogenous factors, such as a global pandemic and civil unrest in countries of origin, lead to numbers that fluctuate frequently. Thus, it is likely that the data discussed in this paper does not accurately represent the true population of individuals experiencing homelessness.

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<sup>4</sup> Rafael López, "INEGI Cuenta Por Primera Vez a las Personas Sin Techo," trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, *Milenio*, 2020, <https://www.milenio.com/politica/comunidad/inegi-cuenta-por-primera-vez-a-las-personas-sin-techo>.

## Literature Review

Many theories in International Relations consider the role domestic affairs play on the larger scale of international politics. However, only recently have the theoretical models been implemented to explain trends that result from globalization, and this work is largely done in the realm of International Political Economy. Of particular importance in this field are ideas of interdependence, and how international and domestic factors intertwine to shape the ways in which systems and interactions between states shape the development of policy. This Literature Review will set the foundations necessary to create a sufficient framework for understanding the intersection of immigration and housing. What follows is a discussion of the main theoretical paradigms used in International Relations. Based on this, an examination of theories that consider the role of domestic politics is introduced, with particular focus on the methods used in other literature to draw connections between nuanced issues on systemic, international, domestic and local levels. Finally, the Review concludes by describing the indirect system effects model, as presented by Stephen Chaudoin et al., which is shown to be best for understanding the relationship between immigration and housing in the context of Mexico City.

In his 1998 article for *Foreign Policy*, Stephen Walt outlined the main theoretical paradigms of international affairs: realism, liberalism, constructivism and theories that considered domestic politics.<sup>5</sup> The prevalent system-level theories of realism and liberalism, while useful in understanding the progression of international affairs throughout the 20th century, are becoming increasingly difficult to defer to when

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<sup>5</sup> Stephen M. Walt, "International Relations: One World, Many Theories," *Foreign Policy*, (no. 110, 1998), 30.

presented with issues like climate change and immigration. These issues present new challenges to the paradigms, as they occur in different contexts depending on the level of analysis one uses to examine such issues. Realism, with a focus on security, power and the relative power between states, struggles with describing the interactions between domestic civil society groups and politicians. Liberalism, with a focus on the influence of international cooperation and institutions, fails to recognize the self-interested role individual players and groups take in promoting these relationships. Both of these theories struggle with analyzing issues that require multi-layer levels of analysis. Though constructivism relies on understanding normative assumptions to explain individual-level actions, it is difficult to diagnose actionable solutions to problems through this paradigm, as solutions can only be dispensed once the important actors and norms are identified. Walt considers theories of domestic politics, with a particular focus on the role culture and domestic institutions play in influencing foreign policy, and the theories under this paradigm seem better suited to the task of describing issues that require a multi-level analysis with consideration of interest groups in both political and social realms.

Contributions to the literature on existing models for evaluating how international issues play out on domestic stages provide helpful frameworks for understanding these nuanced situations. The article “International Systems and Domestic Politics: Linking Complex Interactions with Empirical Models in International Relations” provides significant methodological contributions through a discussion of the ways in which modern global economic forces and domestic institutions interact. The article begins by presenting the 5 main categories of interaction: independence, direct system effects, indirect system effects, moderation, and interdependence. These categories vary in the

level of interconnectedness between system and domestic variables, with independence focusing on “domestic variables independently from any effects of systemic influences” and interdependence, used predominantly in spatial econometrics, which “incorporates the notion that one country’s outcome variable can be influenced by spatially and/or temporally lagged outcome variables from other countries.”<sup>6</sup> An indirect system effects model is one where “systemic variables influence the value of domestic variables, which in turn, affect the outcome variable... [and] can shape the outcome of interest directly... as well as indirectly via their influence on domestic variables.”<sup>7</sup> The method used to weigh how systemic and domestic factors interact will largely depend on the extent of complexity within the research. Figure 1 depicts a diagram of the indirect system effects model, which depicts the variables in the system as well as their interactions.

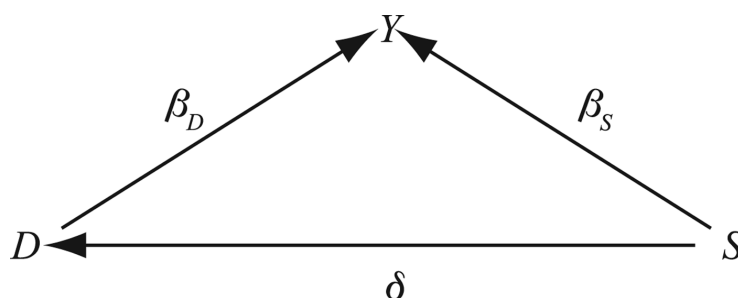


Figure 1: This graph is a representation of the indirect system effects model. In this figure,  $Y$  represents the outcome variable,  $D$  represents the domestic variables and  $S$  represents the systemic variables.  $\beta_S$  represents the direct influence the systemic variables can have to shape the outcome of interest, while  $\delta$  represents the indirect systemic influence on the outcome variable through its influence on domestic variables.  $\beta_D$  represents the direct ways domestic variables can shape the outcome of interest. The key

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Chaudoin, et. al, “International Systems and Domestic Politics: Linking Complex Interactions with Empirical Models in International Relations,” *International Organization*, (69, no. 2 2015), 286.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 283

interaction in this graph is the indirect effect systemic variables can have on the outcome of interest via their influence on domestic variables. Source: Stephen Chaudoin, Helen V. Milner, and Xun Pang.

“International Systems and Domestic Politics: Linking Complex Interactions with Empirical Models in International Relations.”

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The indirect system effects model examines a unique tension that exists internally between the domestic variables and externally between the systemic variable and the output of interest. This relationship is contextualized well in Peter Gourevitch’s article “The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics.” Though Gourevitch mainly presents a literature review of his own on the impact of international economy and threat of war on the formation and development of domestic structures, he provides an example of the indirect effects of systemic variables on domestic variables and outcomes of interest. In utilizing the example of the Great Depression of 1873-1896, Gourevitch details the overt and covert effects the international economic system—which he identifies as the systemic variable—had on varying domestic variables. He describes how “[immense] increases in agricultural and industrial production caused the prices of both sorts of goods to plummet.”<sup>8</sup> As a result, varying domestic variables of Britain, France, Germany, the U.S., Italy, Russia and Southeastern Europe were all drastically affected. In each country, the output of interest differed, but was affected by both direct domestic elements and indirect pressures from the international economic situation. Of particular importance are the developments that occurred in France and Germany.

In both of these countries, Gourevitch notes that landed aristocrats and industrialists were threatened by the price reduction of crops and technology as a result of

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 884.



increased agricultural and industrial goods.<sup>9</sup> To protect their industries, they conspired with the governments of their countries to enact high import tariffs. These tariffs also had the unintended long-term effect of strengthening the power of their regimes at the time: both “Bismarck’s newly-fashioned ramshackle empire” and the Third Republic.<sup>10</sup> The domestic variables, or the agricultural and industrial sectors, were influenced by the pressures from the international economic situation and the threat of the Great Depression to enact tariffs to protect the viability of their sectors domestically. This indirectly affected the outcome of interest, or the success of the domestic government, by bolstering the regimes’ profits. The French Third Republic and Bismarck’s German Empire were greatly affected by the international economic situation, but Gourevitch recognizes that only studying the short-term economic effects of the Great Depression does not fully capture the relationship between systemic variables and domestic actors on something like regime longevity and stability.

Gourevitch emphasizes the necessity of a model like the indirect system effects model, highlighting that:

“[the] international system is not only a consequence of domestic politics and structure but a cause of them. Economic relations and military pressures constrain an entire range of domestic behaviors, from policy decisions to political forms.

International relations and domestic politics are therefore so interrelated that they should be analyzed simultaneously, as wholes.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Gourevitch, “The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics,” *International Organization* (32, no. 4 1978), 911.

Gourevitch also provides a review of debates about the importance of domestic structures, and notes that most arguments in this realm separate politics and society from the processes of change.<sup>12</sup> He maintains that to look at state structures in such a reductionist capacity ignores that “[first] powerful groups conflict among themselves. Second, the interaction among groups is affected by structures. Third, politicians and bureaucrats who run the state have some leeway.”<sup>13</sup> Concurrent with the arguments presented in this thesis, that civil society shapes the way domestic politics take shape and interact with a country’s international relations, Gourevitch’s argument emphasizes the merit of contextualizing the outcomes of policy through the lens of civil society.<sup>14</sup> The indirect systems effect model is particularly helpful for analyzing complex and nuanced interactions in the realm of international affairs, civil society and domestic politics.

In the context of this thesis, the issues examined exist in a world where the international economic and political system exerts a huge influence on international affairs. Thus, it is inevitable that countries will base decisions pertaining to immigration on the stance of other countries with which they cooperate. Worldwide migratory trends result in a domino effect in the global north, where immigration to countries like the U.S. and Canada results in huge surges in migratory movements through Mexico. When crafting immigration policy, rather than considering only the concerns of Mexican citizens and the capacities of the government, Mexican policy makers must also contend with demands from the U.S., as well as the exodus of migration from Central American

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 901

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 903

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 904

states, whose policies also contribute to Mexico's situation. Thus, when the U.S. adopts policies that criminalize immigration, especially among low-income migrants, in order to retain the benefits of globalization and the international economic system, Mexican officials must follow suit and employ stringent measures to penalize immigrants and stem migratory flows.

The use of the indirect system effects model in understanding the intersection between immigration and housing policy helps discern the relevant macro-variables at play. The criminalization of immigration in Mexican policy is a double edged sword. Without easily accessible means to legal immigration, low-income immigrants, often seeking asylum and better economic opportunities, must resort to entry via different, often illicit, channels. This results in increased numbers of undocumented immigrants in Mexico, which the Mexican government is often underprepared to accommodate. In turn, this puts strain on the housing available throughout the country, but especially in places like Mexico City, a popular transit hub for many immigrants. The shortage in affordable housing and units for rent in Mexico City is only exacerbated by the influx of low-income immigrants who do not have access to a stable infrastructure for finding housing, temporary or permanent. The **systemic** variable throughout this study is the international environment, with special consideration given to the economic and political interests/actions affecting immigration, the migratory terrains of the U.S. and Central American states and the reasons for migration that extend beyond nation-specific circumstances. The **domestic** variables directly influenced by the international environment are the flows of migrants, types of migrants and pressures on domestic policy in the domains of immigration and housing as a result. The **outputs of interest** in

this interpretation of the model are immigrants' needs once they are in Mexico City and the local policies, organizing (for and against immigrants) and attitudes around the presence of immigrants, all with a consideration of the housing situation in Mexico City.

## Chapter 1: Overview on Immigration, Mexican Government and Civil Society

The 2020 World Migration Report by the International Organization for Migration of the UN analyzes the growth of international migration through the lens of globalization—or increased access to international markets, information, and services through “distance-shrinking technologies”—and uncertainty, as political alliances and the international order forged in the 20th century begin to evolve and transform.<sup>15</sup> Increases in immigration also come in the midst of a global pandemic that has destabilized global supply chains and local health care systems as well as the job market and housing. Furthermore, displacement through climate change’s perilous phenomena, such as “[fatal] heat waves, droughts, wildfires and severe hurricanes” adds numerous refugees to the fold.<sup>16</sup> These considerations help guide an analysis of the data today on immigration flows into Mexico, the area on which this thesis focuses.

Over the past decade, global migratory patterns have shifted and grown overall. In 2020, the estimated number of international migrants worldwide was 281 million, a 130% increase from the estimate of this population in 2010.<sup>17</sup> Two-thirds of these migrants are labor migrants, or those looking for employment in countries outside their country of origin. Other than economic reasons, immigration also occurs in the context of refugee

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<sup>15</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), *World Migration Report 2020*, Marie McAuliffe, Binod Khadria eds., 2020, 1.

<sup>16</sup> David Leonhardt, “The Problem With Putting a Price on the End of the World,” *New York Times Magazine* April 9, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/04/09/magazine/climate-change-politics-economics.html>.

<sup>17</sup> International Organization for Migration, “World Migration Report 2020,” 2.

and asylum seeking, displacement due to disaster, family reunification and educational pursuits.<sup>18</sup> In the Northern Triangle region, an estimated 709,000 people left the region and moved through Mexico to reach the United States.<sup>19</sup> This group of migrants in particular cited socioeconomic conditions, natural disasters, political instability, and violence at the hands of gangs as predominant reasons for leaving their home countries.<sup>20</sup>

In the context of Mexico, migratory flows have shifted over the last decade. Once a solely transit state, with relatively low levels of immigrant settlement, Mexico has become a hotspot for international migration, particularly from the Northern Triangle in Central America and other countries like Haiti and Venezuela. Pressure from the United States, which has led to updates in Mexico's immigration policy, has created pathways to citizenship for immigrants traveling through the country that were nonexistent a decade ago. Furthermore, the harsher enforcement of border patrol and restrictions on asylee entry in the United States has forced many would-be U.S. applicants to reconsider Mexico as a destination country. This chapter details the international and domestic political context of immigration in Mexico.

### *International Context*

Mexico was largely seen as a transit state in the realm of immigration, until the Trump administration came into power. The recent change is due to “[political] unrest and violence in Central America, heavy-handed immigration enforcement in the United

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Congressional Research Service “Central American Migration: Root Causes and U.S. Policy,” (IF11151, no. 5 2021), 1.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 2

States, and increased development” within Mexico.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the necessity of a reformulation of Mexico’s negligible immigration policy prompted the government to create several initiatives to help process and mitigate the large flows of immigrants coming into the country.

The result of Donald Trump’s attitudes toward immigrants domestically largely informed his negotiations with countries like Mexico. In order for Mexico to sign the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), which would replace NAFTA as a free-trade agreement to benefit North American countries, former President Trump coerced the country into signing onto a supplementary agreement.<sup>22</sup> Trump levied tariffs and elements of the USMCA deal that would benefit Mexico to ensure that the government would sign the supplemental agreement, which outlined the provisions Mexico needed to take to contain the flow of Central American migrants coming to the southern border of the U.S. through the country.<sup>23</sup> The document, just one page long, forced Mexican authorities to evaluate and essentially recreate their migration policies and the enforcement mechanisms within the country. An extensive overview of these policies will follow in Chapter 2.

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<sup>21</sup> Andrea Portillo, “Migration Flows in Mexico Have Challenged the Country’s Immigration Policies,” *Center for American Progress*, December 11, 2018, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2018/12/11/461999/migration-flows-mexico-challenged-countrys-immigration-policies/>.

<sup>22</sup> Rachel Withers, “Mexico Releases the Full Text of Trump’s Immigration ‘Deal,’” *Vox*, June 15, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/2019/6/15/18680129/us-mexico-immigration-deal-release-trump-tariff>.

<sup>23</sup> “Las Políticas De Migración y Refugio De México, Así Como Las Condiciones En La Frontera México-Estados Unidos, Se Han Transformado Significativamente En Un Año Desde Que Se Firmó El Acuerdo De Cooperación Migratoria Entre Ambos Países,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, Migration Policy Institute, June 8, 2020..

An example of the convergence of international, domestic and local politics takes the form of the pressure from the U.S. that has led to an increase in immigrant expulsions via flights from Mexico to Central America and the Caribbean. As of August of this year, “Mexico has now sent roughly 13,000 people from northern cities to its southern border on about 100 flights”.<sup>24</sup> One of the most recent flights was one with 70 Haitian migrants from Mexico City and the surrounding area “in what the government said was part of an ‘assisted voluntary return’ to Haiti.”<sup>25</sup> These flights occur in conjunction with the expulsion of thousands of Haitian refugees from the U.S. into Mexico, as U.S. CBP increased the arrests of Haitian immigrants by 922% this past fiscal year.<sup>26</sup> In Mexico City, these migrants were living wherever they could find basic protection from the elements, from under bridges to on the streets in tents, as shelters in Mexico City have been overwhelmed with the sheer number of refugees seeking asylum.<sup>27</sup> This current crisis of an overwhelming number of immigrants and a complete lack of infrastructure to support their arrival reflects the complicated levels of analysis at play, from the system level issues of economic disparities and climate change to the strained relations between

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<sup>24</sup> Dave Graham and Laura Gottesdiener, “Pressured by U.S., Mexico Hastens Migrant Expulsions with Flights South,” *Reuters*, August 16, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/pressed-by-us-mexico-hastens-migrant-expulsions-with-flights-south-2021-08-15/>.

<sup>25</sup> Al Jazeera, “Mexico send 70 Haitian Migrants to Port-au-Prince by Plane,” *Al Jazeera and News Agencies*, September 29, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/29/mexico-sends-70-haitian-migrants-to-port-au-prince-by-plane>.

<sup>26</sup> Joe Walsh, “Arrests of Haitian Migrants at the U.S.-Mexico Border Soared Last Month -- Here’s Why,” *Forbes*, October 22, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/joewalsh/2021/10/22/arrests-of-haitian-migrants-at-the-us-mexico-border-soared-last-month---heres-why/?sh=7538797e5ee8>.

<sup>27</sup> EFE. “La crisis de migrantes haitianos pone al límite albergues de Ciudad de México,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, *Los Angeles Times en Español*, October 11, 2021. <https://www.latimes.com/espanol/mexico/articulo/2021-10-11/la-crisis-de-migrantes-haitianos-pon-e-al-limite-albergues-de-ciudad-de-mexico>.



Mexico and the U.S. in terms of the facilitation of immigration processes. Furthermore, the lack of available affordable housing, which has left residents of the city unhoused and in shelters, results in the high volume of Haitian migrants, and other residents, living on the streets and in inhospitable conditions. Though this is only one example of the ways in which international affairs trickle down into local issues, the actual division of civil society helps portray the politics at play in Mexico City. In order to better understand the trickle-down effect of these international policies, it is important to analyze the structure of the national government, and the current administration's immigration and housing goals.

### *Overview of National Government*

Mexico has a federal republic government, with the balance of governmental powers distributed between executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The executive is democratically elected for one 6-year term. Constitutionally, power is relegated to the heads of government of Mexican states for smaller scale economic, social and political issues. However, during the 20th century, Mexican politics became extremely centralized, and the sprawling reach of the dominating party in power prevented the establishment of more autonomous sources of funding and government throughout the country. Recently, the addition of a new political party to the fray has altered the course of governance on a national and local level within Mexico.

The administration of current president Andrés Manuel López Obrador (hereafter AMLO) is the first leftist presidency in 70 years.<sup>28</sup> Prior to his landslide victory in 2018,

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<sup>28</sup> "Mexico's López Obrador Sworn in as First Leftist President in Decades," BBC News, BBC, December 2, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-46415993>.

the predominant parties were the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), a center right party whose most recent president was notorious for corruption scandals, and the National Action Party (PAN), a conservative party. The Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) had a recent upsurge in popularity prior to the creation of the Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (hereafter MORENA), the party currently holding a legislative majority and backing López Obrador.<sup>29</sup> AMLO's rise to the presidency was a long time in the making, and his dissatisfaction with the previous political composition is reflected in the establishment of MORENA, and the distinct approach the party takes to counteracting the status quo.

### *MORENA*

Founded by AMLO, MORENA proclaims itself to be the “hope of Mexico,” and is a new addition to the left-leaning parties already present in Mexico.<sup>30</sup> Created in 2011 as a non-profit that acted as a democratic protest movement against corruption and inequity in Mexico, MORENA took the Mexican political terrain by storm. Even as AMLO's current traipse with populism weakens his political standing, MORENA remains a popular unifying party around Mexico. Since its inception, MORENA's ideological stance has been one of combating corruption and creating a more progressive Mexico by reforming a system that idealizes “the unlimited enrichment of a few at the

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<sup>29</sup> National Electoral Institute, “Programa de Resultados Electorales Preliminares 2021: Elecciones Federales,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, Instituto Nacional Electoral, 2021, <https://prep2021.ine.mx/diputaciones/nacional/votos-districho/tarjetas>.

<sup>30</sup> MORENA, “Declaración de Principios de MORENA,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, MORENA, 2021. <https://morena.si//wp-content/uploads/2021/09/declaracion-de-principios-de-morena1.pdf>.

cost of impoverishment of the majority.”<sup>31</sup> MORENA is an extension of AMLO’s personal political bids, while also focusing on addressing a clear vacancy in the representation and needs of poor and working class Mexicans.

For the landmark national elections in 2018, AMLO’s MORENA party combined forces with the Labor Party (PT) and the Social Encounter Party (PES) to form the *Juntos Haremos Historia* coalition. Though the coalition was dissolved in 2020 as a result of the PES party disbanding and becoming absorbed into a more established right-wing party, it accomplished what AMLO needed it to: getting him elected and putting members of his party in Senate and governor positions in the majority of Mexican states. Though AMLO began his bids for presidency in 2006 as a progressive representing the working class, in this election, he had to concede many of his previous rallying calls for a much more stringent approach to policies to which a country reeling from corruption and economic disparity would be receptive.<sup>32</sup> The allegiance he committed to with PES, a right-wing Christian-conservative party, meant that many of the more progressive issues MORENA had claimed to support were swept under the rug. As a result of AMLO’s personal political bids and ambitions, domestic immigration policy has come to embody harsher enforcement strategies, which are antithetical to the inclusive measures he first expressed at the outset of his political career.

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<sup>31</sup> Patricia Martínez “¿Cuál es la ideología del partido político MORENA?” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, *La Verdad*, August 24, 2021, <https://laverdadnoticias.com/politica/Cual-es-la-ideologia-del-partido-politico-Morena-20210824-0055.html>.

<sup>32</sup> Juan Pablo Spinetto and Nacha Cattán, “AMLO Has a Grand Plan to Transform Mexico, on the Cheap,” *Bloomberg*, September 29, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-09-29/amlo-has-a-grand-plan-to-transform-mexico-on-the-cheap?sref=Mkhc1AWW>.

An analysis of the international environment reveals how domestic policy that criminalizes immigration and penalizes those who do not have options arises as a result. This in turn contributes to the high volumes of undocumented immigration flows into places like Mexico City. This influx exacerbates the need for affordable housing, particularly in the light of a pre-existing housing crisis that affects low-income tenants most drastically. When utilizing the indirect system effects model to analyze the agendas and policy generated by the biggest players in Mexico City's civil society and political realms with regard to immigration and housing, it is clear that the international environment breeds domestic policy that prioritizes the interests of established residents rather than comprehensively addressing the needs of immigrants, breaking a promise the elected MORENA government initially made to Mexicans. Only with the advent of civil society groups championing immigrant advocacy and awareness have recent policies tackled the issues at the intersection of housing for immigrants and those residents experiencing homelessness, who were displaced by previous negligence in the realm of urban development. To better understand the macro elements of the model, it is important to first establish the background and framework of Mexico City's civil society.

### *Contextualizing Mexico City's Civil Society*

Before delving into the ways in which Mexico City's interest groups and politicians navigate the needs of immigration in light of the housing trends, it is critical to first contextualize the agendas of the city's main actors. Civil society helps define what local leadership looks like, where initiatives are taken, and how the issues of housing and immigration are addressed. The international environment and domestic policy set the

precedent for the stance local civil society takes on issues like immigration and housing. However, Mexico City's civil society is particularly distinct, as it organizes largely around cultural preservation efforts and economic concerns. Thus, the majority of people unaffiliated with immigration or housing efforts in the city determine their stance on these issues through the lens of the more dominant interests of cultural preservation and economic concerns.

Mexico City's long history begins when it was originally known as Tenochtitlan, when the rulers of the Aztec empire, the Mexica people, established the location as the heart of the empire in 1325. Through the empire's rise and fall, colonization, revolutions for independence, and economic hardship, for half a millennium, the city has represented the heart of Mexico. Currently, as a result of decades of unplanned development and commercial construction, efforts to protect the relics of the past have become particularly important to those living in the city. Since the 1950s, efforts to modernize the city and streamline urbanization have been met with resistance by residents and groups that value the preservation of natural patrimony, especially in the denser parts of the city center.<sup>33</sup>

What makes Mexico City's historical preservation efforts particularly distinct is their conflicting nature with the development of the city: it is impossible for the city to modernize in the way many residents and politicians want to see while preserving relics of the past. The canals and wetlands of Xochimilco, created by the Aztecs as a transportation system, have been threatened by pollution, sinkholes and an over-depletion

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<sup>33</sup> David Yee, "The Making of Mexico City's Historic Center: National Patrimony in the Age of Urban Renewal," *Journal of Planning History* 19, no. 2 (May 1, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1538513219871045>.

of surrounding aquifers.<sup>34</sup> While residents want to retain their connection to their ancestors and pay homage to the past, the canals are becoming increasingly dangerous to operate, especially as the borough remains dependent on high levels of tourism. By the mid-20th century, national patrimony had become a rallying cry for civil society, but at the detriment of poorer communities. This changed at the turn of the century, when construction companies and corrupt politicians massively profited off the creation of structurally unstable buildings and the housing crisis was felt in earnest.

Before the change of government at the end of 2018, Mexico City's government succumbed to the lobbying efforts of companies that prioritized economically lucrative divisions above all else. For context, Mexico City and the metro area dominate the nation's economy, and in 2019 contributed 17.7% to national GDP, the highest amount of any state in the country.<sup>35</sup> The sectors with the highest GDP share by economic activity in 2019 included financial services, transport, retail and corporate/business services, sectors that for years have generated the main sources of the capital's wealth.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, "Mexico City represents one of the largest real estate markets in Latin America," and construction/urban development companies have turned incredibly high profits since their initial boom at the turn of the century.<sup>37</sup> The intersection between economically lucrative

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<sup>34</sup> Victoria Burnett, "An Aquatic Paradise in Mexico, Pushed to the Edge of Extinction," *The New York Times*, February 22, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/22/world/americas/mexico-city-canals-xochimilco-chinampas.html>.

<sup>35</sup> "Invierte en la Ciudad de México: Mexico City Economic Review," Secretaría de Desarrollo Económico, Gobierno de la Ciudad de México, last modified 2021, 3. <https://www.sedeco.cdmx.gob.mx/storage/app/media/Invierte%20en%20CDMX/Mexico%20City%20Economic%20Review%20.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 3

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 7

activities and politics is reflected in the policies that previous administrations in the city implemented to expand the spheres of influence of these sectors, particularly the construction industry.

Civil society groups in Mexico City have started to organize against this same sector—the construction industry—where previously allegiances were forged. As cultural preservation has been the driving force of civil society organization for many years, the construction industry recently faced pushback from the public in attempts to build developments throughout the city that encroached on culturally significant sites and architecture, and as a result began insidiously cutting corners in order to make progress on projects while avoiding public scrutiny. Civil society's organizing following the corrupt efforts of construction industry titans brought members of different socioeconomic classes together behind the movement to halt construction and development companies in their endeavors to reconstruct the city. However, even though this unification between classes exists in certain capacities, the reasons for their joint venture against massive development companies differ significantly, as discussed later in this thesis.

Another factor to consider in the development of civil society groups today are the political affiliations of these groups. In 2018, MORENA candidates won the majority of mayoral seats in elections across the city. Only 5 boroughs voted for non-MORENA candidates, but the governor of the city elected also represented MORENA. In Benito Juárez, Venustiano Carranza, Coyoacán, Cuajimalpa and Milpa Alta, the boroughs that voted for non-MORENA candidates, only Benito Juárez and Cuajimalpa voted for right-wing candidates. The MORENA platform for the head governor position, run by

Claudia Sheinbaum, focused on addressing corruption. The year prior to the elections, a 7.1 magnitude earthquake left parts of Mexico City completely demolished, revealing the shortcuts many developers had taken when building schools, residential and corporate buildings alike.<sup>38</sup> This event was a key point of contention in the debate regarding corruption within the government and construction industry, as well as exceedingly high levels of crime, pollution and the water shortage.<sup>39</sup> In these elections, civil society organized behind Sheinbaum, because with her background in academia and long-time commitment to sustainability and environmental preservation, people trusted her to address the issues facing the city with a clear head and expert rationale. She also served on AMLO's cabinet as the Secretary of the Environment of Mexico City when he served as the head of government for the city.

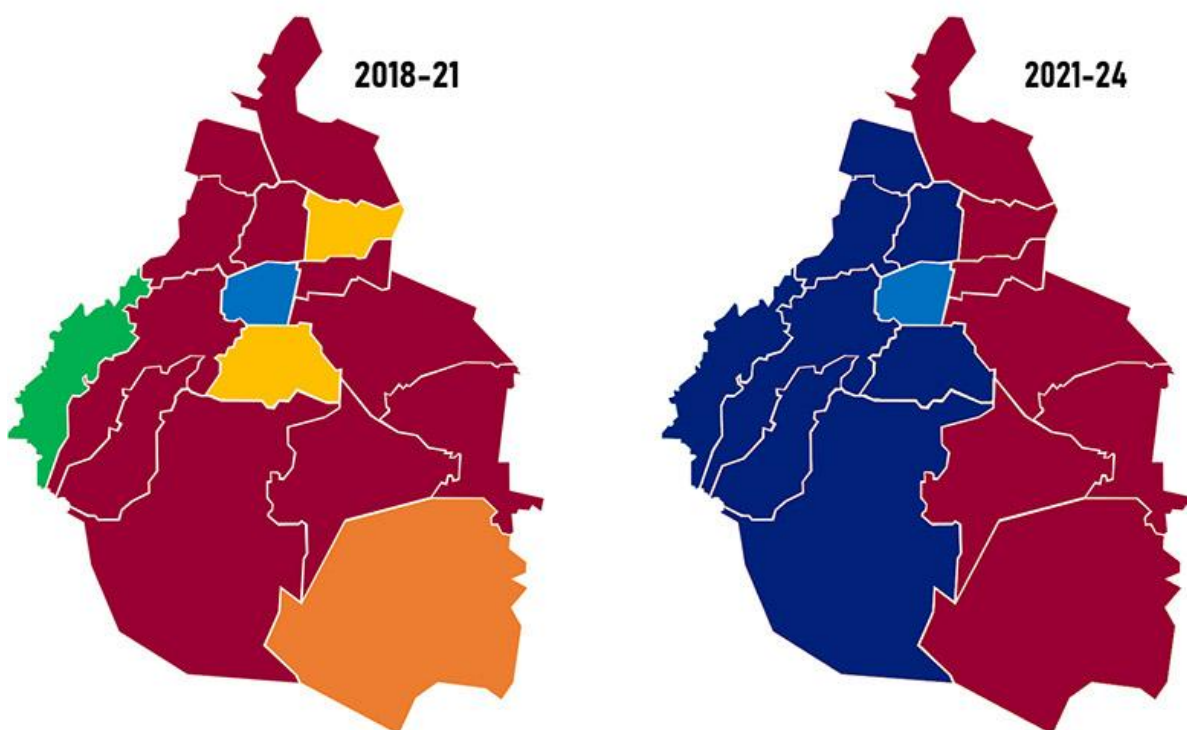
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<sup>38</sup> Carrie Kahn, "Meet Mexico City's First Elected Female Mayor," *NPR*, July 25, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/07/25/631465464/meet-mexico-citys-first-elected-woman-mayor>.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*



## Mexico City boroughs



Map 1: Map of Political Affiliations in Mexico after Elections of 2018 (left) and 2021 (right). Dark blue = PAN-PRI-PRD coalition Red = MORENA-PT-PVEM coalition. Light blue = PAN (National Action Party, a conservative party), Green = PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party, a right wing party), Yellow = PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution, a left-wing party), Orange = MC (Citizens' Movement, a progressive party) *Source:* Aguilera, Rodrigo "Mexico's 2021 mid-term elections: more Morena and glimmers of hope for AMLO's opponents in 2024"

However, the 2021 Mexican legislative elections revealed that Sheinbaum's promises, and the promise of MORENA, "the hope of Mexico," did not reach the ears of many. Map 1 depicts the phenomena many pointed out as reminiscent of the Berlin Wall, a divided east and west within the city.<sup>40</sup> The boroughs that voted for MORENA candidates were those home to majority working class and poorer neighborhoods, while the richer boroughs voted for the coalition composed of the traditional parties that

<sup>40</sup> Marcos González Díaz, "El muro de Berlín en CDMX": cómo la desigualdad que divide la capital de México quedó expuesta tras las últimas elecciones," trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, BBC News Mundo. June 8, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-57408084>.

previously held power in the country. People in the western boroughs wanted to reap the benefits of their tax dollars and political contributions in their communities, rather than on the other side of the city in neighborhoods on the east side.

The government's handling of COVID-19 was also a hot topic of contention, and in areas where MORENA laid the framework for community organizing and activism, predominantly in the east, the community's concerns were quickly funneled to their representatives in the party. However, as a result of antagonizing wealthy residents and sectors that profited at the expense of the working class and poorer residents, MORENA lost a lot of credibility and trust on the western side of the city. The coalitions within civil society and organizations that dictate the results of these elections reflect the changing circumstances from one election cycle to the next. Furthermore, these elections and the fluctuating tide of political support in the city have shown how civil society dictates not only concerns about cultural preservation and the course of economically profitable allegiances, but also the influence these groups have more broadly in determining dynamics and attitudes in the city.

## Chapter 2: Housing: Data and Policy

Mexico City, formerly known as the Federal District (D.F.), is the capital and largest city in Mexico. It is the only city in Mexico that is also its own state. As of 2020, there were 9,209,944 people living in Mexico City, which made it the most populous city in North America.<sup>41</sup> It is also the densest city in the country, with around 6,163 people living together per kilometer squared. The city is comprised of 16 boroughs, which altogether consist of 2,757,433 occupied residences.<sup>42</sup> On average, each residence houses 3 occupants. Based on these figures from the census alone, it is clear that there are around 1 million people living in the city that do not have housing accounted for. This number is exacerbated by the housing supply shortage Mexico City currently faces. This is due in large part to the shortage of available housing and the use of available land.<sup>43</sup>

### *Historical Overview of Development Mexico City*

The historical significance of land development in Mexico City, and the ways in which the current housing layout across the city fails to provide for residents, is crucial to understanding the housing crisis. The area upon which Mexico City has developed is the Valley of Mexico, a largely basin region surrounded by mountains and inactive

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<sup>41</sup> Cuéntame, “Número de Habitantes: Ciudad de México,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, INEGI, 2020, <http://cuentame.inegi.org.mx/monografias/informacion/df/poblacion/>.

<sup>42</sup> INEGI, “Panorama Sociodemográfico de México: Censo de Población y Vivienda 2020,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, SNIEG, 2021, [https://en.www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/productos/prod\\_serv/contenidos/espanol/bvinegi/productos/nueva\\_estruc/702825197827.pdf](https://en.www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/productos/prod_serv/contenidos/espanol/bvinegi/productos/nueva_estruc/702825197827.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> Canadevi Valle de México and ai360 “Situación actual de la vivienda en la Ciudad de México,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, *Procuraduría Ambiental y del Ordenamiento Territorial*, Accessed September 21, 2021 [http://www.paot.org.mx/micrositios/Ciudad/RV\\_\\_archivos/27/Mesa\\_2/2\\_Manuel.pdf](http://www.paot.org.mx/micrositios/Ciudad/RV__archivos/27/Mesa_2/2_Manuel.pdf).

volcanoes.<sup>44</sup> Half a century prior, the basin was Lake Texcoco, which was ultimately drained in order for colonial development in the basin to occur. The draining of this lake is significant, as the city is currently sinking through the clay of the dried lake below.<sup>45</sup> Water supply issues have been formative to the development of the city, as drilling for groundwater through the clay below was a main source of water for the city. But increased exposure to heat due to climate change and an ever increasing population, leading to increased levels of urbanization and deforestation, have only exacerbated the drought, leading to drilling and more sinkage throughout the city. A summary of the ways Mexico City's geography shaped current socioeconomic divisions throughout the city in the "Understanding Slums: Case Studies for the Global Report on Human Settlements 2003" outlines key points well:

"Historically, urban segregation in Mexico City was caused by topography and colonial land use, with the flood-prone areas to the east of the city being occupied by the lower classes. With high immigration and birth rates during the greater part of the 20th century, the city's population grew... The built-up area expanded from 23 square kilometres to [1,485] square kilometres between 1900 and 2000, engulfing surrounding towns and villages and invading steep hillsides and dried-up lake beds on which slums developed."<sup>46</sup>

To this day, the separation of the valley from higher points of elevation in the city serve as dividers of wealth. An example that embodies this phenomenon is that of Santa Fe,

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<sup>44</sup> "Mexico City Topographic Map, Elevation, Relief," topographic-map.com, OVHcloud, Accessed November 11, 2021, <https://en-gb.topographic-map.com/maps/lpg1/Mexico-City/>.

<sup>45</sup> Michael Kimmelman, "Mexico City, Parched and Sinking, Faces a Water Crisis," *The New York Times*, February 17, 2017, sec. Climate. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/02/17/world/americas/mexico-city-sinking.html>.

<sup>46</sup> Priscilla Connolly, "Global Report on Human Settlements 2003, The Challenge of Slums," UN-Habitat (2003); Part IV: 'Summary of City Case Studies', 2003, [https://www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu-projects/Global\\_Report/cities/mexico.htm#top](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu-projects/Global_Report/cities/mexico.htm#top) 195-228.

located in the Álvaro Obregón borough. Santa Fe is one of the wealthiest areas of the country, and situated on an elevated hillside, it “[sits] opposite a valley from the low income housing” sprawl that makes up the rest of Álvaro Obregón, as demonstrated in Image 1.<sup>47</sup> Other wealthy parts of the city are similarly situated, and are the result of housing stratification and city development that began hundreds of years ago.



The visual dichotomy of the western barrio Santa Fe, which is divided from the surrounding residential areas of Mexico City by topography on one side and a highway on the other. Johnny Miller, the photographer who captured this image with the assistance of a drone, noted that during COVID-19, Santa

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<sup>47</sup> Johnny Miller, “Mexico City,” *Unequal Scenes*, 2018, <https://unequalscenes.com/mexico-city-df>.

Fe had “a very low rate of COVID cases,” while the other parts of Álvaro Obregón “[had] one of the highest rates of mortality from the virus.”

Photograph by Johnny Miller for his project “Unequal Scenes.”

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The historical prelude to current levels of development has led to extreme urbanization with little room for improvements to be made on current infrastructure. Currently, 59% of the available land in Mexico City is reserved for historical sites and environmental preservation efforts, leaving only 41% of the land in Mexico City available for the use of residents. Even though 99% of the population lives in urban areas, there are 599 rural towns/shanty towns in Mexico City and 35 city centers.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the remaining land left for development in Mexico City is constrained to already dense areas within boroughs. A problematic example of the manifestation of this issue is in the two boroughs adjacent to the city center which chronically struggle with housing issues and poverty. Iztacalco, the most densely populated and geographically smallest borough of the city, is positioned directly above the most populated borough, Iztapalapa. The boroughs are almost completely urbanized, with Iztapalapa reserving only 6% of its area for the preservation of two parks, which serve as ecological reserves. The construction of residential units began in both Iztapalapa and Iztacalco in the early 20th century during a huge migration into city centers, and resulted in a “unidimensional” housing scheme, with little to no residential units having multiple stories.<sup>49</sup> Both of these boroughs combined house over 2 million people, and the high amount of urbanization coupled with

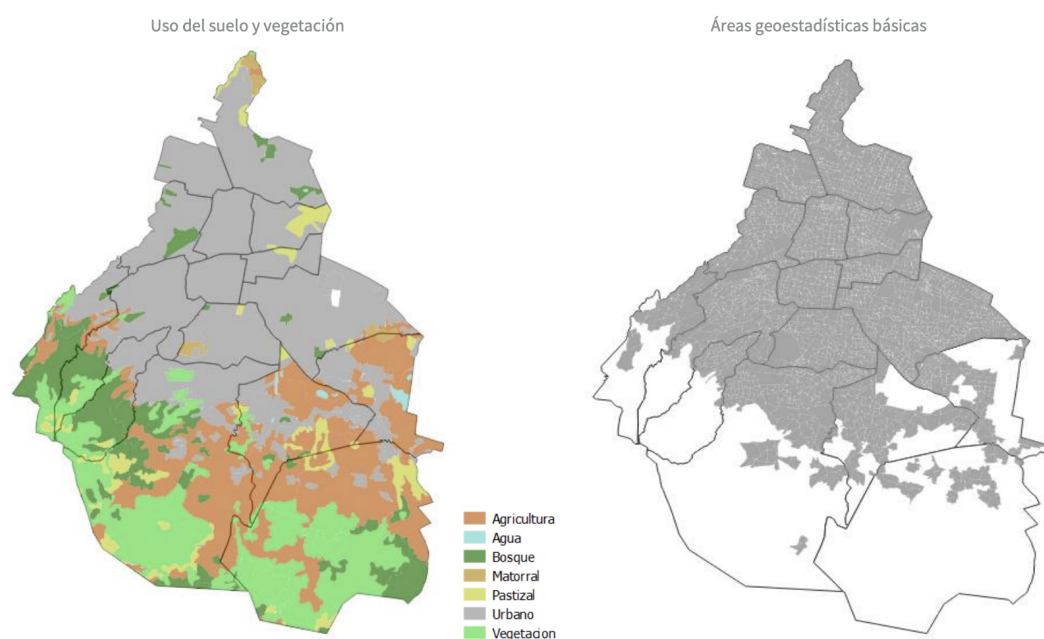
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<sup>48</sup> Cuéntame, “Información por Entidad: Rural y urbana,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, INEGI, 2020, <http://cuentame.inegi.org.mx/monografias/informacion/df/poblacion/distribucion.aspx?tema=me&e=09>.

<sup>49</sup> James O'Brien et al., “Iztacalco Development Plan, Mexico City,” OBVDS Workshops, O'Brien Van Der Steen Workshops, October 25, 2021, <https://obrienvandersteen.com/project/iztacalco-development-plan/>.



a lack of vertical construction has left little in terms of room for infrastructure or future developments.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the average number of people living in a household is 3.3 per bedroom in Mexico City, but in these two boroughs, the average regardless of socioeconomic status increases to around 3.6.<sup>51</sup> A lack of proper planning, consideration of the geographic factors and little infrastructure in densely populated areas has contributed to overcrowding and a difficult situation for the unhoused population of the city.



Map 2: The use of land in Mexico City: agriculture, vegetation and urban development. The map on the left depicts the ways in which land is used throughout Mexico City. Boroughs with the most urban development (grey area) and no conserved territory (green) are the northern regions of Benito Juárez, Cuauhtémoc, Azcapotzalco, Miguel Hidalgo, Iztacalco, Venustiano Carranza and Coyoacán. The southern boroughs with the most conserved land are Cuajimalpa de Morelos, Álvaro Obregón, La Magdalena Contreras, Tlalpan and Milpa Alta. The map on the right depicts a basic color scheme that corresponds to Basic Geostatistical Areas (AGEB in Spanish). AGEB correspond to a municipality, town or political delegation that is

<sup>50</sup> Evalúa “Ciudad de México 2020: Un diagnóstico de la desigualdad socio territorial” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, Government of Mexico City, August 2020, <https://www.evalua.cdmx.gob.mx/storage/app/media/DIES20/ciudad-de-mexico-2020-un-diagnostico-de-la-desigualdad-socio-territorial.pdf>.

<sup>51</sup> INEGI, “Censo de Población y Vivienda 2020,” 9

distinguished in one of two ways: rural and urban. In this map, urban areas correspond to the boroughs on the left with the most urban development. On the other hand, rural areas correspond to the boroughs on the left with the highest levels of land set aside for conservation.

Source: Evalúa Reporte “Ciudad de México 2020: Un Diagnóstico de la Desigualdad Socio Territorial”

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### *The Housing Crisis in Mexico City*

In 2001, a monumental undertaking to develop Mexico from a predominantly agrarian country with little housing infrastructure commenced.<sup>52</sup> This was a global effort, a public-private partnership, with investors and contributions pouring in from entities like the World Bank, Wall Street and hundreds of other sources.<sup>53</sup> However, the developments that arose as a result have largely been left unfinished, and in the event that they were completed, unmaintained by project managers. This also resulted in massive overcrowding in places like Mexico City, where promises of reinvisioned suburbs and developments in the adjacent Mexico State left “200,000 to 500,000 people in [housing] limbo.”<sup>54</sup> Not only were these people, and others across the country, left in limbo, but they were also saddled with inflated mortgage payments, inaccessibility to loans, a lack of infrastructure for navigating the housing market and cyclical poverty, which have contributed to what many people in the city describe as “an eternal housing crisis”.<sup>55</sup> The orchestrators of the failed billion dollar project have gone unprosecuted, even as “some

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<sup>52</sup> Richard Marosi, “A Failed Vision: Mexico’s Housing Debacle,” *The Los Angeles Times*, November 26, 2017, <https://www.latimes.com/projects/la-me-mexico-housing/>.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Zorayda Gallegos, “A Tight Spot for the 34 Million Mexicans Living in Micro-Apartments,” *El Pais-English*, February 9, 2018, [https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2018/02/09/inenglish/1518182586\\_392585.html](https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2018/02/09/inenglish/1518182586_392585.html).



investors and construction executives reaped enormous profits, hailing themselves as ‘nation builders’ as they joined the ranks of Mexico’s richest elite.”<sup>56</sup> This effect was especially felt in Mexico City, where construction companies and developers prioritized commercial construction at the cost of residents seeking affordable housing and seeking shelter where they could, exacerbating the pre-existing housing deficit.

A report by the Center of Economic Research and Teaching in Mexico City found that “in Mexico City, without consideration of the surrounding metropolitan area, there are at least 800 irregular settlements which house 40 thousand families and more than 240 thousand people.”<sup>57</sup> This estimate does not reflect the exact, identifiable number of individuals experiencing homelessness, as this is a particularly difficult number to acquire in Mexico City, because most unhoused individuals and families find shelter in slums and other forms of irregular housing throughout the city, rather than on the streets and more visible encampments. There are 5 distinct types of slums/irregular housing units that are observable in Mexico City.<sup>58</sup> *Colonias populares*, or informal/irregular settlements, “[result] from unauthorized land development and construction, with deficits in urban services, often in high-risk areas and with dubious property titles.” *Vecindades*, or “inner-city rental slums... date from the late 19th century and comprise houses abandoned by the wealthy and converted into tenements for the poor.” *Ciudades perdidas*, or lost cities, refer more broadly to an enclave of shanty houses built on vacant

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<sup>56</sup> Marosi, “A Failed Vision.”

<sup>57</sup> Nicolás Ignacio Matus Pérez, “Los Asentamientos Irregulares en la Ciudad de México y la Importancia de la Definición de los Problemas Públicos,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, Mexico City Economics Research and Teaching Center A.C., June 2019.

<sup>58</sup> Connolly, “Global Report on Human Settlements 2003.”

lots or undeveloped land. *Cuartos de azotea*, relics from a time when feudal hierarchies were a norm, served as “servants’ quarters and makeshift accommodation on the roofs of apartments... they are almost invariably well located in central areas.”<sup>59</sup> Finally, public housing projects, many of which have deteriorated and abandoned by the government, left in the hands of residents relying on government subsidized housing, are where a large population of unhoused Mexicans reside. Another alarming figure comes from the 2020 Population and Housing Census, which finds that Mexico City has only 12 shelters specifically for the use of individuals experiencing homelessness. At the time of the census, these shelters were reported to house around 1,700 individuals.<sup>60</sup> However, this number likely fluctuates due to the temporary nature of spots in homeless shelters.

A report published in 2018 by Council on Evaluation of Social Development of Mexico City (Evalúa) revealed that approximately 14 million (45%) of houses in Mexico did not meet basic standards of decency nor habitability.<sup>61</sup> In Mexico City, the violation of these standards are especially grievous throughout the settlements many unhoused, low-income residents live in. The irregular forms of slums and encampments in Mexico City detailed above are quite dangerous for their occupants. Many of these settlements are constructed without authorization and by hand, using mud, concrete, cardboard, trash and any other available materials. *Colonias populares*, and other types of unauthorized

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Lilián Bañuelos et al., “Así se Contó México,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, INEGI, 2021, [https://en.www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/productos/prod\\_serv/contenidos/espanol/bvinegi/productos/nueva\\_estruc/702825007046.pdf](https://en.www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/productos/prod_serv/contenidos/espanol/bvinegi/productos/nueva_estruc/702825007046.pdf).

<sup>61</sup> Ana Karen García, “14 Millones de Viviendas en México no Son Dignas,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, *El Economista*, December 19, 2018, <https://www.eleconomista.com.mx/politica/14-millones-de-viviendas-en-Mexico-no-son-dignas-20181219-0081.html>.

settlements, pose huge risks to their inhabitants, as not only are they unequipped to keep those living inside safe from the elements, but they are often built in precarious, inaccessible locations, like steep slopes, ravines and in protected conservation areas that often have dense vegetation and little pest/animal control.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, a lack of regulation or codes-of-habitability enforced on these units means that residents often do not have access to potable water, viable plumbing services, reliable heating or cooling systems, protection from harsh weather or any kind of regulatory body to turn to in the event of catastrophe. Thus, otherwise unhoused residents living in these types of shelters face increased risk of illness and death, even as they participate in civil society and are a part of Mexico's labor force.

From 2000 to 2015, it is estimated that there was an 89.3% increase in the number of irregular settlements in Mexico City.<sup>63</sup> The boroughs that experienced the highest increase were Alvaro Obregon (332.2%), Tlahuac (251.4) and Xochimilco (96.6%). However, every borough experienced a growth of these settlements in some capacity. The city's government has historically done little to combat the formation of these settlements, focusing its efforts instead on residents who are at risk of homelessness and falling back on shelters to provide services to those living in settlements and on the street. Only recently have there been active efforts to create affordable housing--*vivienda*

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<sup>62</sup> Cecilia Nava, "Analizan Reubicación de Asentamientos Irregulares En CDMX," trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, *El Sol de México*, January 20, 2020, <https://www.elsoldemexico.com.mx/metropoli/cdmx/analizan-reubicacion-de-asentamientos-irregulares-en-cdmx-4723051.html>.

<sup>63</sup> Sandra Hernández García, "Aumentaron 89.3 Por Ciento Asentamientos Irregulares de 2000 a 2015," trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, *La Jornada*, August 26, 2020, <https://www.jornada.com.mx/ultimas/capital/2020/08/26/aumentaron-89-3-por-ciento-asentamientos-irregulares-de-2000-a-2015-845.html>.

*popular*--in areas where established irregular settlements previously stood, and this has largely been due to the efforts of the recently elected MORENA government.

Before the election of the MORENA-affiliated head of government Claudia Sheinbaum in 2018, efforts to solve the housing crisis largely revolved around temporary fixes and keeping the housing problem contained. Multiple cabinet members of the city's former governor, Miguel Ángel Mancera, have been found guilty of collusion and corruption with real estate companies and attempts to profit from rebuilding efforts that arose from the immense destruction following the 2017 Mexican earthquake.<sup>64</sup> His administration was tied to the "Construction Cartel", a group of construction companies and developers believed to be responsible for at least 27% of buildings reported for irregular or illegal construction.<sup>65</sup> Previous administrations before him faced similar issues with corruption and profiting off the interests of commercial construction companies rather than addressing the housing concerns of those living in the city. The emergence and proliferation of civil society groups demanding change, along with the election of the leftist MORENA candidate Claudia Sheinbaum in 2018, was the culmination of the city's frustration with tradition. The reign of the previous political establishment ended, and with it came hope for change and a new direction in the light of pressing housing and immigration concerns that would soon be exacerbated by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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<sup>64</sup> Paris Alejandro Salazar et. al, "El 'cartel' inmobiliario de CDMX; sus Operadores en el Gobierno de Mancera," trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, *La Silla Rota*, February 19, 2018, <https://lasillarota.com/especiales/sr/el-cartel-inmobiliario-de-cdmx-sus-operadores-en-el-gobierno-de-mancera/206357>.

<sup>65</sup> Enrique Hernández, "El cártel inmobiliario, en la mira; sus actividades se ampliaron en el gobierno de Mancera," trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, *Forbes México*, May 17, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com.mx/el-cartel-inmobiliario-en-la-mira-sus-actividades-se-ampliaron-en-el-gobierno-de-mancera/>.

### *Local Politics of Housing: Contextualizing Civil Society*

Housing is an element of life that affects social, political, environmental and economic decisions within Mexico City. From affordable housing availability to the construction industry, issues regarding housing span the entire city, both geographically and socioeconomically. In 2012, NGOs estimated between 15,000 and 30,000 people were experiencing homelessness.<sup>66</sup> MORENA candidates in Mexico City promised to address the shortcomings of political systems in the light of COVID-19, with a particular emphasis on housing.<sup>67</sup> However, the measures they implemented to improve the current housing crisis largely focus on those who are citizens, rather than migrants, and require large amounts of oversight and investment. Claudia Sheinbaum has spearheaded these efforts in order to retain credibility among a voter pool that prioritized accountability and anti-corruption efforts in the construction industry. As the woman attempting to right Mexico City's government, which has a history of corruption and support for lucrative, yet poorly built projects, she has attempted to correct the course of urban development in her city. Thus far, her efforts have been antithetical, as she has focused on reorienting urban development projects to address the issue of irregular settlements while doing little to address the root of the issue of corruption in the construction industry.

An issue that demanded the head of government's immediate attention was that of forced evictions (*desalojos violentos*). Forced evictions are violent and devastating, but

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<sup>66</sup> Emilio Godoy, "Mexico's Homeless Are Targets of 'Social Cleansing,'" *Inter Press Service*, November 1, 2012.  
<http://www.ipsnews.net/2012/11/mexicos-homeless-are-targets-of-social-cleansing/>.

<sup>67</sup> Obras, "¿De qué trata la Ley de Vivienda propuesta por diputados morenistas en la CDMX?" trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, July 13, 2020,  
<https://obras.expansion.mx/inmobiliario/2020/07/13/ley-vivienda-propuesta-diputados-morenistas-cdmx>.

also represent the power corporate interests can leverage over the working class and low-income residents in the city. These occur on smaller scales, with individual renters, and on larger scales, when whole groups of people are expelled from their homes.<sup>68</sup> Increasingly, the reasons for these evictions rest on the fact that rent has increased exponentially in the past 5 years, and income has not kept pace with the inflated cost of housing, particularly in the areas of the city that are the safest to live in.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, as developers get access to undeveloped land and vacant lots, they further displace occupants that may have moved into these lots or made use of the land in the form of irregular settlements. The unhoused population of Mexico City lacks diversity in terms of prospects for shelters and relocation upon eviction. Shelters are a temporary option mostly relegated to women and children who face external factors, like domestic abuse, rather than unhoused populations more broadly. Many unhoused folks are left to their own devices and forced to relocate to areas like the Lost City of Tacubaya, a recently demolished slum that housed hundreds of families in the heart of Miguel Hidalgo.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the issue of eviction becomes cyclical, as those who are evicted can attribute a lack of resources to the reason for their eviction, and when unable to find support or networks to

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<sup>68</sup> Eliana Gilet, "Así han aumentado los desalojos violentos en el corazón de la Ciudad de México," trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, *VICE Español*, September 27, 2018, <https://www.vice.com/es/article/59ad98/asi-han-aumentado-los-desalojos-violentos-en-el-corazon-de-la-ciudad-de-mexico>.

<sup>69</sup> Isabel García Meré, SEDUVI, and Listings Lamudi, "Dime Cuánto Ganas y Te Diré Dónde Rentar," trans. by Sophia Ramirez-Brown, *MXCity, Guía Insider*. Lamudi, March 1, 2016, <https://mxcity.mx/2014/08/dime-cuanto-ganas-y-te-dire-donde-rentar/>.

<sup>70</sup> Arturo Contreras, "La Disputa por la Ciudad Perdida de Tacubaya," trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, *Pie de Página*, September 29, 2019, <https://piedepagina.mx/la-disputa-por-la-ciudad-perdida-de-tacubaya/>.

assist in the process of finding suitable home, they can either choose to live in decrepit conditions or leave the city altogether.

To tackle this issue of eviction, in 2018, Sheinbaum enacted a reform to article 60 of the Constitutional Law on Human Rights for Mexico City.<sup>71</sup> This reform stipulated that forced evictions were forbidden unless they were “exceptional cases” as determined by the law.<sup>72</sup> However, after a huge amount of legislative and public outcry, the article was amended to permit evictions only after a court order had been obtained. The purpose of this reform was to address the issue of forced evictions, of individuals and groups, on a large scale. However, by going through an article within a larger document and failing to target the actual reasons for eviction--an inability to pay rent, unmitigated disputes with landlords, gentrification, corrupt/dodgy construction (*obras chuecas*)--this particular legislative route was insufficient to stop forced evictions. In fact, recent violent forced evictions have targeted indigenous communities and been enacted by fellow community members, even as local police officers stepped in to protect those being evicted.<sup>73</sup>

In light of the unsuccessful efforts of the MORENA government to prevent evictions, civil society has turned to and backed autonomous institutions to be reliable mediators of the concerns residents bring to their attention. The Human Rights Commission of Mexico City (CDHDF) was formed decades earlier through the work of

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<sup>71</sup> Guido Brandenburg, “Review on the Constitutional Law of Human Rights and its Guarantees for Mexico City,” *MGPS Muggenburg, Gorches y Peñalosa S.C.*, August 14, 2019. <https://www.mgps.com.mx/en/news/publications/164.html>.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Wendy Roa, “Presentan ante el MP a 14 personas tras desalojo violento en la colonia Juárez,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, *Excelsior*, October 15, 2021. <https://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/presentan-ante-el-mp-a-14-personas-tras-desalojo-violento/1477360>.

faculty at the National Autonomous University of Mexico and concerned residents. CDHDF was created in 1993 to act as an autonomous defender of human rights in Mexico City. The Commission hears complaints and generates reports that are dispersed to the government and public on a variety of issues. In 2019, CDHDF became a public defender of laws against forced eviction. They not only assisted with the articulation of grievances from residents that had been evicted, but also advised those at risk of eviction and acted as intermediaries in potentially unjust/corrupt situations. CDHDF's call for a human-rights approach to eviction garnered a lot of support among housing and human rights advocates throughout the city, and helped solidify residents' trust in the legitimacy of the organization.<sup>74</sup>

Another rampant issue civil society has organized against is unauthorized construction. For years in Mexico City, developers were able to bypass regulators and avoid applying for permits by paying off elected officials. Corruption led to the creation of nefarious groups like the "Construction Cartel", which as mentioned in the previous chapter, partnered with the previous head of government in Mexico City to build unsafe, often illegally placed, housing and office units. Though MORENA has taken a tough stance on corruption, and assisted authorities in pressing charges against politicians that had previously received impunity for allowing such transactions to occur, shoddy construction and companies taking shortcuts continue to be an issue that plagues the city.

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<sup>74</sup> Press Bulletin, "La CDHDF Llama a Que La Regulación De Los Desalojos Tenga UN Enfoque De Derechos Humanos," trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown Comisión de Derechos Humanos de la Ciudad de México, May 30, 2019, <https://cdhcm.org.mx/2019/05/la-cdhdf-llama-a-que-la-regulacion-de-los-desalojos-tenga-un-enfoque-de-derechos-humanos/>.



NIMBY movements in Mexico take the form of *vecinocracia* - rule of the neighborhood (association). Mexico City, rife with historical and cultural artifacts of the past, has become a prime spot for these *vecinocracias*, with their ultimate goal being the preservation of cultural heritage and preservation of undeveloped land. The *vecinocracia* movement in Mexico City has taken on a unique character in recent years unlike NIMBY movements in other populous cities. In places where cultural heritage in the city center converges with the concentration of low-income households at risk of displacement, civil society rallies in a way that combines the interests of cultural preservation groups and poorer residents.<sup>75</sup> This occurs frequently in central parts of the city, home to a wealth of cultural and architectural relics, and when developers push gentrifying agendas in these areas, they are met with resistance.

Local movements, like #ObraChueca (#ShoddyConstruction), promote neighborhood watches for suspicious construction activity and have had enormous effects on community engagement, particularly in encouraging residents to confront construction companies and policy makers directly with any concerns they have. #ObraChueca is a coalition of *vecinocracia* adjacent organizations that organize on behalf of the community. Suma Urbana, one of the founding organizations, is a group that prides itself on reporting corrupt project that “manifestation in irregular construction and land use, but also in the loss of cultural heritage, deforestation, invasion of public spaces, [and] urbanization of ravines [(critical water sources)].”<sup>76</sup> Another organizer of #ObraChueca is

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<sup>75</sup> Martha Pskowski, “The Restaurant at the Center of Mexico City’s Gentrification Wars,” *Bloomberg*, June 4, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-06-04/how-mexico-city-residents-resist-gentrification>.

<sup>76</sup> “Obra Chueca: Quienes Somos,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, *Obra chueca: Ciudad de México*. Accessed December 1, 2021. <https://obrachueca.com/about-us>.

Virk, a social entrepreneurship platform “focused on the development of content, tools and technological products for civic engagement, to close the gap between citizens and institutions with available software and free data.”<sup>77</sup> Virk’s consulting role in this partnership has been critical to its success and widespread use of the hashtag throughout Mexico City. The final founding member of this organization, Ruta Cívica (the Civic Route), is an organization made up of “chilangos”, or those born and raised in Mexico City, that has fought political corruption since 2010 and champions sustainability and transparency in politics.<sup>78</sup> As a result of the contributions and efforts from these organizations, the Obra Chueca effort continues to amplify community members’ concerns and suggestions. Since 2017, users have followed basic reporting protocols on an online form, noting the location, violations of the construction, progress of the project and a brief description of the problem. Community members engaged in the project would then verify the concerns and follow up with the managers on site, then report to local politicians as needed. The site also has guides and presentations on how to identify proper permits, questions to ask when talking to construction workers and various summaries on requirements depending on the construction site.

The catalyzing force of civil society groups in the housing sector are predominantly forced evictions and irregular construction concerns. These concerns are distinct in that while they bring together different socioeconomic stratas of Mexico City’s residents, the concerns generally address the needs of established residents. The focus of civil society on chilangos allowed for lower-income and working class residents to join

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

these movements and acquire a platform to voice their concerns. Furthermore, the city-wide nature of *vecinocracia* movements against shoddy construction categorically targets corruption in the construction industry rather than irregular settlements created by individuals experiencing homelessness in Mexico City. Though there are a couple exceptions, the majority of civil society recognizes the problem of irregular settlements and homelessness is a problem that can be attributed to the construction industry, political corruption and administrative lack of initiative rather than attributing the blame solely to unhoused individuals who were once residents of the city.

The former head of government of Mexico City, Marcelo Ebrard, implemented the Law of Urban Development of the Federal District. This ordinance was introduced to help guide the expansion of Mexico City in a sustainable manner and involve public, private and civil society sectors in a tangible through “actions of urban reordering, infrastructure endowment, provision of public services, conservation, recovery and increase of urban cultural heritage, recovery and preservation of the urban image and control of urban growth.”<sup>79</sup> However, throughout Ebrard’s governance, little had been done to address the goals stipulated in the document, and the lack of enforcement of provisions allowed companies to ignore regulations as they had before. Mancera, who succeeded Ebrard as head of government in 2012, set the foundation for a more proactive, stringent approach to charting a course toward more sustainable urban development. He published a “CDMX Resilience Strategy: Adaptive, Inclusive and Equitable

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<sup>79</sup> “Ley De Desarrollo Urbano Del Distrito Federal,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, VII Legislative Assembly: the Congress of Mexico City, Government of Mexico City, July 15, 2010, <http://aldf.gob.mx/archivo-3a6419f3c20189c5c79382d35f87c41f.pdf>.

Transformation” report in collaboration with the Secretary of the Environment in 2016, and an updated version of the urban development law entitled “Regulation of the Law of Urban Development of the Federal District”. These efforts preceded the creation of the Cooperation-based Performance Systems (SAC), a mechanism for classifying projects in the city as working towards achieving the aforementioned goals of equal access and sustainability.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, the SAC was created in tandem with the Irregular Human Settlement Evaluation Commissions (CEA). Each borough in the city would have a CEA, and each CEA would evaluate the causes, severity and evolution of irregular settlements and propose location-specific solutions to each settlement.<sup>81</sup>

In order to qualify for the classification, the developers of SAC projects must prove their commitment to working with civil society groups by demonstrating initial agreements, times for follow-up with these groups, and a commitment to ensuring the SAC project benefits residents in multiple capacities.<sup>82</sup> There are currently 5 SAC projects underway, and the most recent addition to the group was the “Tacubaya Regeneration Project,” the most progressive iteration of the project yet.<sup>83</sup> As recently as 2020, officials sanctioned the demolition of the Lost City of Tacubaya (*la Ciudad Perdida de Tacubaya*), an abandoned lot that occupied a zone of about 5,000 m<sup>2</sup> that

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<sup>80</sup> “SAC: Sistemas De Actuación,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, SEDUVI: Mexico City Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, Government of Mexico City, Accessed November 29, 2021., 2

<sup>81</sup> “Reglamento De La Ley De Desarrollo Urbano Del Distrito Federal,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, *Procuraduría Ambiental y del Ordenamiento Territorial*, Government of Mexico City, March 15, 2018, 17

<sup>82</sup> “SAC: Sistemas De Actuación,” SEDUVI, 3

<sup>83</sup> “Proyecto Regeneración Tacubaya,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, SEDUVI: Mexico City Ministry of Urban Development and Housing. Government of Mexico City, 2020, <http://seduvi.proyectosurbanos.cdmx.gob.mx/s.a.c./tacubaya.html>.

housed 300 families in the Miguel Hidalgo borough. Instead of proceeding as originally planned with the demolition, whereby luxury apartments were to be built on top of the rubble of the lost city, the administration of Sheinbaum negotiated with residents and civil society agents concerned with the impending displacement of the families living in the irregular settlement. What all parties agreed to was the designation of the site as a SAC territory, upon which 176 affordable housing units will be built for the former residents, as well as a Point of Innovation, Freedom, Art, Education and Knowledge (PILARES), a program implemented by the city similar to recreation centers that promote knowledge and engagement in marginalized communities.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, when the community living in the Lost City of Tacubaya was forced to leave, the city government provided 4,000 pesos (188 USD) worth of rent assistance to ensure they have a place to stay while their future homes are being built.<sup>85</sup> The SAC program, and the Tacubaya Regeneration Project in particular, show the power of partnerships between government initiatives, civil society groups, and the affected communities, which generate solutions that will benefit the city and its residents for generations to come.

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<sup>84</sup> Nelly Toche, "La UNESCO premia al programa PILARES de la CDMX," trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, *El Economista*, January 7, 2021, <https://www.economista.com.mx/arteseideas/La-UNESCO-premia-al-programa-PILARES-de-la-CDMX-20210107-0064.html>.

<sup>85</sup> Obras, "Así lucirá la vivienda que sustituye a la 'ciudad perdida' en Tacubaya," trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, *Expansión*, January 20, 2021, <https://obras.expansion.mx/inmobiliario/2021/01/20/asi-lucira-la-ciudad-perdida-en-tacubaya>.

## Chapter 3: Immigration: Data, Policy and the Organization of Civil Society

While solutions to the housing crisis in Mexico City promote collaboration and intersection among residents, this does not necessarily extend to immigrants experiencing homelessness. The role of national attitudes toward immigration coupled with shifting migratory patterns have led to a recent increase in the number of undocumented immigrants living in Mexico City who face hostile responses to their presence. Unfortunately, many of them resort to finding shelter in irregular settlements and on the street due to the current housing crisis. The civil society groups focused on housing issues have reacted to this phenomena in ways that continue to prioritize the interests of chilangos rather than employing a broader, all-encompassing approach through their efforts in the realms of forced evictions and concerns about the construction industry. However, this narrow focus within civil society's attempts to address the housing crisis reflects the broader interests of cultural preservation and economic concerns in Mexico City. Though some action is initiated on behalf of residents who identify as low-income and are potentially at risk of homelessness, there is a distinct lack of support for immigrants experiencing homelessness in the regular channels of support in the city. Thus, the creation of advocacy groups that protect the interests and needs of immigrants has taken on a new dimension.

When Mexico City became a destination city around 2016 for migrants seeking asylum and economic refuge, the city was ill-equipped to handle the surge of arrivals.

However, this lack of preparation, infrastructure, and resources was indicative of a larger national issue Mexican officials had not needed to confront until migratory flows began to change in earnest. As shelters, NGOs and community members on the ground immediately began to dispense information and aid for immigrants on the ground in the city, the government was slower to respond in kind. This chapter will employ the indirect system effects model to understand the transcendental effect of immigration as a result of international, domestic and local interactions and tensions.

As discussed in the Literature Review, immigration policy in Mexico is affected by the systemic variables of the international environment in the context of the circumstances of migration from countries surrounding Mexico, the economic and political interests affecting immigration, and reasons for migration that are international, such as climate change and violence. What follows in this chapter is a discussion of the data on immigration, illustrating Mexico's transition from transit to destination country and the sheer number of people entering the country. A discussion of national immigration policy, which arose as a result of direct pressure from the international environment, follows. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the outcome in Mexico City, the outputs of interest being the needs of immigrants in the city, civil society's organization around issues in this realm, and the political response as a result. The convergence of these variables reveals a distinct lack of institutional support for immigrants, which results from insidious systemic influence on domestic institutions/policy-making and direct effects due to the influence of racism and xenophobic attitudes.

### *National Data on Immigration*

To begin, this section will contextualize the systemic variables under consideration in Mexico: patterns of migration, why Mexico receives such high numbers of migrants, and the reasons for international displacement with a focus on Central America. Before the pandemic, the majority of immigration to Mexico came from the southern border with Guatemala. The movement of people was concentrated to three groups in particular: “ a) temporary agricultural workers; b) daily mobility for Guatemalan border residents for commercial and work purposes;1 and, c) Central American population, the majority of whom are unauthorized, with the intent of reaching the United States.”<sup>86</sup> Map 1 depicts the main routes these migrants would use to get through Mexico. Mexico was largely a state immigrants used for the purpose of transit, and as a result, prior to 2010, the numbers on previous immigration largely drew on data from apprehensions and detentions at the northern border, areas of high immigrant processing and offices of immigrant affairs. It was estimated that in 2010, the foreign-born population in Mexico was 968,000. That number increased to 1.1 million by 2018.<sup>87</sup> However, recent developments in immigration as a result of U.S. policies, COVID-19, and the political tumult in Central America and the Caribbean have shown an increase in the immigrants choosing Mexico as a destination state.

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<sup>86</sup> Claudia Masferrer ed., “Migration and Inequalities in the Face of COVID-19: Vulnerable Populations and Support Networks in Mexico and the United States,” Translated by Jennifer Apperti. Sin Fronteras in collaboration with The College of Mexico A.C. June 2020. [https://sinfronteras.org.mx/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/5\\_MigrationInequality-COVID-19\\_Populations\\_EN.pdf](https://sinfronteras.org.mx/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/5_MigrationInequality-COVID-19_Populations_EN.pdf).

<sup>87</sup> “International Migration Outlook 2020: Mexico,” OECD iLibrary, OECD, 2019, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/eb37dd8f-en/index.html?itemId=%2Fcontent%2Fcomponent%2Feb37dd8f-en>.





Map 1: This map depicts the main migratory routes through Mexico. The yellow lines represent highways and roads migrants use, mainly with cars and busses. The dotted blue lines indicate the routes for “La Bestia”, an infamous freight train migrants ride to get from southern Mexico to the border. Source: Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentari

Right before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, foreigner entry into Mexico was increasing. The main countries of origin for migrants seeking documentation in Mexico were Venezuela, Honduras and El Salvador. The main countries of origin for undocumented migrants, and those attempting to utilize Mexico as a transit state for the purpose of reaching the US, were Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. Trends from 2010-2020 show that these nations have consistently been the main countries of origin for immigrants in Mexico. The Council for Hemispheric Affairs found “[apprehensions] of Central Americans at the U.S.-Mexico border doubled between October 1, 2015 and January 31, 2016, in comparison to the same period the previous year. Over that same time period, Mexico deported around 150,000 Central Americans, signaling a 44 percent

increase over the previous year.”<sup>88</sup> Estimates of the movement of Central American migrants entering Mexico to access the U.S. increased from 388,700 in 2005 to 394,200 in 2014, and rose over 400,000 by 2016.<sup>89</sup> The situation in Central America was critical, with homicide rates reaching all time highs from 2014-2016. A reporter for the Latin America Working Group found:

“People from the Northern Triangle of Central America-El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras- represented 59 percent of asylum applications in Mexico in 2017. And that’s down from 92 percent in 2016, as last year witnessed a swell in applications from Venezuelans... Looking at the facts, it’s no wonder they’re fleeing. With a homicide rate of 60 per 100,000 in El Salvador, 42.8 in Honduras, and 26.1 in Guatemala... all three countries are well above the 10 per 100,000 rate the WHO considers the minimum to be characteristic of endemic violence.”<sup>90</sup>

Additionally, the exacerbation of droughts, tropical storms and heat waves due to climate change was another consequential factor in people’s decision to emigrate from their countries of origin.<sup>91</sup> The more recent phenomenon of Central American migrant caravans has become prevalent in Mexico in large part due to these effects of climate change. These caravans are enclaves of up to 7,000 poor Central American migrants, the

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<sup>88</sup> Alejandra Castillo, “Programa Frontera Sur: The Mexican Government’s Faulty Immigration Policy,” Council on Hemispheric Affairs, October 26, 2016, <https://www.coha.org/programa-frontera-sur-the-mexican-governments-faulty-immigration-policy/>.

<sup>89</sup> Office of the Secretariat of the Interior, “Estadísticas Migratorias: Síntesis 2020,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas, Government of Mexico, June 2021, [http://portales.segob.gob.mx/work/models/PoliticaMigratoria/CEM/Estadisticas/Sintesis\\_Graficas/Sintesis\\_2021.pdf](http://portales.segob.gob.mx/work/models/PoliticaMigratoria/CEM/Estadisticas/Sintesis_Graficas/Sintesis_2021.pdf), 34

<sup>90</sup> Folkerts, “Behind the Caravan”

<sup>91</sup> “How the Climate Crisis Is Affecting Central America.” The Climate Reality Project, March 30, 2021, <https://www.climateRealityProject.org/blog/how-climate-crisis-affecting-central-america>.

majority of whom are seeking asylum in the United States, that travel through Mexico.<sup>92</sup> The increasing number of severe hurricanes increasing in the region alone—from Hurricane Maria in 2017, which caused an estimated 91.61 billion dollars in damage, to Hurricanes Eta and Iota in 2020, which together caused an estimated 10 billion dollars in damage—merits serious attention. Central America also suffers from extreme weather volatility in a region known as the Dry Corridor, which affects an area spanning Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua (around 45 million people) in particular.<sup>93</sup> The weather patterns that occur in this region are notoriously irregular, with “long periods of heatwaves during which there is hardly any rainfall... [a] window of time with no precipitation... [and in] contrast, during years of more intense rains, there are tropical storms that have devastating effects.”<sup>94</sup> As a result of this irregularity, the cultivation of crops and basic agriculture have suffered to the point where “approximately 10% [4.5 million] of the population suffers from malnutrition” at any given time.<sup>95</sup>

By the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, another severe global catastrophe exacerbated by climate change, the specific incidence of refugees petitioning to stay in Mexico had increased almost 300% from 2019 to 2020.<sup>96</sup> These numbers cemented the

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<sup>92</sup> Annie Correal and Megan Specia, “The Migrant Caravan: What to Know About the Thousands Traveling North,” *The New York Times*, October 26, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/26/world/americas/what-is-migrant-caravan-facts-history.html>

<sup>93</sup> Jordi Vaqué, “Chronology of the Dry Corridor: The Impetus for Resilience in Central America,” *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*, January 6, 2017, <https://www.fao.org/in-action/agronoticias/detail/en/c/1024539/>.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Office of the Secretariat of the Interior, “Estadísticas Migratorias,” 22

fact that Mexico is increasingly becoming a destination country for migrants fleeing human rights abuses, refuge from climate change, and seeking better economic prospects. Socioeconomically, immigration flows into Mexico are diverse. The Mexican government uses three types of entry to measure immigration: aerial entry, maritime entry and land entry. These types of entry largely indicate the types of immigrants arriving to the country: those with documents (students, businesspeople, diplomats, relatives) largely rely on aerial entry for access to the country whereas undocumented immigrants use more covert land and maritime entry accesspoints to come into the country.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, the majority of immigrants that utilize Mexico as a transit state travel exclusively by walking or ground transportation, as they are unable to purchase arrangements or acquire the necessary documentation that would allow them to go straight to the U.S. from a country along their journey. Caravans, as mentioned before, are largely comprised of poor, undocumented refugees. As recently as 2019, many members of these caravans diverged from their intended destination (the U.S.) to seek asylum and gainful economic employment to remain in Mexico. This has become a new trend especially among caravans that are composed of large groups of unaccompanied minors. The flows of migrants, and the increasing severity of their reasons for leaving their countries of origin, have forced the Mexican government to reassess its immigration policy. Additionally, pressure from the U.S. has also forced AMLO's administration to redesign the country's immigration containment and enforcement methods.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

### *National Policies on Immigration*

The direct effects of the international environment on domestic variables pertaining to immigration—the result of migratory flows, the impact of the types of immigrants entering Mexico and international pressures—manifest in the domestic policy on immigration in Mexico. Prior to the inauguration of AMLO and the MORENA government in 2018, the Mexican government treated immigrants in the country as a slightly aggravating side effect of a larger migratory problem, and followed the United States’ cues in terms of public-facing policy. Suspicion of U.S. motives behind the scrutiny of Mexican national security policy when signing agreements like NAFTA left hesitant policy makers only willing to work with the U.S. in a limited capacity on the issue of immigration.<sup>98</sup> Following a surge in familial unit migration through Mexico in 2014, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto implemented the *Programa Frontera Sur*, the Southern Border Program, the first initiative that replicated the border control efforts the U.S. had been implementing for years in the north.<sup>99</sup> Though Peña Nieto stated his priorities were respecting the human rights of migrants, in actuality, his policy focused on enforcement of detention and deportations, even when it came to processing unaccompanied minors.<sup>100</sup> The election of AMLO, and the majority of his leftist party in

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<sup>98</sup> “Mexico’s Peña Nieto Vows to Defend ‘National Dignity,’” BBC News, BBC, September 2, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-41138825>.

<sup>99</sup> Alejandra Castañeda, “¿Qué es El Programa Frontera Sur?” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, Observatorio de Legislación y Política Migratoria, El COLEF: The College of the Northern Border, February 2016, <https://observatoriocollef.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/BOLET%C3%8DN-1-Alejandra-Casta%C3%B1eda.pdf>.

<sup>100</sup> “Closed Doors: Mexico’s Failure to Protect Central American Refugee and Migrant Children” Human Rights Watch, May 27, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/03/31/closed-doors/mexicos-failure-protect-central-american-refugee-and-migrant>.

the legislative branch of government, left many hopeful that humane immigration reform was on the horizon.

AMLO had to make a difficult decision with regards to immigration immediately after his inauguration, which occurred at a time when caravans started arriving at the U.S.-Mexican border in earnest. As someone who staked his political integrity on his efforts to defend and represent marginalized and poor Mexicans, he quickly had to reconcile his ambitions with the reality of migratory conditions in the country. When Trump threatened to shut down the border entirely, AMLO “[appeared] ready to defuse the situation by agreeing to provide better housing for the migrants while they [waited] for months on Mexican soil for a chance to apply for asylum in the U.S.”<sup>101</sup> However, AMLO’s willingness to appease the U.S. and maintain his progressive stance only lasted for less than a year before he changed his agenda.

AMLO set a precedent for negotiation with Donald Trump that other Latin American leaders quickly followed, which prioritized maintaining an economically lucrative relationship with the U.S. over humanitarian immigration policy. Though AMLO claimed he prioritized the humane treatment of immigrants, many of the bilateral immigration enforcement agreements that stemmed from their trade negotiations indicated otherwise. The trade agreement, USMCA, stimulated the Mexican government to take direct action throughout the country. A joint declaration signed between the U.S. and Mexico led to a huge increase in immigration enforcement efforts within the

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<sup>101</sup> Mark Stevenson, “New Leftist President Promises Transformation of Mexico,” AP NEWS, November 30, 2018, <https://apnews.com/article/d16c1f95aaab46eeb732086a89d33a51>.

country.<sup>102</sup> The Southern border with Guatemala saw a huge increase in militarization and the creation and deployment of a Mexican National Guard in 2019 to aid in this effort.<sup>103</sup> To further decrease the number of Central American immigrants waiting for processing in the U.S., AMLO's government agreed to hold around 70,000 refugees awaiting U.S. asylum at the northern border of the country—a process which resulted in overrun shelters, sprawling street encampments, and stadiums filled to the brim with people unable to access basic necessities throughout Mexico.<sup>104</sup> The Trump Administration codified this unconventional policy into law through the Migrant Protection Protocols.<sup>105</sup> The effects of keeping such large numbers of caravans and asylees at the border are still prevalent today, as the legal disputes regarding this policy continue to play out within the new Democratic Biden administration.

With Biden's inauguration into the White House, many expected a distinct change from the policies of the previous administration. However, the stringent measures from the Trump era continued in the wake of Biden's administration, and AMLO still employs aggressive measures to curtail caravans and prevent asylees from reaching the United

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<sup>102</sup> "Joint Declaration and Supplementary Agreement Between the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA and MEXICO," U.S. Department of State, Government of the United States of America, June 7, 2019.

<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/19-607-Mexico-Migration-and-Refugees.pdf>.

<sup>103</sup> Manu Ureste, "El gobierno persigue migrantes y deja en promesa el discurso sobre derechos humanos," trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, *Animal Político: Grupo Editorial Criterio*, April 24, 2019. <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2019/04/politica-migratoria-amlo-redadas-masivas/>.

<sup>104</sup> Catherine E. Shoichet and Leyla Santiago, "The tear gas is gone. But in this shelter at the border, the situation is getting worse," *CNN*, November 29, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/29/americas/mexico-border-tijuana-shelter/index.html>.

<sup>105</sup> "Migrant Protection Protocols (Trump Administration Archive,)," Department of Homeland Security, Government of the United States of America, August 25, 2021. <https://www.dhs.gov/archive/migrant-protection-protocols-trump-administration>.

States to this day. In the summer of 2021, official flights full of undocumented Central American migrants began leaving the U.S. for Mexico.<sup>106</sup> Unlike the Trump administration's flight policy, Biden's policy targets Central American immigrants rather than Mexicans. This policy has ramifications within Mexico, as state governments scramble to accommodate the influx of refugees being flown in. Additionally, Biden has been largely unsuccessful in his efforts to formally end harsh Trump-era immigration policy, like the Migration Protection Protocols (MPP). His attempts to cease adherence to MPP procedure have been struck down repeatedly in court, and Biden has been forced to "[condemn] the program while simultaneously having to put plans in place to restart it."<sup>107</sup> However, the re-implementation of this policy requires AMLO's consent to receive those awaiting asylum, and so long as his demands for modifications within the program are met, it is unlikely AMLO will refuse to comply with a new and improved MPP. The direct international systemic effects on and national policy set the stage for a deeper examination of the outcomes of interest in Mexico City, specifically with regards to policies and agendas on immigration.

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<sup>106</sup> Associated Press, "US Is Flying Central Americans to Mexico to Deter Crossings," *US News and World Report*, August 6, 2021, <https://www.usnews.com/news/politics/articles/2021-08-06/us-is-flying-central-americans-to-mexico-to-deter-crossings>.

<sup>107</sup> Eileen Sullivan, "Biden Administration Tries Again to End Trump's 'Remain in Mexico' Policy," *The New York Times*. The New York Times, October 29, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/29/us/politics/immigration-remain-mexico.html>.



*Local Politics of Immigration: Contextualizing Civil Society in Mexico City*

The outcomes of interest in terms of immigration in Mexico City are threefold: i) immigrants' needs once they are in the city, ii) civil society and political response to immigrants and iii) attitudes toward immigrants. Prior to 2015, the main migratory corridors bypassed Mexico City. Immigrants would mainly stop in the city to recuperate and rest in the middle of their journeys to the U.S. However, as the remote paths to the north became more dangerous and exploited by cartels and law enforcement alike, Mexico City began to attract a significant number of transitory migrants.<sup>108</sup> These increases were first observed in shelters, migrant houses, and soup kitchens.<sup>109</sup> The types of immigrants increasingly began to include families, unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable populations, as “the migrant profile in Mexico City, especially among family units, increasingly [included] those seeking asylum or pursuing other legal processes.”<sup>110</sup> Thus, the influx of immigrants necessitated an increase in space in the city to accommodate them in a manner that respected their freedom of movement, a priority the MORENA city government vocalized from the first day of the campaign trail.

Mexico City recently became a distinct point on one of the main migratory walking routes through Mexico to the route to the U.S. This led to the city becoming a key access point for immigrants, especially as the migrant shelters located in the heart of

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<sup>108</sup> Emma Buckhout, “More Migrants Are Coming, and They’re Arriving More Hurt’: Tales from Mexico City Migrant Shelters,” Latin America Working Group, February 12, 2016, <https://www.lawg.org/more-migrants-are-coming-and-theyre-arriving-more-hurt-tales-from-mexico-city-migrant-shelters/>.

<sup>109</sup> “Map 2020 of Migrant Houses, Shelters and Soup Kitchens for Migrants in Mexico,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, *BBVA Research*, Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria, SA, March 2, 2020, <https://www.bbvarsearch.com/en/publicaciones/map-2020-of-migrant-houses-shelters-and-soup-kitchens-for-migrants-in-mexico/>.

<sup>110</sup> Buckhout, “Tales from Mexico City Migrant Shelters”

the city became internationally renowned, and the headquarters of the National Institute of Migration, the main supervising “authority in charge of regulating the entry, stay and exit of foreign and Mexican citizens in Mexico” provides access to documents and vital information for migrants.<sup>111</sup> A diagnostic report on inequality released by the Council on Evaluation of Social Development of Mexico City (Evalúa) details a comprehensive overview of the immigrant population of Mexico City. Since 2000, the number of immigrants (not including those from the U.S.) permanently residing in the city has grown 61%, from 25,552 to 41,126 in 2015.<sup>112</sup> However, adding to this total was the number of immigrants detained that year, around 8,000.<sup>113</sup> Additionally, in 2010, estimates of the total number of undocumented immigrants in the city ranged from 600,000-1,100,000, a number that is believed to have increased since.<sup>114</sup>

These changing patterns of migratory flows found Mexico City unprepared to accommodate the incoming waves of migrants. Figure 2 shows the statistics for foreigners detained in Mexico City without documentation over an 8 year period—a time that saw three U.S. presidents in office that were eager to keep undocumented immigrants in Mexico, and two Mexican presidents that were willing to oblige. The significant

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<sup>111</sup> Secretary of External Relations, “Visas and migratory documents,” Government of Mexico, Accessed November 28, 2021, <https://consulmex.sre.gob.mx/reinounido/index.php/es/contenido/75-general-information-on-visas-and-migratory-documents#:~:text=The%20National%20Institute%20of%20Immigration,and%20Mexican%20citizens%20in%20Mexico.>

<sup>112</sup> Evalúa “Ciudad de México 2020: Un diagnóstico de la desigualdad socio territorial” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, Government of Mexico City, August 2020, <https://www.evalua.cdmx.gob.mx/storage/app/media/DIES20/ciudad-de-mexico-2020-un-diagnostico-de-la-desigualdad-socio-territorial.pdf>. 21

<sup>113</sup> Figure 2

<sup>114</sup> CONAPO, “Porcentaje de la población inmigrante en México por entidad federativa, 2010,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, Mexican Government, Accessed December 3, 2021, <http://www.conapo.gob.mx/work/models/OMI/GeografiaMigratoria/PoblNmMex/1.pdf>.

increases in the number of detentions occurred in 2016, with 11,879 total. Since that year, the highest number of detentions was in 2018 with 8,032, a 32% decrease. However, this occurred at the time when higher levels of undocumented immigrants were traveling through and staying in Mexico City than before.<sup>115</sup> Thus, these numbers reflect the struggle Mexican authorities faced during the surge in immigrants, which continues to this day. As a result of a lack of apprehension and a slow processing system, many immigrants must turn to organizations on the ground for support—especially in the context of housing.

## Migratory Statistics for Foreigners without Documents in Mexico City

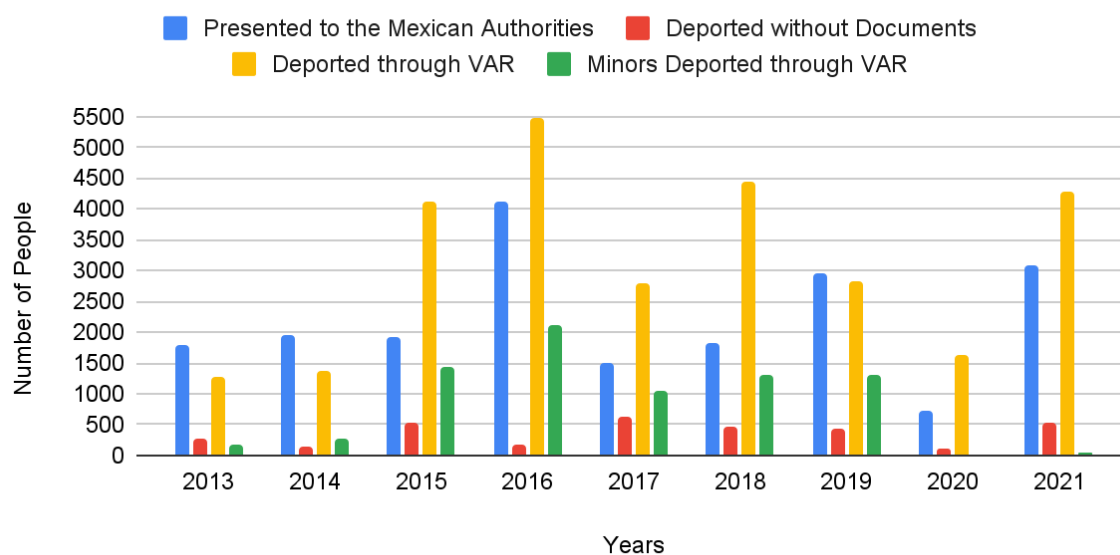


Figure 2: This graph shows the trends overtime of apprehended undocumented individuals in Mexico City, which correlates to the total amount of undocumented immigrants in the city. Presented to the Mexican authorities indicates the number of immigrants detained in Mexico City; Deported without documents indicates immigrants deported without any assistance from the Mexican government in securing travel documents; Deported through VAR (Voluntary Assisted Return) indicates immigrants who received some form of government assistance, either through acquiring documents or communicating with their home country, to facilitate the deportation process; Minors deported through VAR (Voluntary Assisted Return)

<sup>115</sup> Buckhout, “Tales from Mexico City Migrant Shelters”

indicates the same as the prior category, with respect to those under the age of 18. Source: Secretary of the Interior of Mexico

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The most prominent channel of ground-zero support for undocumented immigrants begins at shelters. In particular, Casa Tochán, CAFEMIN, Casa Mambré and Casa de los Amigos serve as primary points of contact for immigrants seeking housing. Located in Álvaro Obregón, Gustavo A. Madero, Miguel Hidalgo, and Cuauhtémoc respectively, these shelters are positioned in strategic locations throughout the city. Over the past decade, the boroughs within Mexico City that received the most immigrants were Iztapalapa, Gustavo A. Madero, Coyoacán, Cuauhtémoc, and Miguel Hidalgo.<sup>116</sup> Miguel Hidalgo and Cuauhtémoc in particular are central, easily accessible spots in the city, while Álvaro Obregón and Gustavo A. Madero have high concentrations of vulnerable immigrants that need access to shelters.<sup>117</sup> These shelters provide kitchens, privacy, bathrooms, and safety for migrants. Though at one point these locations were geared primarily toward women, children, and migrants seeking asylum, the migratory crisis has forced the agencies to accept immigrants on a first-come first-serve basis. The development of political and civil society organizing around the issue of immigration largely revolved around the needs these shelters have reported among the immigrant communities coming into the city, as well as the work of organizers in religiously-affiliated NGOs.

The civil society and political response to the influx of immigration in Mexico City has been motivated in large part by the response of on-the-ground organizations and

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<sup>116</sup> Evalúa, “Un Diagnóstico de la Desigualdad,” 41

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

religiously affiliated NGOs, rather than larger movements to raise awareness of the harsh realities immigrants face as some of the most vulnerable people in the city. The foundation of the action behind the immigrant rights movements throughout Mexico City have largely arisen from the foundations laid by migratory shelters and other organizations that work directly with immigrants. Casa Tochán, CAFEMIN, Casa Mambré and Casa de los Amigos are shelters that provide valuable services that meet immigrants' material needs, and they have close connections with organizations like Sin Fronteras (Without Borders), Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes (Jesuit Migrant Service), and civil society networks. These networks take the form of Iniciativa Ciudadana para la Promoción de la Cultura del Diálogo Asociación Civil (Citizens' Initiative for the Promotion of the Culture of Dialogue, Civil [Society] Association), the NGO Fundación para La Justicia y el Estado Democrático de Derecho (Foundation for Justice and the Democratic Rule of Law), REDODEM (Documentation Network of Migrant Advocacy Organizations), and the networks generated by international NGOs like the Mexico City branches of Habitat for Humanity, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the International Rescue Committee. The Mexico City-specific networks' campaigns and interconnection efforts did not begin until 2014, 2011, and 2013 respectively. The creation of these networks directly resulted from the need for a developed network infrastructure among shelters, advocacy groups and official administrative efforts to address the needs of immigrants in the city. Now, these groups all occupy different roles in the response to immigration, but their interconnectedness and education efforts have positively impacted general attitudes towards immigrants.

After addressing the basic material needs of refugees, these organizations and networks provide access to universal basic services and shoulder the work of educating and dispensing information to the general public. The push for education efforts resulted from a general lack of awareness in the political sphere of the circumstances surrounding and affecting immigrants, both in their home countries and once they arrived in Mexico. A politically-driven lack of awareness, coupled with no incentive to correct inadequate migratory infrastructure in Mexico City, left low-income migratory populations particularly vulnerable and lacking access to basic necessities, like safety, sustenance and shelter. Furthermore, political inaction prior to the involvement of civil society organizations led to public opinion on migration reflecting hostile and unwelcoming attitudes towards immigrants originally headed to the U.S. who instead chose to seek refuge/reside in Mexico rather than continue their journey north.

Thus, nonprofits like Sin Fronteras and the Jesuit Migrant Service began to offer “accompaniment” services, whereby people signed up to have trained personnel accompany them to the National Institute of Immigration field office, hospitals, police stations, churches and any other locations where immigration status might be an issue in receiving universal basic services.<sup>118</sup> They also acted as information-generating sites, through the collection and distribution of data, information and basic facts on immigration to disperse to the public. Casa Refugiados is another central nonprofit, which was formed in collaboration with the UNHCR in 1983. This organization began focusing on education efforts for immigrants and the general public in 1995. They created

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<sup>118</sup> “Acompañamiento,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes México. Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes México, Accessed November 29, 2021, <https://sjmmexico.org/acompanamiento/>.

a Facebook Page in 2017 (@ConfiaEnElJaguar—Confide in the Jaguar) dedicated to helping those who “left their countries of origin and need orientation... a Facebook page that tells you ‘What should I be aware of? Where can I get help? What are my rights?’”<sup>119</sup> Casa Refugiados also provides “workshops, courses, conferences and formative activities in... schools, universities, civil society organizations, religious organizations, companies, professional development groups, government institutions, international organizations.”<sup>120</sup> The Program of Migrant Cases (PRAMI) at the Ibero-American University in Mexico City, the oldest Jesuit university in Mexico, was created to reinforce the educational initiatives, in the form of advocacy and awareness, for the general public.<sup>121</sup> The legitimacy associated with the university bolstered the program’s efforts and helped convey information to political spheres. Since the early 2000s, the widespread, constant efforts of immigration advocacy within a small sector mainly occupied by shelters and grassroots NGOs has in turn proliferated networks that reach the rest of society, and gone so far as to influence political parties’ stances on the issue of immigration. Thus, the information campaign these nonprofits and NGOs undertook in tandem with their immigration advocacy efforts resulted in generating more positive outlooks in public opinion and comprehensive information on immigrants coming into Mexico City.

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<sup>119</sup> El Jaguar (@ConfiaEnElJaguar) profile page, trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, *Facebook*, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/ConfiaEnElJaguar/photos/a.589527731254408/1544820449058460/?type=1&theater>

<sup>120</sup> “Nuestra Acción: Educación Para La Paz.” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, Casa Refugiados. UNHCR. Accessed December 6, 2021. <http://casarefugiados.org/nuestra-accion/educacion-para-la-paz>.

<sup>121</sup> “PRAMI: Programa de Asuntos Migratorios,” trans. Sophia Ramirez-Brown, *IBERO Ciudad de México: Formación e Incidencia Ignacianas/PRAMI*, Accessed November 29, 2021 [https://prami.iberomx.mx/?\\_ga=2.37937251.1505292404.1638492212-509168864.1638492212](https://prami.iberomx.mx/?_ga=2.37937251.1505292404.1638492212-509168864.1638492212)

Beyond this realm of activism and education, the distinct lack of housing is still felt among undocumented, low-income immigrants. Shelters remain in a near-constant state of overcapacity. Affordable housing units are few and far between, and the demand for available spaces is so high that generally, residents that are citizens who access to government programs are prioritized for leases more so than undocumented immigrants. It is estimated that at any given time, around 50% of the population of individuals experiencing homelessness in Mexico City are foreign-born.<sup>122</sup> While shelters and NGOs attempt to fill the vacancy in housing by connecting undocumented immigrants to temporary housing solutions, a large amount of migrants who choose to stay in Mexico City experience homelessness and an inability to access critical housing resources until the documentation for their citizenship is finalized. The lack of affordable housing availability, especially for undocumented immigrants, is the direct result of domestic issues—like the housing crisis and a lack of infrastructure to handle the influx of migrants in Mexico City—that are exacerbated by the indirect influence of the international political and economic environment. However, it also reflects the broader issue of the criminalization of undocumented immigration that emerges from the a hostile international environment. The case of Mexico City shows that as long as xenophobia and hostile attitudes shape the international paradigm through which countries view immigration, domestic and local infrastructure/outcomes will reflect these broader attitudes and leave undocumented immigrants, already one of the most vulnerable populations in the world, reliant on the compassion of few.

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<sup>122</sup> Evalúa, “Un Diagnóstico de la Desigualdad,” 50



## Conclusion

Immigration and housing are two issues that, upon first glance, do not appear to have much overlap. However, after utilizing the indirect system effects model, the intertwined nature of the relationship between the two issues becomes increasingly apparent, especially on a local scale. Mexico City occupies a unique position in terms of both immigration and housing. As one of the most economically productive cities in the world, Mexico City encapsulates the merits of globalization and international cooperation. On the other hand, the wealth in the city is concentrated in the hands of corporate and political elites, a reflection of a broader pattern in the country whereby “the top 1% of the population in Mexico account for 21% of the wealth.”<sup>123</sup> For centuries, political and civil society advocates in the city have struggled to reconcile socioeconomic development with the harsh realities of poverty millions face daily. This reality becomes even more pervasive when considering one of the most vulnerable population in the city: undocumented immigrants. The dynamic nature of the ever-evolving needs, context, and policy of immigration and housing in Mexico City requires a model with the capacity to handle multiple points of analysis. This thesis utilizes the indirect system effects model to simplify the different influences and pressures exerted upon immigration and housing politics. Further, this model uses domestic and international variables of analysis to better understand the local situation undocumented immigrants face in Mexico City with respect to housing.

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<sup>123</sup> Paula Jimeno et. al, “Mexico City,” *ArcGIS StoryMaps*, Esri, December 7, 2020, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/0dca371a3b30462690d5e6df344cf07d>.

The indirect system effects model as presented by Stephen Chaudoin provides clarity on the unique relationship between systemic variables, domestic variables, and the output of interest of a given study. In applying this framework to the issues of immigration and housing, the international environment—with a particular emphasis on the economic and political interests, attitudes, and actions driving policy in the realm of immigration—represents the systemic variable. The consideration of the migratory terrains of the U.S. and Central America—which influence the flow of migrants, reasons for immigration and reveal the nation-specific circumstances of immigration—are also an element of the systemic variable that merit consideration in the model. The domestic variables in this thesis are the pattern of immigration flows into Mexico, the types of migrants and the pressures on domestic immigration and housing policy. These variables all arise as a result of the effect of the international environment on domestic institutions. The outputs of interest in this model are the direct result of the international environment, and the indirect influence of the international environment on domestic factors/institutions: immigrants' needs once they arrive in Mexico City, the local politics regarding immigration, civil society organizations and attitudes, and a consideration of the housing situation in Mexico City. This thesis has explored the pressures, tensions and product of the indirect system effects model through the scope of Mexico City, and the implications of this study show how versatile the model is to studies of the migratory movements that affect a wide variety of population dynamics.

Mexico City's housing and immigration concerns coalesce as a result of the interactions of civil society and government. History, circumstance and geography are not only formative to the creation of civil society interests, but relate to the immediate issues

of housing. Civil society and the politicians of the city attempt to tackle Mexico City's housing crisis in two distinct ways: i) by addressing the issue of forced evictions and ii) by weeding out corruption in the construction industry through raising awareness and government-civil society partnerships. These efforts, though conducive to addressing the immediate housing concerns of low-income residents and those at high-risk of eviction in areas like the city center, do not do enough to address the root causes of the housing crisis in the city. Furthermore, the impact of these solutions is limited in scope, as they do not provide more affordable housing units for undocumented immigrants seeking asylum and citizenship in Mexico City even in the face of benefits they provide to other marginalized residents. In terms of immigration, Mexico City has largely left migrant shelters, networks of advocates and civil society organizations to provide for the needs of immigrants in the city. As a result, these same organizations have shouldered the burden of creating awareness and opportunities for both migrants and the public. Efforts to integrate immigrants into Mexico City, through education, counseling, accompaniment to important facilities, and employment opportunities, is undertaken predominantly by shelters and NGOs who act independently from the city's government. This extends to the domain of housing, where very few affordable housing options and a generally unwelcoming atmosphere leaves immigrants stuck between a rock and a hard place in terms of long-term solutions for housing. The application of the indirect model showed how the international environment, and resulting tension between domestic policies, attitudes and reactions in the realm of immigration are felt most deeply on the ground among the extremely vulnerable undocumented immigrant population in places like

Mexico City, where the lack of infrastructure for these communities leaves them at the mercy of local politicians, elites and civil society groups.

The indirect system effects model simplifies the nuanced relationship between immigration and housing because the nature of the model itself allows for the dissection of complex, multivariable issues. Furthermore, the success of the analysis in this thesis is indicative of a broader forecast: that the indirect system effects model can be used to look at international conditions that affect the movement of people (both immigration and emigration) and the implications on domestic and local variables. With the advent of climate change, large scale political instability, the outbreak of diseases like COVID-19, and rising global xenophobic attitudes, countries all around the world are experiencing surges, both in terms of inflows and outflows, in the movement of people. Countries, like the U.S. and Mexico, which have historically been on the receiving end of immigration flows, are dealing with an unprecedented amount of migrants, especially from the global south. On the other hand, countries that never before dealt with significant migratory flows are experiencing immigration/emigration in a new capacity, and are forced to quickly develop infrastructure to accommodate these populations. This thesis employed a study of housing in conjunction with an analysis of immigration, but the domestic restrictions and availability on other basic necessities can be examined through the model. Regardless of the nature of immigration, the utilization of the indirect system effects model can help countries understand the international environments surrounding immigration, the domestic variables influenced as a result, and the outcome of interest in terms of resources and capacity. As we enter a global age of mass movement and disruption, frameworks like the indirect system effects model will enable states to

navigate the complex issue of immigration while also evaluating the circumstances of the most vulnerable groups in society.

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