

Smuggling and social anomie on the border between Colombia and Venezuela

Contrabando y anomia social en la frontera entre Colombia y Venezuela

Neida Albornoz-Arias^{a*}  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7851-5985>
Miguel Ángel Morffe Peraza^b  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9442-5242>

^a Universidad Simón Bolívar, Facultad de Administración y Negocios, Cúcuta, Colombia, e-mail: neida.albornoz@unisimon.edu.co; neida.albornoz.arias@gmail.com

^b Universidad Católica del Táchira, Facultad de Ciencias Jurídicas y Políticas, San Cristóbal, Venezuela, e-mail: mmorffe@ucat.edu.ve; miguelmorffe@gmail.com

Abstract

This study analyzed the relationship between the perception of an environment of illegality and people's non-normative behavior (anomie) regarding the crime of smuggling in the Department of Norte de Santander (Colombia) and in the State of Táchira (Venezuela). Data collected during the first half of 2022 from two population samples were analyzed: $n = 2\,385$ persons in the Department of Norte de Santander and $n = 1\,398$ persons in the State of Táchira. A hypothesis test was used, with the independent variables being the respondents' age groups and educational level (heads of household between 18 and 69 years old). The results show the existence of smuggling as a practice socially accepted by many citizens even though it is a crime, which is increased by the deterioration of commercial exchange between Venezuela and Colombia, the unilateral closing of border crossings, and therefore the deterioration of the quality of life of citizens.

Keywords: anomie, smuggling, border, violence, social exclusion.

Resumen

Este estudio analizó la relación entre la percepción de un ambiente de ilegalidad y el comportamiento de las personas no basado en normas (anomia) en relación con el delito del contrabando en el departamento Norte de Santander (Colombia) y en el estado Táchira (Venezuela). Se analizaron datos recolectados durante el primer semestre de 2022, de dos muestras poblacionales: $n = 2\,885$ colombianos en el Departamento Norte de Santander y $n = 1\,398$ venezolanos en el estado Táchira. Se utilizó un contraste de hipótesis, las variables independientes son los grupos etarios y nivel educativo de los encuestados (jefes de hogar entre 18 y 69 años). Los resultados muestran la existencia del contrabando como una práctica

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* Corresponding author: Neida Albornoz-Arias. E-mail: neida.albornoz.arias@gmail.com

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socialmente aceptada por muchos ciudadanos aun siendo delito, que se ve acrecentado por el deterioro del intercambio comercial entre Venezuela y Colombia, el cierre unilateral de los pasos fronterizos y el deterioro de la calidad de vida de los ciudadanos.

Palabras clave: anomia, contrabando, frontera, violencia, exclusión social.

Introduction

Throughout modern history, borders have represented spaces of constant interaction between social groups, and in which unique features are shown that differentiate these border areas from other geographical areas; thus, due to the social complexity of border areas, an analysis that goes beyond the geographical aspect is needed (Rhi-Sausi & Oddone, 2009). Similarly, border studies have undergone significant changes since the second half of the twentieth century, one study of which refers to the transdisciplinarity on which its analysis is focused (Newman, 2015). By the 1980s and 1990s, borders were seen as postmodern laboratories, where border societies are not defended or endangered but are mixed and become hybrid borders (Zuñiga, 2009). Recently, within the framework of postmodern approaches, the politics, practice, and perception (PPP) approach has emerged, under which “the limit is not simply a legal institution designed to guarantee the integrity of the territory of the State but a product of social practice” (Kolossov, 2005, p. 625).

In this approach, and from contributions from geography and social sciences, a closer understanding of borders is obtained from those who inhabit these regions (Tapia Ladino & González Gil, 2014). This consideration refers to the fact that perspectives have transformed from concerns about geographical limits, their termination in the territories, and the role of control of the states to concerns for their citizens, their interactions, and their experiences (Zapata-Barrero & Ferrer-Gallardo, 2012).

In the case of the borders of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), their location in the periphery has been the subject of many debates and discussions due to the institutional weaknesses that can be observed and the notion of security and defense that has defined the interactions in these regions, a vision that has influenced the multiple and complex problems identified in these territories. Most of these territories are bordering spaces with few communication routes and basic services that “fulfill a function of preserving the sovereignty of the State so that the predominant notion is to keep it underdeveloped and relatively isolated” (Bradshaw & Linares de Gómez, 1999, p. 15).

Moreover, one of the problems facing these border areas is violence, the particular features on the border of which are due to endogenous and exogenous factors in each region, the presence of various cross-border actors, and the existence of a border economy, where legal and illegal activities interact outside of legal, economic, and political bases and logic (Carrión & Espín, 2011). For example, on the Colombian-Venezuelan border, the infractions of the law that stand out are linked to organized crime, which creates new opportunities for doing business with illegal markets: food and hygiene products, medicines, and the black market for foreign exchange and electronic artifacts. That is, “These new markets, where organized crime operates, come to join the already traditional markets of drug trafficking, extortion, kidnapping, and hitmen” (Briceño-León & Camardiel, 2015, p. 9).

For practical purposes and the study of functional relationships, the Colombian-Venezuelan border, which spans 2 219 kilometers, is roughly divided into urban, active periphery, and passive periphery given its geographical characteristics and ways of occupying the space and socioeconomic activities (Oliveros, 2002). Similarly, urban areas include Táchira state (Venezuela) and Norte de Santander department (Colombia); the active periphery includes the Zulia state and La Guajira, Cesar, part of Norte de Santander, and Arauca departments; and the passive periphery includes Apure and Amazonas states and Vichada and Guainía departments, as well as part of Arauca. In each region, the border relationship leads to different problems depending on the cooperation-or-conflict situation in the bilateral relationship (Bustamante, 2011).

Within the social practices linked to the Colombian-Venezuelan border, for example, the case of the Guajira region to the north of both nations is observed, in which there is a gap between the norms and sociocultural objectives regarding smuggling within the social group by ethnic groups, which have populated this region for a long time, that been historically recognized; however, this gap is the basis for the origin of crime and criminal practices (González-Plazas, 2008).

About the border shared by Táchira state and Norte de Santander department, the geographical, theoretical, and traditional notions of the border as a space for safeguarding national sovereignty have disappeared for different reasons. The first reason is geographical, referring to a geographical depression surrounded by mountains that for centuries, made communication with the capitals of both countries difficult but made contact between inhabitants possible (Sánchez & Bustamante, 2008). The second reason refers to some historical ties rooted in the inhabitants of this border area. In fact, in the city of Cúcuta (Colombia), the first Constitution of Colombia was promulgated in 1830, of which Venezuela was also a part.

Indeed, until the end of the nineteenth century, the region was considered unique and different in several ways about the countries to which it was loyal by displaying a particular regional and border identity, even forming a common integrated space that exceeds the international limit of the states to which these countries belong (Bustamante, 2004).

Likewise, the historical link between Táchira state and Norte de Santander was reflected in their complementary economies, where families were united, studied, and lived on one side of the border or the other and communicated with the world through the port of Maracaibo (a city in the north of Venezuela). Due to the exchange and transit that took place between the inhabitants of both sides, trade, migration, and cross-border transportation characterized this border region (Sánchez & Bustamante, 2008). These events influenced the region's vision of the border being more permeable and less rigid and separating than in the traditional vision; this border is an area where cooperation is reflected in daily life with the preeminence of the factual over the legal or formal, although by the beginning of the twentieth century, loyalties toward each of the countries were reinforced (Sánchez, 2011).

In the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century, the cities of San Cristóbal (Táchira) and Cúcuta (Norte de Santander) were recognized as the hub cities of informal and habitual relationships from the socioeconomic point of view of Colombia and Venezuela (Suárez, 2015). It is estimated that 85% of the economic interrelation between Colombia and Venezuela was carried out by the contiguous land spaces between Táchira state and Norte de Santander department (Cámara de Comercio de Cúcuta [ccc], 2018).

Moreover, the departure of Venezuela from the Andean Community of Nations (ACN) in 2006—the only integration scenario in which both countries were linked and through which trade protocols were governed—began to affect trade between the two countries (Sainz Borgo, 2007). Historically, Venezuela has been the main trading partner of the Norte de Santander department, which has come to represent up to 90% of departmental exports. Between 2008 and 2010, this participation level decreased by 66 percentage points, from 90% to 24%. Similarly, between 2000 and 2012, the GDP of Norte de Santander increased from \$4.9 billion to \$7.6 billion in constant terms (Sánchez Jabba, 2014). In this way, the weakening of commercial exchange may have a detrimental effect on the economic and social conditions of the inhabitants of the Táchira-Norte de Santander border by increasing the level of social conflict and the evolution of other negative social phenomena (Preusse, 2007).

In this regard, according to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism of Colombia, 2008 exhibited the greatest commercial exchange between Colombia and Venezuela. In that year, bilateral trade (exports plus imports) between the two countries exceeded 7 billion dollars. Then, a crisis occurred in Venezuela, and trade began to decline, decreasing to the lowest figure in 2020 when it approached 222 million dollars. In 2021, trade began to increase and close at 394 million dollars but did not reach the averages of those years in which bilateral trade flowed smoothly (Ministerio de Comercio, Industria y Turismo de Colombia [Mincit], 2022).

In contrast, even though the cooperation and assistance between the citizens and economic sectors of the Táchira-Norte de Santander border favored the avoidance of many social conflicts over the centuries, the unilateral closure of the border crossings beginning in August 2015 by Venezuela (Bustamante, 2019) and the 2020 pandemic helped externalize the socioeconomic crisis in the region. Moreover, these events led to social phenomena that were typical of the border, such as smuggling, which was always present but furtive behind the curtain of commercial exchange and development, as foreshadowed at the border.

Indeed, smuggling on the Táchira-Norte de Santander border is an illicit activity that has persisted since the end of the colonial period, despite recent efforts to develop the region, as this activity occurs both in remote border areas with difficult access (trails) and in formal border crossings controlled by the states (Avila Rivera, 2019; Gallien & Weigand, 2021; García Pinzón & Mantilla, 2021). Consequently, smuggling on this border has also promoted the presence of armed groups that operate using violence, corruption, or other means to achieve, either directly or indirectly, economic benefits, among others (Mazuera-Arias et al., 2019; Niño et al., 2012).

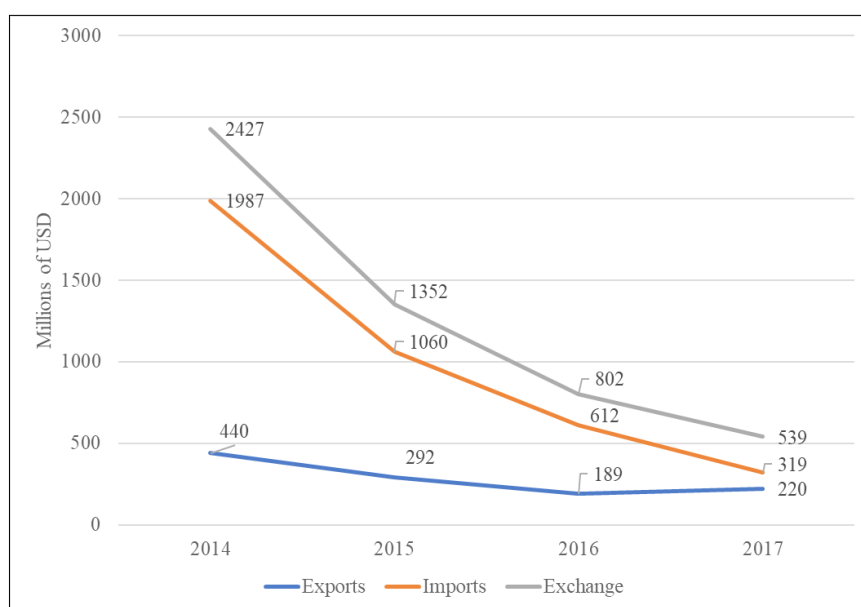
Although the context of Norte de Santander and Táchira has common economic and social peculiarities, how to understand the behavior of the population in the face of phenomena such as smuggling and its approval as a form of subsistence has always been the subject of discussion (Ramírez Martínez, 2017). In the same way, it is observed that the respect, solidarity, or mutual support manifested by border inhabitants when facing problems denote essential features of social cohesion in any society; however, such capacities of these citizens are being eroded by the legitimization of crimes, such as smuggling and extortion, by admitting their occurrence through arguments contradicting the acceptance of the imposed social norms (Albornoz-Arias, Mazuera-Arias et al., 2019; Albornoz-Arias, Ruscheinsky et al., 2019; Morffe Peraza, 2014).

The effects of the decline in trade between Venezuela and Colombia were immediate. According to the National Administrative Department of Statistics (Departamento

Administrativo Nacional de Estadísticas [DANE], 2015), this behavior has slowed the development of many sectors and has also led to the goal of eliminating or lessening the serious problem of smuggling, the flow of which has increased due to incentives for illegal trafficking from Venezuela, a product of the enormous exchange rate and price differential.

In effect, the trade balance continued to decline (Figure 1) to the extent that the likelihood of a political crisis was increasing in Venezuela and unleashed multiple economic and social problems that impacted the weak economy of the Colombian-Venezuelan border and that was reflected even more so after the unilateral stoppage of border crossings in Venezuela in August 2015 (Cámara de Integración Económica Venezolano Colombiana [Cavecol], 2018).

Figure 1. Commercial exchanges between Colombia and Venezuela (2014-2017)



Source: Cavecol, 2018

For the first semester of 2021, according to the Directorate of National Taxes and Customs (Dirección de Impuestos y Aduanas Nacionales [DIAN], 2022) of Colombia, the annual variation in the level of smuggling in Norte de Santander department concerning the previous semester and year, that is, 2020, showed an increase of 164.8%, with a participation rate of 4.9% of the value learned throughout the national territory; these figures denote an increase in the percentage and value of the contraband merchandise retained after the closure of the border as well as the pandemic. Likewise, the impediment of the passage of cargo vehicles with various products through international bridges and the deactivation of customs in the border area reinforced the illegality between Colombia and Venezuela. This phenomenon was manifested by the high percentage of illicit activities of Colombians and Venezuelans, such as the smuggling of contraband across the border, considering the various informal, illegal steps that unite both nations (Avila Rivera, 2019; Redacción Economía, 2020).

About smuggling at this border, there are two modalities: 1) the passage of small quantities of merchandise without paying tariffs or taxes and 2) the passage of large quantities of merchandise without paying tariffs or taxes. The case of small quantities (less than 12 kilos, units, or liters) was concentrated in the passage of food and products of mass consumption due to the gains generated by the differential in the exchange rate between the currencies of Colombia and Venezuela, while the passage of large quantities was linked to paramilitary groups or criminal organizations that fought for control of the roads or informal routes for the transit of goods (Albornoz Arias et al., 2016; García Pinzón & Mantilla, 2021).

Therefore, the complexity of this social phenomenon requires going beyond the consideration of the practice as a crime, with the needs, absence of the state, violence, customs, and old-fashioned social constructions that have cemented social, economic, and cultural relations of this border region being combined (Albornoz-Arias, Ruschinsky et al. 2019; Martínez Herrera, 2017). Thus, smuggling is related to the social integration of individuals in the border society, which makes its acceptance normal from a cultural perspective, understood as a social construct (González Palma, 2017) and, in the same way, as an economic practice carried out by many people in union with the family (Giddens, 2009). Smuggling is even considered a normal way of life in the face of unemployment and a lack of employment opportunities (Idler, 2019; Nikooy et al., 2022); “the cultural pattern of smuggling is undoubtedly one of the social forms that become familiar as it grows” (Cavalier Adarve & García Villegas, 2009, p. 167; Dorfman, 2015).

In this complex context of the illegal activities, the absence of institutions, socio-economic crises, and noncompliance with social norms that describe the current Táchira-Norte de Santander border, this smuggling phenomenon can be represented with “the concept of prohibited areas, to imply those conditions under which, for different reasons, noncompliance with the norm (specifically the law) is normal, either always or in certain circumstances” (Dahrendorf & Ortiz, 1990, p. 193). Likewise, this phenomenon can also be explained by the concept of “anomic state” to refer to the following:

(...) Situations that lack any social regulation, as Durkheim imagined them, are constituted in social reality rather than being a rare exception (...) a social situation is anomic when clear, consistent, punishable, and accepted norms or rules are lacking to some extent by society to direct social behavior and provide orientation (...) States can also develop anomic characteristics. (Waldmann, 2006, p. 214)

By September 25, 2022, after seven years of blocking the crossing of vehicles and restricting commercial exchange through this border area, the governments of Venezuela and Colombia reestablished free passage through all border confluence points between the two countries (Hernández, 2022). Even so, the deterioration of the economy in Venezuela and its consequent humanitarian crisis continued, thus generating uncertainty about the positions that presage the reduction in smuggling at the border, a practice that has continued after the aforementioned border reopening. Among those goods exchanged mainly from Colombia to Venezuela are automobiles, auto parts, footwear, cell phones, cigarettes, clothing, office supplies, appliances, jewelry, toys, liquors, medicines, textiles, and other goods (“En Cúcuta la Policía Fiscal y Aduanera”, 2022).

In this regard, Dorfman (2020) maintained that smuggling is a geographical or spatial practice since it essentially works with the different situations at the border; that is, “if there were no border, no two different production systems and no two separate markets, then there would be no reason to smuggle” (Dorfman, 2020, p. 155). Likewise, Ratti and Schuler pointed out that “the differential impact of a border implies inequalities in the levels of prices, income, wages, social protection and services offered to the population” (Ratti & Schuler, 2013, p. 7). In addition to the abovementioned reasons, as this reopening has been recent, data on the reduction or increase in smuggling on the border shared by Venezuela and Colombia are not yet available; therefore, it is difficult to question the changes in social anomie.

In this sense, this work is divided into five sections. The first section, the introduction, which includes the background of the Colombian-Venezuelan border and its social, cultural, and economic dynamics, explains smuggling as a way of life for border citizens and highlights the associated breach of regulations. The second section offers a conceptual framework of social anomie understood as the absence or breach of norms. The third section includes the methodology used during manuscript preparation. The fourth section presents the results and discussion, while the fifth and final section presents the conclusions.

Although the literature on the smuggling of goods in border regions is extensive, to date, studies have overlooked the relationship between the cultural and institutional factors that explain the environment of illegality and the behavior of people not based on norms in the Táchira-Norte de Santander border. For this reason, the study focuses on concepts from the theory of social anomie to explain the smuggling of goods and explore the institutional imbalance, cultural characteristics of society, and smuggling trend in the aforementioned border area.

Toward a contextualization of social anomie

Social anomie is a concept that arose during the emergence of the field of sociology in the mid-nineteenth century and is attributed to French sociologist Emile Durkheim, who developed it in the following two works: *De la division du travail social*, originally published in 1893, and *Le suicide*, dating from 1897. This concept has been extensively addressed in the social sciences and is characterized by multiple perspectives and definitions (Paraless-Quenza, 2008).

Etymologically, the term social anomie comes from Greek and means the absence of norms or the normative deficiency produced by the lack of adequacy among the norms, values, and cultural objectives of a given society. Likewise, anomie is a traditional sociology concept that means the absence of norms or the disobedient tendency of rules, both at the collective and individual levels, that is when the norms are not permanently observed (Reyes Morris, 2008).

In this same context, the concept of anomie is closely linked to that of social control, which was attributed to traditional nineteenth-century sociology, in its beginning when it was under the influence of the positivism of Augusto Comte and the evolutionism of Charles Darwin and Herber Spencer, to the violent instincts of human beings, aggressions against society, and all kinds of anomalous behavior referring to the most primitive origins of humanity, such as irrationality and an exacerbated animality (Raison, 2009).

For his part, Durkheim (2008) argues that social control is a necessity that produces, among other elements, social cohesion and avoids chaos at the level of human actions, from which he recognizes three forms of social regulation on which the notion of social control relies: ethics, morals, and laws. Ethics involve the norms and principles of every individual; they are particular to particular human being. Morality has a religious origin and is communal since it is linked to the dominant religion in a given society. Finally, the law is linked to the appearance of the state, and its effectiveness depends on the social contract, according to contractual doctrines (Rawls, 2012).

Moreover, anomie is related to the concept of social control that resides fundamentally in society, for which human happiness can be guaranteed only if the pleasures of the individual are limited by socially accepted norms; that is, if the norms disintegrate, then the individual can be plunged into a state of personal disorganization that extends to the social sphere (Durkheim, 2007, 2008, 2013). Even the possibility of overcoming anomie lies in the same need of every society to reintegrate the social order because work and professional ethics are the main modes through which to overcome anomie.

Similarly, social anomie can also be understood as the inability of a society to integrate different individuals so that they receive the benefits provided by social life; that is, anomie is the inability of society and the state to grant social benefits to all members; therefore, those individuals in a situation of anomie are, in a certain sense, outside the control of the state and social control and trying to subsist and live while being partially or excluded from social and state benefits (Durkheim, 2007, 2008, 2013).

Likewise, the concept of anomie has evolved, describing behaviors and roles in different social spaces. In this way, social anomie is “outside the normativity established by society and proposed by the State” (Merton, 1980, p. 212), alluding to U.S. culture as a culture that tends to build an anomic society. This description can be understood in multiple ways. First, U.S. society is associated with exclusion, especially at the racial level, where minority groups such as African Americans, Hispanics, and Muslims are excluded, in one way or another, from social benefits and, in many ways, state cases. Second, because the U.S. is a society where anomalous behavior prevails and incites crime and the violation of social norms of coexistence and current laws, that is, involving people being outside the scope of legal norms, the country is said to be in a situation of anomie (Merton, 1980).

The possibilities of falling into anomie differ from one individual to another due to the social structures in which they live since the individuals belonging to the lowest strata of society are more likely to be subjected to stronger social pressures to achieve their goals and, thus, resort to illicit solutions that lead them directly to an anomic state (Featherstone & Deflem, 2003; Merton, 1980). This proposed distinction allows us to differentiate social anomie from legal anomie, although the common origin of all types of anomie is the violation, to some extent, of social control. Indeed, the rules are considered to have been violated when societies face difficulties enforcing them. Moreover, anomie describes a situation in which the violation of the norms goes unpunished (Dahrendorf & Ortiz, 1990).

However, Zieglle (1998) proposes returning to the concept of anomie as a fundamental tool for interpreting novel phenomena such as mafias, especially those linked to drug trafficking and extends the concept of legal anomie to all aspects related to organized crime at the national and international levels. Consequently, offending individuals have particular psychological traits that can be interpreted as positive: they are bold, ambitious, self-confident, and innovative and strive to achieve their goals,

which is why anomie acts as a social situation in which such individuals are prone to committing crimes (Briceño-León & Camardiel, 2015).

In this same sense, Messner and Rosenfeld (1997, 2007) propose the theory of institutional anomie, which explains the relationship between social institutions, such as the economy and culture, at when guiding the behavior of people toward the fulfillment of social norms. For this reason, societies are more vulnerable to institutional imbalances when culture does not compensate for the predominant influence of the economy; they have higher levels of crime because their social fabric faces institutional imbalances, such as economic asymmetries, which dominate the capacity of noneconomic social institutions, such as education, family, and politics, to regulate such behavior (Baumer & Gustafson, 2007).

Therefore, anomie is a polysemic term that has been subject to interpretations from various disciplines. In psychology, scholars show the psychological interpretation of anomie that emerges from Merton's approaches, which is associated with feelings of impotence, abandonment, and hopelessness (Muratori et al., 2013). One study points out that anomie occurs due to the instability between the goals proposed by society and the actual achievements of individuals. This social anomic state is observed in subjects in whom the sense of social condition is fragmented and weakened (López Fernández, 2009).

In LAC, there are various contributions to understanding the concept of anomie. In this regional context, Waldmann (2006) considers anomie any situation that lacks social regulation, in which states can also develop anomic characteristics that go beyond the current limits owing to Latin American states being unable to put into practice the laws formulated and approved by different parliaments.

Conversely, the extension of the term anomie covers the violation of the norms of coexistence, with which the existence of social anomie is understood not only when the moral, ethical, or legal norms are violated but also when the rules of citizen coexistence are violated, for example, any transgression that affects civic life, ranging from painting graffiti to dumping garbage on public roads (Nino, 2011).

Regarding the practice of smuggling on the Táchira-Norte de Santander border, it is important to consider the situation of social anomie due to an activity that is outside the legal norms being carried out by families, armed groups, and others. Although such illicit activities have been culturally accepted at this border for centuries, the economic growth experienced by the region in recent decades has been overshadowed by events such as Venezuela's departure from the ACN, the unilateral closure of the border crossings in 2015, and the 2020 pandemic, which spurred the resurgence of smuggling as an imperative practice.

Methodology

The objective of this study was to analyze the relationship between the perception of an environment of illegality and the behavior of people not based on norms (anomie) about the crime of smuggling in Norte de Santander department (Colombia) and Táchira state (Venezuela) (dependent variable). The dependent variable was selected considering that a characteristic of borders between countries in LAC is that they are marked sociospatial and economic relationships, among which there is a

culture of bonding between people and smuggling. These relationships are associated with corruption, bribery, and extortion, which are born and spread by sociopolitical factors, economic and legal asymmetries, and institutional and ethical-cultural aspects (Carrión M., 2011; Kim & Tajima, 2022; Mazuera-Arias et al., 2019).

This study was investigated with a quantitative approach, and an exploratory-descriptive nature and nonprobabilistic sampling were used with the snowball technique. Data from two population samples were analyzed: $n = 2\,385$ Colombians in Norte de Santander department and $n = 1\,398$ Venezuelans in Táchira state. A hypothesis test was performed, where the independent variables were the age groups and education levels of respondents.

Age was considered a demographic indicator of the population from a static perspective, that is, the age of the respondent at the time of being consulted, which was used to contrast the perception of an environment of illegality with the behavior of people not based on norms in the face of smuggling, at the border of Norte de Santander department and Táchira state. This work sought to demonstrate if the border dynamics and experienced inconveniences are the same for all people or if there is a distinction by age group regarding the existence and compliance of regulations. The education level achieved by respondents was another factor considered for the study and was justified because the purpose of education is to instill wisdom in individuals so that they know how to use the significant knowledge and skills acquired properly and, at the same time, exhibit cultural characteristics (Whitehead, 1957).

A structured survey was sent to people (heads of household) between 18 and 69 years old during the first semester of 2022. All the people surveyed read the informed consent and voluntarily agreed to respond to the survey. The hypotheses proposed according to the perception of an environment of illegality and the behavior of people not based on norms were as follows:

1. H0. There are no significant differences among the age, the perception of an environment of illegality, and the behavior of people not based on regulations in the face of smuggling in the border region of Norte de Santander, Colombia.
2. H0. There are no significant differences among the education level, the perception of an environment of illegality, and the behavior of people not based on regulations in the face of smuggling in the border region of Norte de Santander, Colombia.
3. H0. There are no significant differences among the age, the perception of an environment of illegality, and the behavior of people not based on regulations in the face of smuggling in the border region of Táchira state, Venezuela.
4. H0. There are no significant differences among the education level, the perception of an environment of illegality, and the behavior of people not based on regulations in the face of smuggling in the border region of Táchira state, Venezuela.

Likewise, the variables investigated are qualitative in nature and measured on an ordinal scale. The verification of the assumptions of normality was carried out using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which showed no significance in the assumption of the normality

of the distribution; therefore, nonparametric or free-distribution Kruskal-Wallis H tests were used. Significance level $\alpha = 0.05$ for the comparisons of hypotheses on the existence of significant differences between two or more groups of independent variables: *a)* age groups (18 to 25 years, 26 to 35 years, 36 to 50 years, and 50 years or older) and *b)* education level (none/elementary, complete elementary, incomplete high school, full high school, technical, and university). The dependent variable is the ordinal or nominal type (perception of an environment of illegality and the behavior of people not based on norms in the face of smuggling). These *post hoc* comparisons between pairs allow us to identify any pairwise differences. Kendall's Tau-b coefficient is used as an indicator of the strength and directionality of this association.

Results and discussion

Norte de Santander department, Colombia

Table 1 lists the hypothesis to be tested for each of the independent variables (age group and education level). Equally in agreement with the results, the majority of the inhabitants of Norte de Santander, regardless of age group, agree or strongly agree that an environment of illegality and the behavior of people not based on norms in the face of smuggling is visualized in the border area; that is, there are agreements between people and/or institutions related to the trafficking and transit of contraband goods without the payment of taxes or duties.

Table 1. Perception of an environment of illegality and behavior of people not based on norms at the border in the face of smuggling according to age group (Norte de Santander)

		An atmosphere of illegality is perceived, and the behavior of people is not based on norms at the border					Total
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Age groups (years)	18-25	95	335	118	34	5	587
		16.2%	57.1%	20.1%	5.8%	0.9%	100%
	26-35	87	306	92	28	3	516
		16.9%	59.3%	17.8%	5.4%	0.6%	100%
	36-50	128	420	167	41	5	761
		16.8%	55.2%	21.9%	5.4%	0.7%	100%
	50 and older	70	296	116	34	5	521
		13.4%	56.8%	22.3%	6.5%	1.0%	100%
	Total	380	1 357	493	137	18	2 385
		15.9%	56.9%	20.7%	5.7%	0.8%	100%

Source: own elaboration

This result suggests that the null hypothesis of independence should be retained when using the Kruskal-Wallis H test with ($\chi^2 = 0.495$; $p = 0.136$) and a value greater than the present level of $\alpha=0.05$, which confirms the evidence that there are no significant differences among the age of the inhabitants of Norte de Santander, the perception of an environment of illegality, and the behavior of people not based on regulations in the face of smuggling; that is, all respondents from Norte de Santander have the same perception.

This behavior refers to the situation in which a social outcast involuntarily commits a crime, and the social system induces him or her to participate in different forms of anomie and to take part in groups, mafias, or gangs. Social marginalization leads to negative associativism, where conditions force individuals to work together (Briceño-León & Camardiel, 2015).

In the same way, the existence of anomic groups is due to those laws and regulations being enacted in LAC, but these groups are unable to achieve efficiency in their compliance for which impunity frequently exists (Waldmann, 2006). Regarding the Colombian-Venezuelan border, despite the laws that regulate smuggling, there is, in practice, prevailing corruption among security forces and in customs, which promotes the constant violation of proposed laws, as explained by Albornoz Arias and Mazuera Arias (2016) and Mazuera-Arias et al. (2019). The securitization approach in permeable borders aims, through the implementation of measures such as fences, walls, and patrols, to combat smuggling; this approach is an effective measure only when there are no pacts and complicity between smugglers and public officials, as expressed by Kim and Tajima (2022).

In contrast, the crisis in bilateral relations that has generated the drastic drop in trade between Colombia and Venezuela is a fact that is reflected in the economies of cities such as Cúcuta, in which the devaluation of the bolivar and a high dependence on the economy of Venezuela have occurred, which shows that the exchange rate and political instability have had an enormous effect on the real sectors of the economies of the city (Sánchez Jabba, 2014). This situation agrees with that explained by Van Uhm (2020), who refers to such asymmetries as criminogenic in the fields of economy, politics, law, ecology, and power since they contribute to the absence of controls and facilitate the illegal trafficking of goods or wildlife from countries of the global south to Europe.

However, with respect to education level, it can be observed that the majority of the inhabitants of Norte de Santander, regardless of their education level, agree or strongly agree that there is an environment of illegality and that the behavior of people is not based on norms in the face of smuggling. Similarly, there is a significant percentage of people who state that they neither agree nor disagree (Table 2).

Consequently, the null hypothesis of independence is also rejected. When using the Kruskal-Wallis H test with a ($\chi^2 = 0.495$; $p = 0.000$) value less than the preset level of $\alpha=0.05$, there are significant differences among the education level, the perception of an environment of illegality, and the behavior of people not based on norms at the border.

In this case, Kendall's Tau-b statistic, ($\text{Tau } b = 0.326$; $p = 0.017$), as a measure of the strength and direction of the association, shows moderate positive relationships, which suggests that the higher the education levels of people are, the lower their position in agreement with visualizing an environment of illegality and the behavior of people not based on norms in the face of smuggling. In contrast, the lower the education levels of people are, the more strongly they agree with this opinion (Table 3).

Table 2. Perception of an environment of illegality and behavior of people not based on norms at the border according to education level (Norte de Santander)

		An atmosphere of illegality is perceived, and the behavior of people is not based on norms at the border					
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Last completed level	None/ incomplete elementary	36	160	87	31	2	316
		11.4%	50.6%	27.5%	9.8%	0.6%	100%
	Complete elementary	56	167	76	19	4	322
		17.4%	51.9%	23.6%	5.9%	1.2%	100%
	Incomplete high school	57	236	112	27	4	436
		13.1%	54.1%	25.7%	6.2%	0.9%	100%
	Complete high school	154	530	152	48	5	889
		17.3%	59.6%	17.1%	5.4%	0.6%	100%
	Technical	45	161	42	8	1	257
		17.5%	62.6%	16.3%	3.1%	0.4%	100%
	University	32	103	24	4	2	165
		19.4%	62.4%	14.5%	2.4%	1.2%	100%
	Total	380	1 357	493	137	18	2 385
		15.9%	56.9%	20.7%	5.7%	0.8%	100%

Source: own elaboration

Table 3. Measures of the association between the perception of an environment of illegality and the behavior of people not based on norms at the border according to education level

		Value	Asymptotic standard error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate sig.
Ordinal by ordinal	Kendall's tau-b	0.326	0.018	0.982	0.017
	Kendall's tau-c	0.326	0.014	0.982	0.014

^a Assuming the alternative hypothesis^b Using the asymptotic standard error based on the null hypothesis

Source: own elaboration

The vision proposed by Muratori et al. (2013) corresponds to a psychosocial approach to anomie, where socially excluded individuals (in this case, those individuals with a low education level) are those who experience social marginalization; who feel the rejected by the community in which they live; and who generate feelings of impotence, abandonment, and hopelessness to be able to reach new, higher levels within the socioeconomic scale of the system. The above factors are the reasons why

such individuals accept smuggling and other forms of violation of social control as normal—part of a scale of negative values that make up part of the cultures of citizens at this border, transmitted from generation to generation.

Táchira state, Venezuela

Similarly, age group and education level were also factors. It was observed that the majority of the inhabitants of Táchira, regardless of age group, agree or strongly agree that there is an environment of illegality and that the behavior of people is not based on norms in the face of smuggling at the border (Table 4).

Table 4. Perception of an environment of illegality and the behavior of people not based on norms at the border, according to age group (Táchira)

		An atmosphere of illegality is perceived, and the behavior of people is not based on norms at the border					
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Age groups (years)	18-25	126	78	24	14	6	248
		50.8%	31.5%	9.7%	5.6%	2.4%	100%
	26-35	137	74	28	11	16	266
		51.5%	27.8%	10.5%	4.1%	6.0%	100%
	36-50	219	111	47	14	18	409
		53.5%	27.1%	11.5%	3.4%	4.4%	100%
	50 and older	246	141	49	21	18	475
		51.8%	29.7%	10.3%	4.4%	3.8%	100%
	Total	728	404	148	60	58	1 398
		52.1%	28.9%	10.6%	4.3%	4.1%	100%

Source: own elaboration

Likewise, this result led to the retention of the null hypothesis of independence when using the Kruskal-Wallis H test with ($\chi^2 = 0.495$; $p=0.935$) values greater than the preset level of $\alpha=0.05$. This result shows that there are no significant differences among the age of the inhabitants of Táchira, their perception of an environment of illegality, and the behavior of people not based on norms in the face of smuggling at the border, meaning that regardless of age, Táchira respondents also observe deviant behaviors among individuals.

A possible explanation for this result is the situations of the anomie, marginality, and fragmentation of Venezuelan society, which encourage economic crimes, including smuggling, to be committed (Nino, 2011). Therefore, the illegal economy of smuggling works through pacts in which there are conditions imposed and established by people who promote social, economic, and political interaction (Briceño-León, 2016). In this case, there are agreements between smugglers and armed groups that unilaterally control the illegal passages, the prevalence of which increased as a result

of Venezuela closing its border in August 2015 (García Pinzón & Mantilla, 2021).

Indeed, the Venezuelan economy has continued to gradually and steadily deteriorate. Regarding internal political instability, the decline in oil prices and the imbalance accumulated by the implementation of an ineffective economic policy, which insists on its antimarket bias and the demotivation of private initiative, we must add the sustained collapse in oil production, the unhinged *default* in the service of the external debt of the public sector, and the transition from an economy with high inflation to a hyperinflationary economy (Zambrano et al., 2018).

As a consequence of this instability, the degree of smuggling at the Colombian-Venezuelan border has increased, both of Venezuelan products to Colombia, where profit is important due to the differences in the exchange rates, and of Colombian products to Venezuela, as such products, like vehicle spare parts, medicines, and basic necessities, are scarce or more expensive in Venezuela (Albornoz Arias, 2016; Albornoz Arias et al., 2017). This finding is similar to the case of the border cities of Tijuana and San Diego, where contraband goods flow in both north-south and south-north directions (Hernández Hernández, 2021).

Regarding education level, it can be observed that the majority of the inhabitants of Táchira, regardless of education level, agree and strongly agree that there is an environment of illegality and that the behavior of people is not based on norms in the face of smuggling at the border (Table 5).

Table 5. Perception of an environment of illegality and the behavior of people not based on norms at the border according to education level (Táchira)

		An atmosphere of illegality is perceived, and the behavior of people is not based on norms at the border					
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Last completed level	None/ incomplete elementary	73	34	16	6	4	133
		54.9%	25.6%	12%	4.5%	3%	100%
	Complete elementary	100	67	18	10	8	203
		49.3%	33%	8.9%	4.9%	3.9%	100%
	Incomplete high school	92	63	19	11	10	195
		47.2%	32.3%	9.7%	5.6%	5.1%	100%
	Complete high school	230	121	54	18	21	444
		51.8%	27.3%	12.2%	4.1%	4.7%	100%
	Technical	101	47	18	10	7	183
		55.2%	25.7%	9.8%	5.5%	3.8%	100%
	University	132	72	23	5	8	240
		55%	30%	9.6%	2.1%	3.3%	
	Total	728	404	148	60	58	1 398
		52.1%	28.9%	10.6%	4.3%	4.1%	100%

Source: own elaboration

In this case, the null hypothesis of independence is retained when using the Kruskal-Wallis H test with a ($\chi^2 = 0.495$; $p = 0.476$) value greater than the preset level of $\alpha=0.05$, which shows that there are no significant differences among the education level, the perception of an environment of illegality, and the behavior of people not based on norms in the face of smuggling at the border. This result means that regardless of the education level of respondents from Táchira, their opinions about the existence of deviant behaviors at the border are the same.

Likewise, there is a tradition of the Táchira region being linked to smuggling; however, in the collective conscience, this activity is perceived as a crime by some and as a slight violation of regulations by others. In any case, there is an overall vision that smuggling is a denial of the legal norms that govern life in border areas. In the case of Venezuela, this phenomenon can also be explained as a consequence of the gradual increase in corruption in the country over the last 17 years, as pointed out by Mazuera-Arias et al. (2019). Although all Venezuelans reject corruption, many still practice it at different levels and to different degrees (Niño et al., 2012; Tablante & Tarre, 2013).

The results obtained, both from respondents from Norte de Santander (Colombia) and those from Táchira (Venezuela), are similar to those obtained by Williams (2009), who revealed that both in Mexico and Iraq, the smuggling of illicit goods (such as food, medicines, spare parts for vehicles, and raw materials in small quantities) without paying taxes, violence, anomie, a culture of anarchy and high levels of corruption are all present. Likewise, the above author agrees with the findings of the study by Jancsics (2021), who analyzed 156 criminal cases of officers and agents employed by the Customs and Border Protection Office working on the southern border of the U.S., where most of the cases were related to organized crime activities involving corrupt customs officials responsible for customs operations at official points of entry into the country and border patrol agents located at ports of entry. Similarly, the above findings coincide with those of the study by Gallien and Weigand (2021), who explained the types of relationships between smugglers and the state in border areas of North Africa and Southeast Asia.

Conclusions

Perhaps the context that describes many of the LAC borders can be compared with some of the realities that converge on the Colombian-Venezuelan border, considering some differences inherent to the social environments where poverty, inequality, violence, and peripheral location have conditioned the life of citizens. Even so, the border between Norte de Santander department and Táchira state has been marked by historical ties rooted in the inhabitants, where, over centuries, actions related to cross-border transport and complementary economies have been developed that have allowed these inhabitants to circumvent the disadvantages of being away from the centers of power.

Although smuggling, as an illegal practice, is reflected in a large portion of the world's borders, the complex environment caused by political disagreements and the Venezuelan economic crisis has promoted the rebirth of an illegal practice that while even being assumed or accepted in a large portion of the citizens of the Norte de Santander-Táchira border, has been blurred by the economic growth that has provided employment and growth opportunities for the families at the border.

Even though the reopening of the border crossing points between Colombia and Venezuela has allowed for commercial exchange, the measurement of the impact of smuggling in this new stage of bilateral relations is complicated by the reluctance of the Venezuelan government to publish data about this practice. Likewise, the Venezuelan economic crisis continues, which is why the asymmetries that characterize this border are still present.

It is in this new conflictive environment that social anomie is reflected as a custom, tradition, or usual practice currently induced by an economic crisis and the absence of response capacity by the governments of both countries. Faced with the closure of border crossings and uncertainty, inhabitants could not wait for the borders to reopen and, at a border as extensive and porous as that shared by Táchira and Norte de Santander, crossing of rivers, paths, and roads just to be able to communicate their needs, without stopping to reflect on whether or not they had committed a crime.

Beyond any questioning of this illegal practice and the permissive behaviors of citizens and authorities, the responses of both states are to recover the opportunities for growth and the opportunities for growth and development that had been underpinning much of the commercial and social and social relations between Norte de Santander and Táchira, considering the historical roots and the peculiarities that for centuries have marked the lives of their citizens.

Finally, the new border approaches linked to the social interactions and experiences of citizens must continue to delve into the different features that describe social anomie as a frequent practice rooted in the behavior of many border inhabitants. A first measure could be for authorities to offer inhabitants similar conditions of development and quality of life as those in capital cities. Furthermore, it emphasizes the changes in behavior that can be initiated through education and the creation of a citizen culture of legality that helps diminish social anomie actions in these border territories.

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Neida Albornoz-Arias

Colombian. PhD in social and legal sciences from the Universidad de Córdoba (Spain). Full time professor at the Faculty of Administration and Business of the Universidad Simón Bolívar, Cúcuta, Colombia. Research lines: territorial development, migratory phenomenon: transnational and cross-border, entrepreneurship and innovation. Recent publication: Albornoz-Arias, N. & Santafé-Rojas, A.-K. (2022). Self-confidence of Venezuelan migrant entrepreneurs in Colombia. *Social Sciences*, 11(7), Article 290. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/socsci11070290>

Miguel Ángel Morffe Peraza

Venezuelan. Master in borders and integration from the Universidad de Los Andes, Venezuela. Professor at the Faculty of Legal and Political Sciences of the Universidad Católica del Táchira, Venezuela. Research lines: public policies, borders and migration. Recent publication: Mazuera-Arias, R., Albornoz-Arias, N., Cuberos, M.-A., Vivas-García, M. & Morffe Peraza, M. Á. (2020). Sociodemographic profiles and the causes of regular Venezuelan Emigration. *International Migration*, 58(5), 164-182. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12693>