

Envisioning Mexico's Migration Future: Three Scenarios to Inform Policy and Transform Narratives

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Extended abstract

Theoretical focus

Immigration to Mexico and people on the move traveling North to the United States have been subject of much politics, and often very few empirical evidences. This is far from exclusive to the Mexico-United States case since politics is full of myths on migration (de Haas, 2023). In this case, maybe the most notable and heated allegations have been those from President Donald Trump during the 2016 election campaign and during his administration (2017-2021), but those from his more recent 2024 campaign are not behind in building-up an Anti-immigrant and Anti-Mexican rhetoric. This rhetoric associated migration from Mexico to violence and rape, or an invasion out of control, dehumanizing people to animals, and promoting the idea of threat (Verea, 2018). Trump promised to control migration building up walls and closing the border with Mexico, while also targeting people from Central America and Muslims. Controlling immigration and setting tougher immigration border controls and enforcement is not new in the United States: it started with 1986 IRCA and was later strengthened with the 1996 IIRAIRA and other legal actions that increased deportations of long-term residents and limited legal options for migration. These ideas have also resonated in Mexico. As pressures from the United States and tension from local actors increased, Mexico implemented new forms to control immigration mainly militarizing its southern border with Guatemala and limiting mobility through its territory preventing transit and preventing asylum seekers to arrive to the U.S.

Mexico has been a historical emigration country to the United States, but faces an increasingly complex migration reality. Return migration flows coexist with immigration of the foreign-born, transit and internal migration, forced internal displacement, as well as populations seeking international protection in Mexico and the United States. These migrant populations are present throughout Mexico, but show geographical concentrations which have been subject to increasing local tensions and questions on the governance of these migration flows. Although transit migration and immigration from Central American countries date back to the 1970s when political turmoil forced many to move north, the origins of international migrants have diversified over time, with an increase of interregional flows coming from South America and the Caribbean, as well as extra-continental flows from Africa and Asia (Masferrer et al., 2019).

Mexico is an unequal country with heterogeneous demographic dynamics (CONAPO, 2023). According to the most recent estimates, 126 million people lived at the beginning of 2020. This is twice the population living in France and less than half the population of the United States. Mexico is divided in 32 states with different population sizes. Recent population projections show a peak of close to 145 million people at 2050, and a population starting thereafter. Beyond variations in population size and population growth, Mexican states are not homogenous demographically: fertility decline and changes in life expectancy show large variations too. Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has declined since mid-1970s and is converging below replacement

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levels. At the national level, Mexico's TFR reached replacement level of 2.1 in 2014. Although life expectancy (LE) increased steadily between 1950 and 2006, it has been stagnated since then at the national and state-levels. At the national level LE is stagnated around 72 years among men and 78 years among women.

Thus, we aim to answer the following research questions: What is the demographic future of Mexico under three extreme migration scenarios, assuming no emigration, no immigration, as well as no emigration nor immigration? How different would this be to the projected future of an open population with emigration and immigration? Our aim is that by answering these questions and being cautious of the political uses of knowledge and the politics of immigration, we can inform better immigration policy in Mexico (Boswell, 2009).

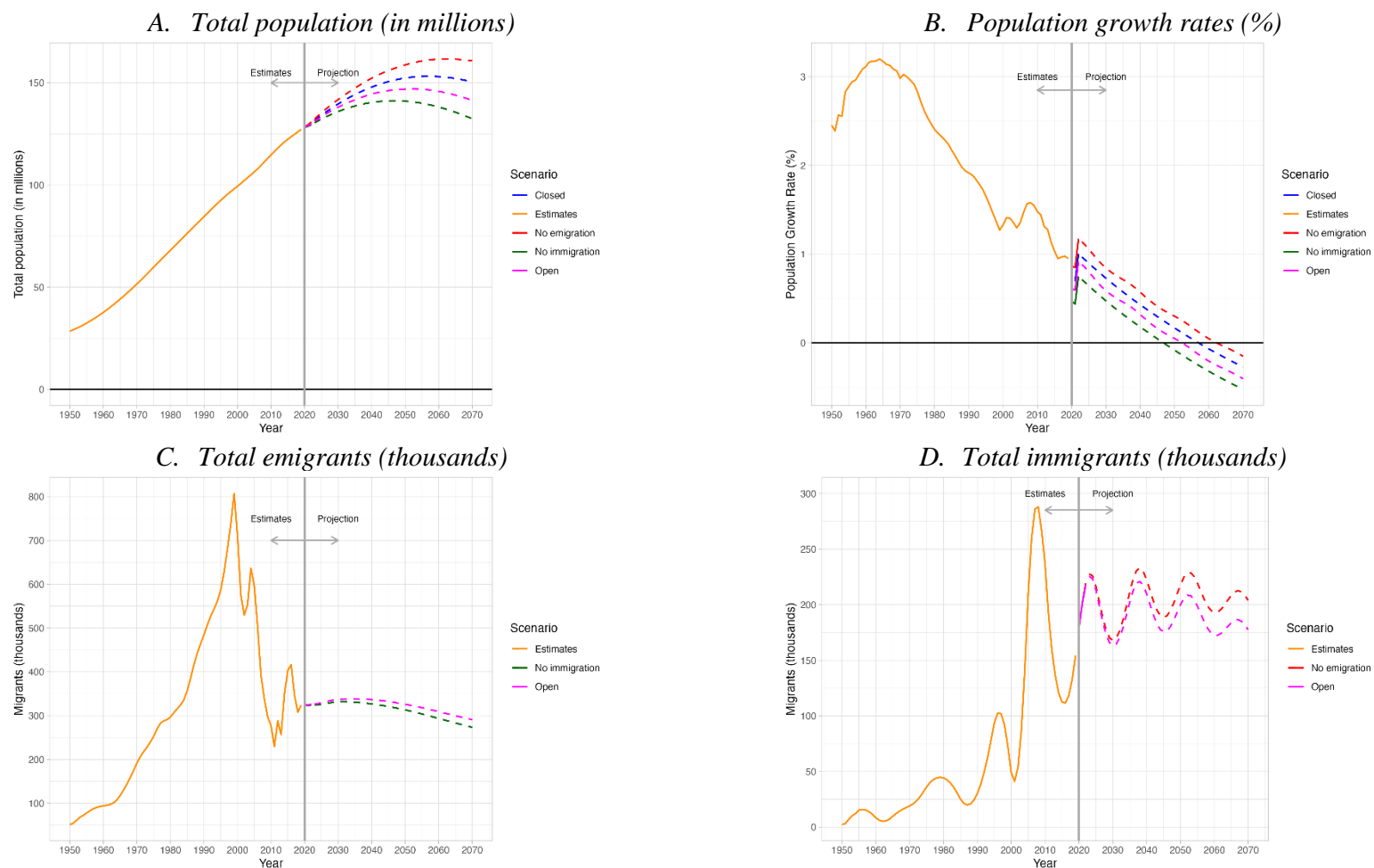
Data, measures, and methods

We use official population projections (2020-2070), recently published in 2023 by the Mexican National Population Council (CONAPO), along with the population estimates for 1950-2019, calculated using vital statistics, Mexican censuses and household surveys, as well as U.S. data (ACS, CPS, and census). Population projections were estimated using the Cohort Component Method that extrapolates historical trends using time-series analysis combining probabilistic and deterministic methods for calculating each demographic variable (CONAPO, *forthcoming*). Although fertility and mortality were projected probabilistically, migration (both internal and international) were deterministic considering, at the state level, a constant share of international migration and a constant redistribution of internal migrants across states. For this analysis, we use the same methodology as the official population projections, except for the three international migration scenarios: 1) no emigration; 2) no immigration; and 3) no emigration nor immigration. We compare our key focal dimensions at the national and state level, with scenarios of closed and open populations: total population, population growth, total migrants (emigrants and immigrants), age-structures, and dependency ratios.

Preliminary Results

Overall, the three extreme international migration scenarios show small differences with the official population projections, at the national level (see Figure 1). We find that emigration has a greater effect than immigration, which can be explained by the small share of immigrants in Mexico today, and that immigrants can emigrate later, so no emigration would be locking them in. Population decline is inevitable, but this is due to other demographic trends that are underway. At the state level, though, we find interesting differences on population decline (see Figure 2). While the northern border states show larger gaps between closed and open scenarios, Mexico City shows that open and closed scenarios are similar since emigration and immigration seem to compensate. In terms of age-structure, no emigration would imply population increase, especially elderly and youth while no immigration would imply an early start of the population decline, specially in working-ages (see Figure 3). As expected, an open population mitigates population aging and population decline. Constant shares of internal migration from official methodology implies small differences at the state level. Future steps of this analysis include exploring changing dynamics of internal migration associated with projects for redistributing migrants out of the northern and southern border towards the interior and development projects in southeast Mexico that are expected to reshape state-level dynamics.

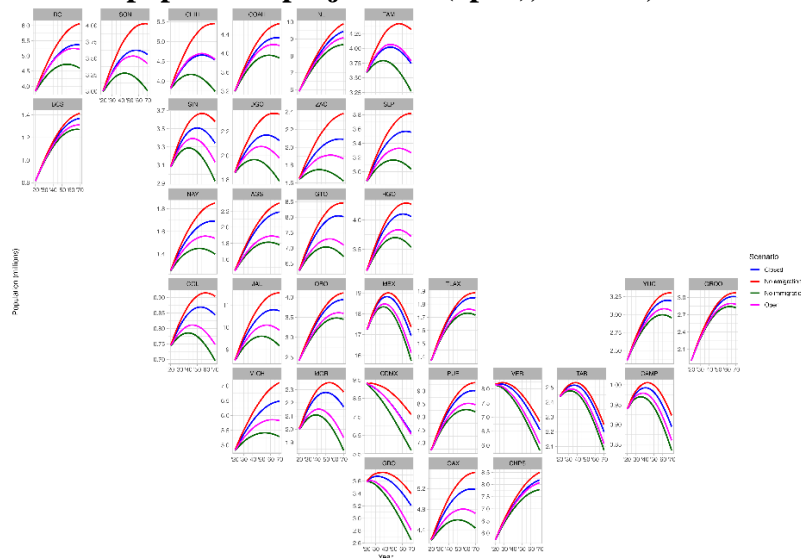
Figure 1. Estimated (1950-2019) and projected (2020-70) total population (A), population growth rates (B), total emigrants (C), and total immigrants (D), comparing three international migration scenarios and official population projections, Mexico



Source: Official population projections (CONAPO) and own estimates with three different international migration scenarios.

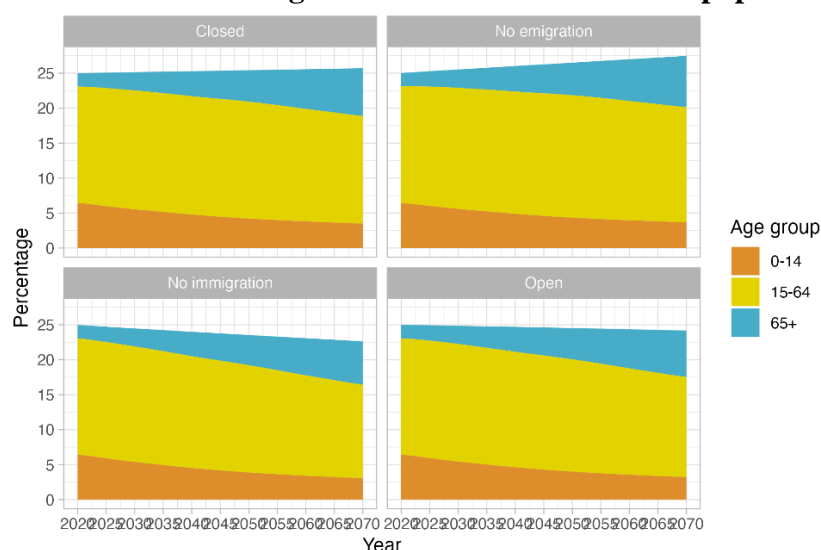
Note: Open scenario corresponds to official population projections, and closed scenario assumes no international emigration nor immigration.

Figure 2. Projected total population by state comparing three international migration scenarios with official population projections (open), Mexico, 2020-2070



Source: Official population projections (CONAPO) and own estimates with three different scenarios.
Notes: State-level graphs are located with a similar order as they are geographically located within Mexico.

Figure 3. Basic age-structure of projected population in Mexico (2020-2070) comparing three international migration scenarios with official population projections



Source: Official population projections (CONAPO) and own estimates with three different scenarios.
Note: Open scenario corresponds to official population projections, and closed scenario assumes no international emigration nor immigration.

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