

The Long Shadow of Immigration Enforcement Evidence from Mexico

This research studies a neglected **paradox of migration policies**: While migration seems not to be a relevant driver of violence and crime at destination, **forcing migrants to return casts a long shadow on their countries of origin in terms of violent crime.**

The Argument

Deportations may cause crime and violence back home through **several channels**:

1. Upon return, migrants may become **victims** of the violence they tried to escape.
2. There is qualitative evidence that **criminal groups specifically target deportees** who can easily be coerced into criminal activities due to the economic precariousness and stigma they face upon return.
3. Deportations may deprive both families and communities of transnational support systems (migrant remittances, access to a migration network). The resulting **social and economic precariousness** may pose more fertile ground for crime and violence

Empirical Approach

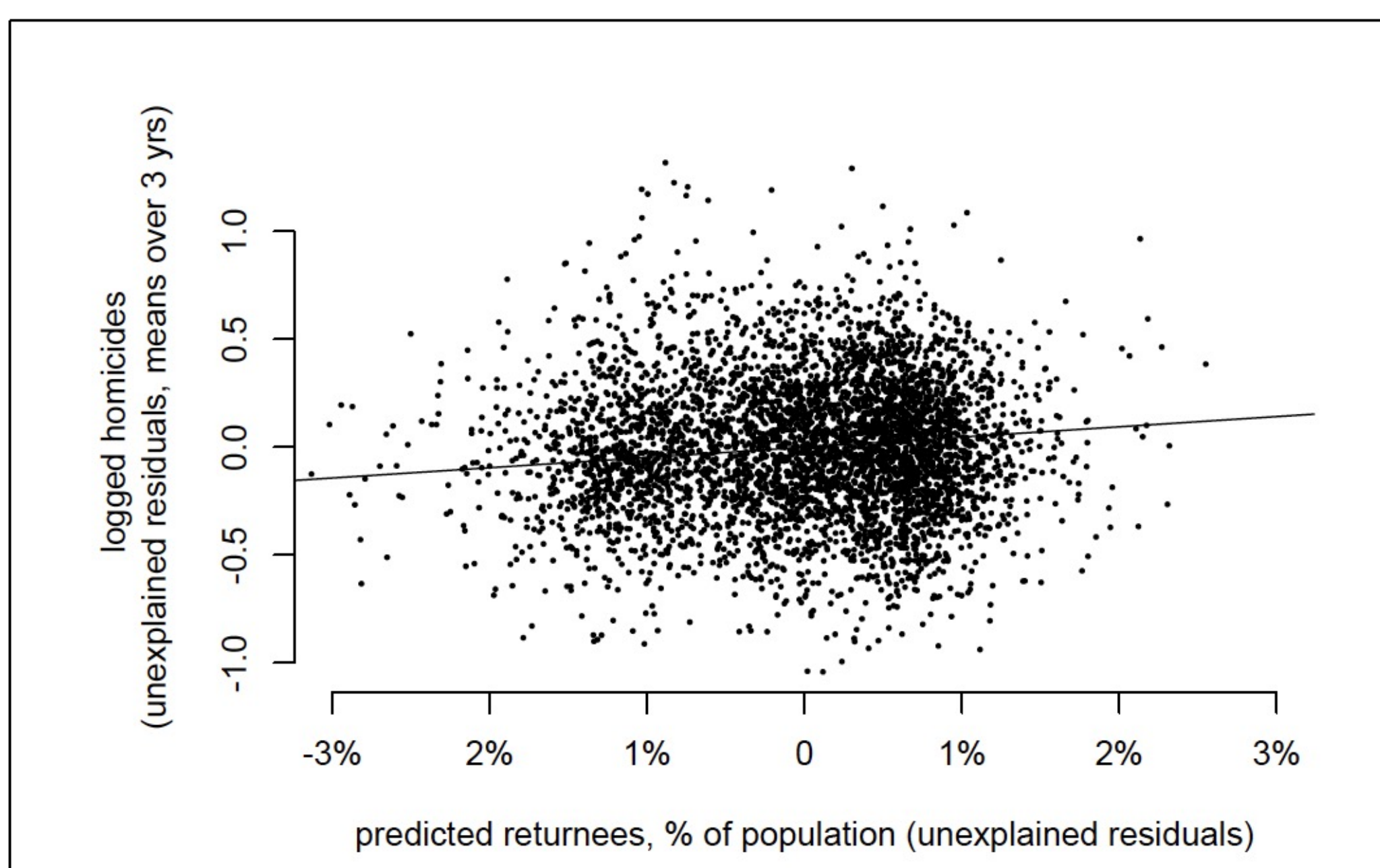
This paper **estimates the effect of forced return on indicators of violence for up to 2000 Mexican municipalities** over the period 2000 to 2015. **Year fixed effects** control for indicators that change for all municipalities at a given time (e.g. change in US policies defined at the national level). **Municipality fixed effects** control for time-constant geographic conditions as well as institutional or other historical legacies of municipalities that are constant over time.

Two **main challenges to a causal identification** remain:

1. Census data does not distinguish between voluntary and involuntary return.
2. The arrival of deportees could be **endogenous** to violence and crime. Other unobserved variables could cause both deportations and crime, for instance economic precariousness that could affect human mobility and violence. Or violence causes migration, and, in turn, more deportations (reverse causality).

Enforced Return and the Increase in Homicides: Second Step Results

Figure 5: Second Step Residual Plot



The horizontal axis depicts the part of the variation in return migration predicted in the first regression step using exposure to deportation threats as an instrument. The vertical axis shows the unexplained variation in logged homicides (controlling for time-varying control variables as well as municipality and year fixed effects). The figure is based on specification 2 in Table 4.

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The US Mexico Deportation Corridor

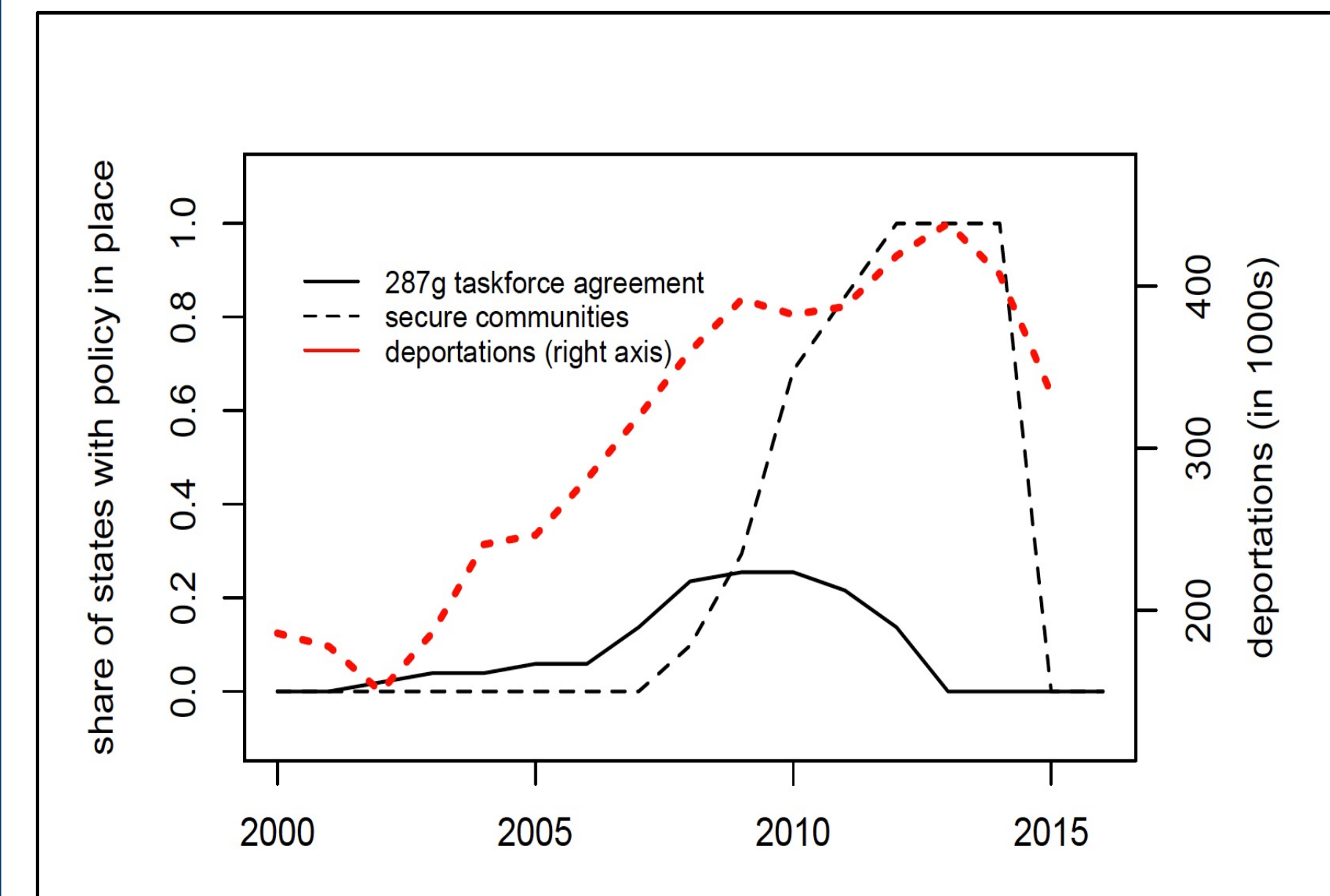
Since 2000, Mexico received almost **3.5 million deportees** or 71% of all deportations from the U.S., equivalent to some **3% of its population size**

Since 2000, two programs were implemented with the explicit goal of facilitating deportations:

1. **Secure Communities**: Local law enforcement agencies share data with US Immigration and Customs Offices (ICE). ICE then decide over deportations.
2. **287(g) Taskforce Agreement**: State and local police officers collaborate with the federal government to enforce federal immigration laws.

The **unequal and staggered implementation of both programs across U.S. states** provides a **natural experiment** that is exploited in the empirical strategy.

Figure 1: State-Level Enforcement Policies and Deportations



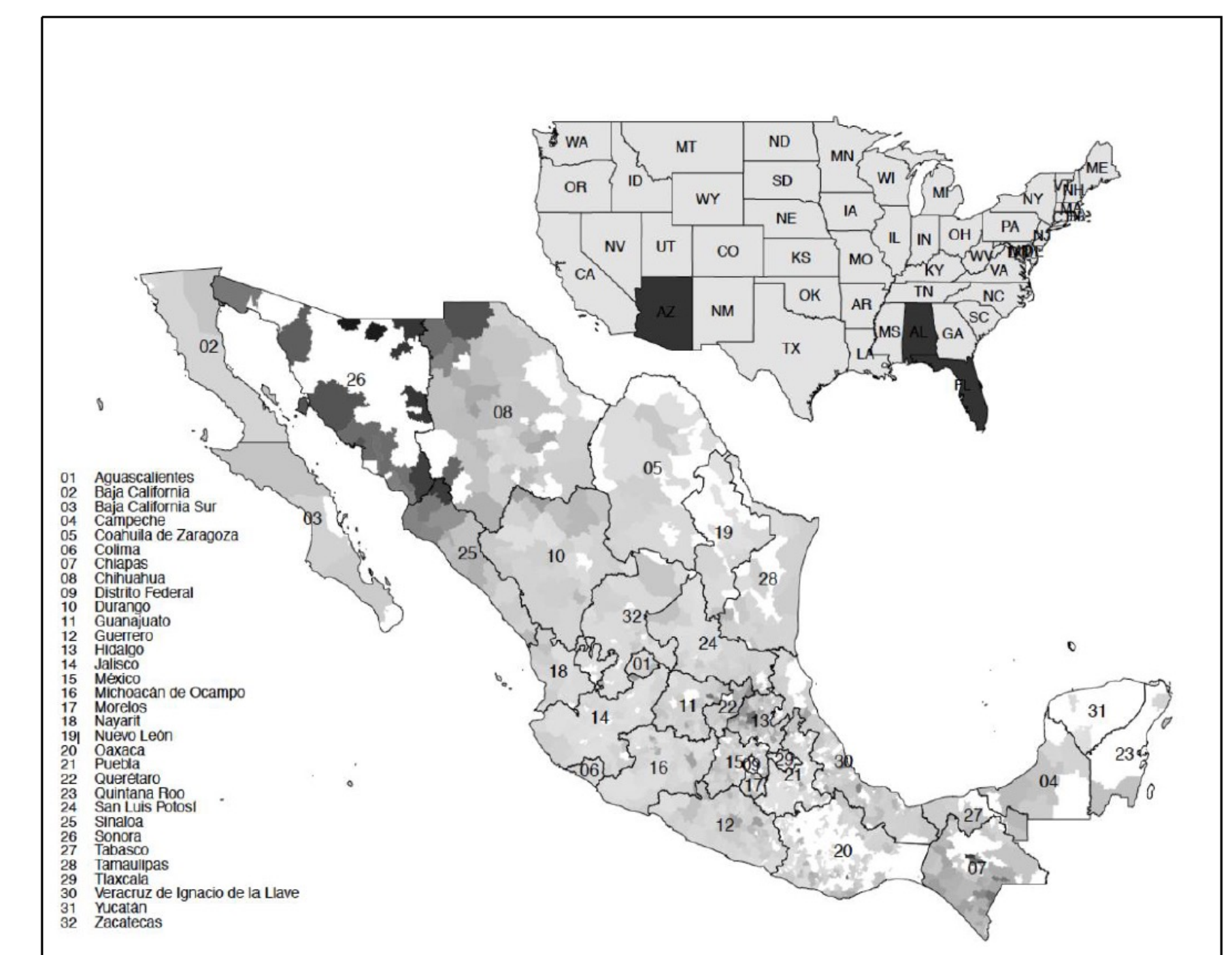
The graph shows the share of all states that employed the immigration enforcement policies *Secure Communities* and *287g task force agreements* in a given year, as well as total annual deportations (right-side vertical axis). Screenshot. See text for details.

Identification: Exposure to Deportation Risk

If migrants happen to live in U.S. states that implement *Taskforce Agreement* or *Secure Communities*, their deportation risk increases. I use this policy experiment to calculate an indicator of **exposure to deportation risk for each year and each municipality.**

Figure 2 illustrates for the year 2005 and *Task Force Agreement*: For instance, if migrants happened to live in dark shaded Arizona in 2005, the deportation risk for migrants from their municipalities of origin (e.g. the darker shades in the North-Eastern regions) increased. Since migration corridors don't change, it is this quasi-random exposure to an exogenous policy shock that identifies the measured effect.

Figure 2: Changes in the Exposure to the 287g Task Force Agreement (2005 vs 2000)



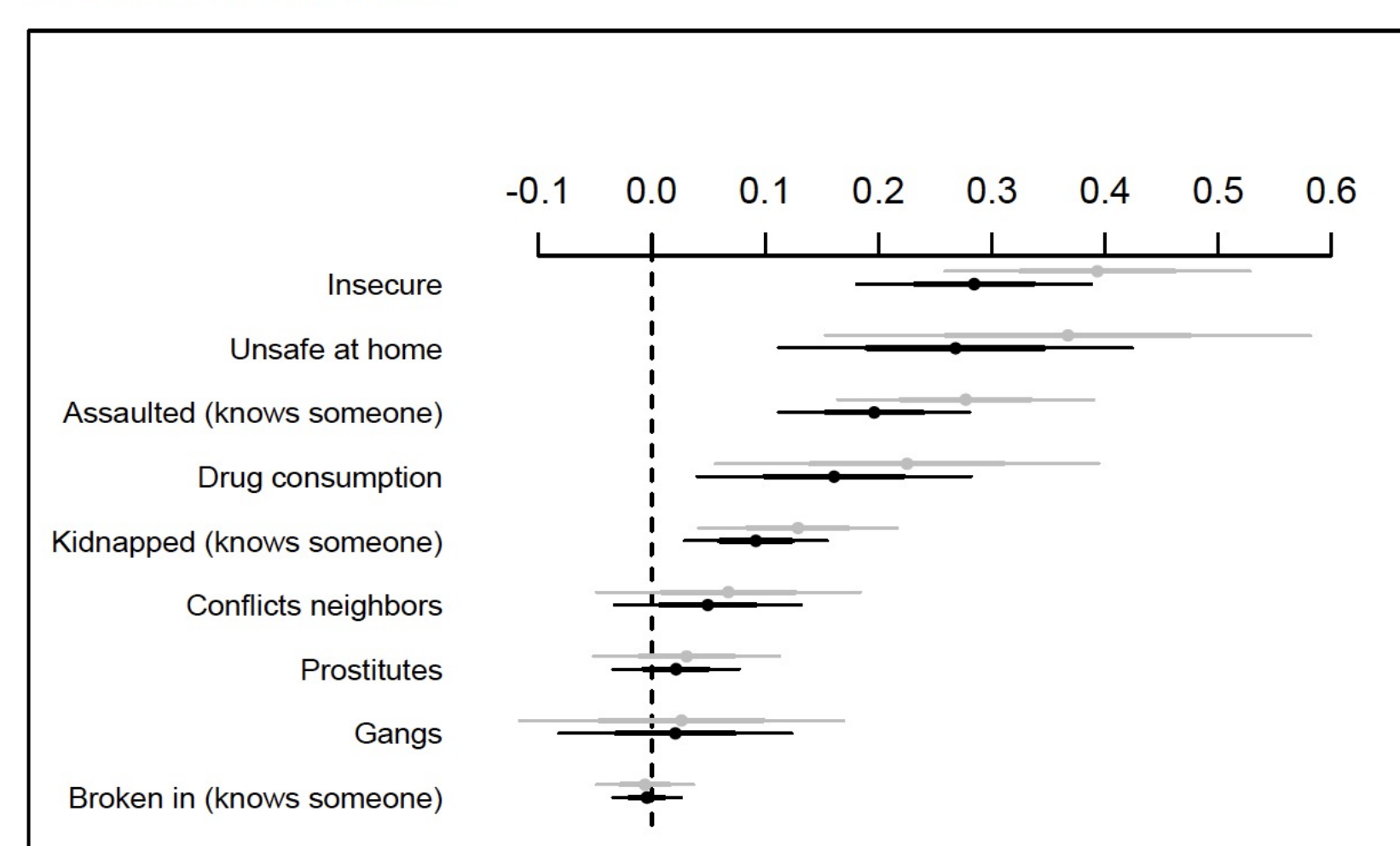
Two-Step Strategy

Exposure to deportation risk is used as an **instrumental variable** to predict return migration in a first step regression. This has two benefits:

1. Identify the subgroup of returnees that responds to deportation risk.
2. Clean the endogenous variable in the second step regression (return) by relying on exogenous variation only.

Perceptions of Crime & Victimization

Figure 6: Enforced Return and Household Level Indicators, Coefficient Plot for 2nd Step and Reduced Form Results



The coefficient plot graphs point estimates for predicted return migration at the municipal level and 95% confidence intervals for nine alternative indicators asked of household heads, using the same second-step specifications as in Columns 1 and 3 in Table 5. The grey bars show confidence intervals for reduced-form regressions from exposure to the *287g task force agreement*.

Summary

Deportation risk & enforced returns are associated with more homicides, a higher likelihood of presence of cartels, a higher sense of insecurity and a higher probability of being assaulted or kidnapped.

This study provides one step towards unpacking the channels through which immigration enforcement affects migrants' communities of origin and adds evidence to recent studies using a variety of approaches (Ambrosius & Leblang 2021, Ambrosius 2020, Roza et al. 2020). With funding from **Thyssen Foundation**, I will explore **drivers and consequences of deportation corridors** at the **country-by-country level** over the next years.

A preliminary version is available as SSRN working paper
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3725278