

# To Smuggle or Not to Smuggle?

Analyzing the vulnerability to engage in smuggling in Ecuador and Colombia

## Introduction

In recent years, South and Central America have experienced a significant increase in the number of irregular migrants from South Asia, West Africa, and the Horn of Africa traveling through its countries in the hopes of reaching the United States and Canada. The heavy flow of irregular migrants has brought with it a demand for smuggling services which are being satisfied by locals in need of alternative livelihood strategies.

The present analysis aims to answer:

What are the points of entry and exit most often used by extra-continental migrants into and through the Americas?

What are the socio-economic conditions in the two countries of highest frequency of transit, at the administrative level 2?

What role do the socio-economic conditions of border towns play in defining the entry and exit points of extra-continental migrants in the Americas?

## Methodology

To answer these questions, I first joined all tabular data to administrative level 2 shape files for Ecuador and Colombia.



Second, I identified the points of entry and exit most often used by extra-continental migrants. The data used to identify these points was collected

through 87 qualitative interviews conducted in Costa Rica and Colombia as part of *The Journeys Project*. As the map above shows, Costa Rica, Panama, Ecuador, and Colombia were the countries with the highest frequency of transit. I focused the remainder of the analysis on Colombia and Ecuador given greater access to data in these countries.

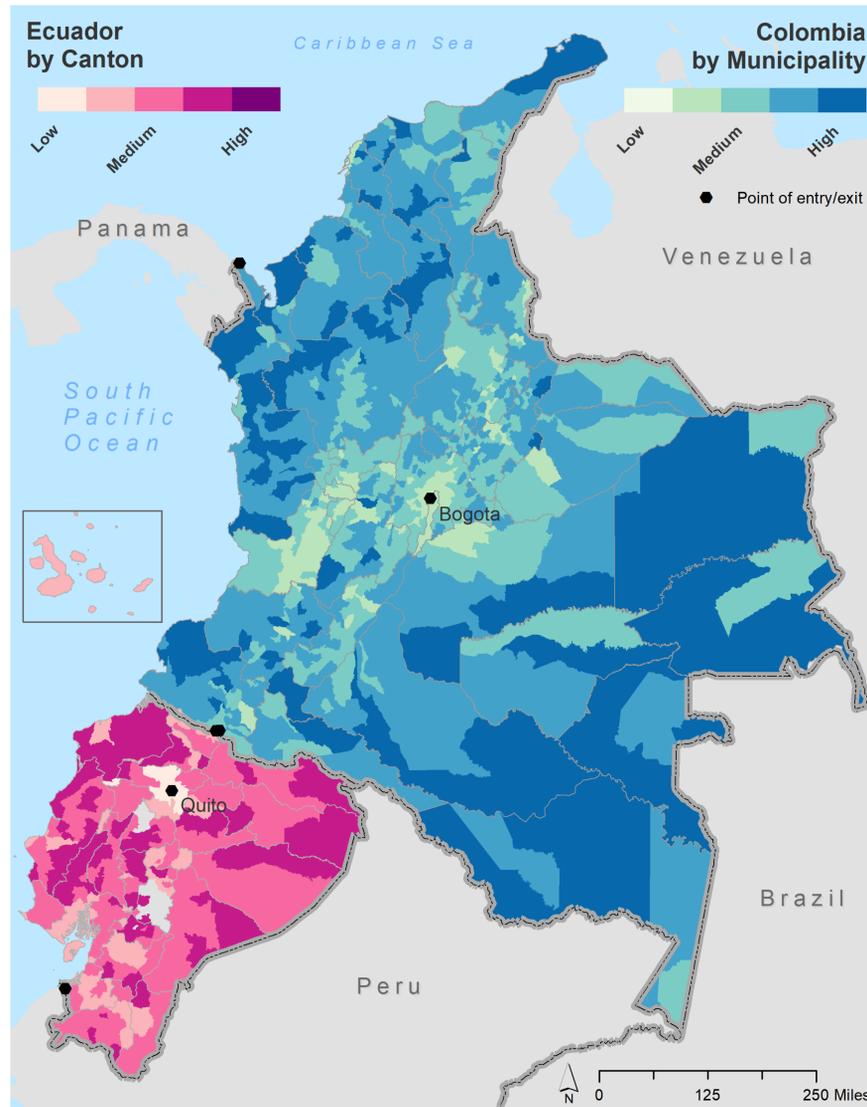
Third, I visualized the socio-economic conditions at the administrative level 2 of Ecuador (canton) and Colombia (municipality). The indicators considered in this analysis were incidence of poverty, unsatisfied basic needs (UBN), and absence of education, in accordance with livelihoods literature. I then used the field calculator to rank these factors on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represents low presence of the indicator and 5 represents high presence of the indicator.

Lastly using the field calculator, I aggregated the scores of each indicator and created a vulnerability to engage in smuggling index (VES).

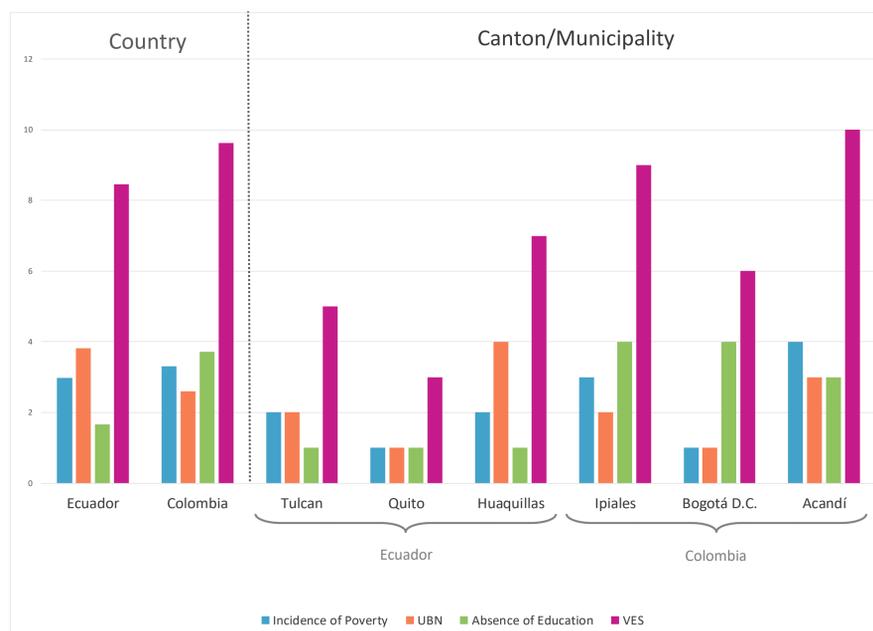
## Results

The VES map below suggests the socio-economic conditions present in the most frequented points of entry and exit in Ecuador and Colombia are not an indicator of a town's engagement in migrant smuggling. In fact, the three cantons (Tulcan, Quito, Huaquillas) and three municipalities (Ipiales, Bogota, Acandí) in Ecuador and Colombia experiencing the highest flow of extra-continental migrants, present similar or lower VES than their respective country average. In sum, socio-economic factors do not appear to play a role in defining the entry and exit points of extra-continental migrants in the Americas.

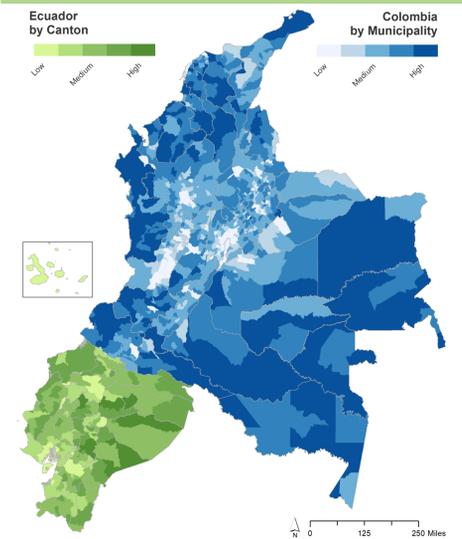
## Vulnerability to Engage in Smuggling



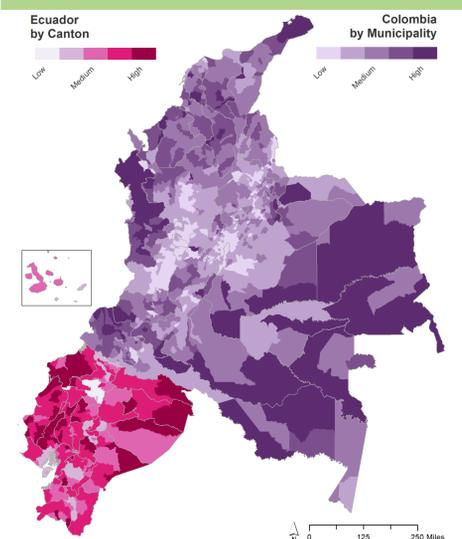
## Socio-Economic Profile



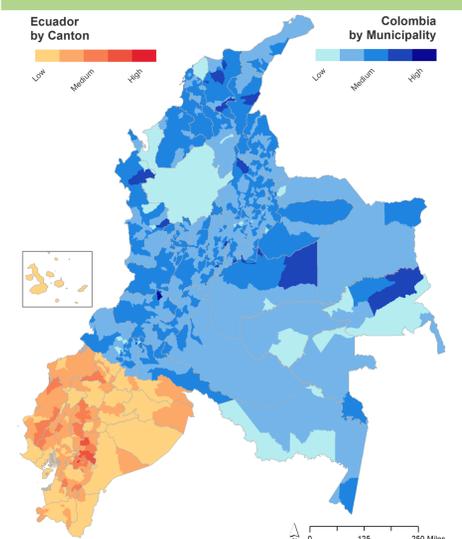
## Incidence of Poverty



## UBN



## Absence of Education



## Limitations

There were several limitations to this analysis. First, the extra-continental migrants interviewed were not always aware of the towns they were transiting through. Therefore, it is possible the information used to identify frequency of transit is not entirely accurate.

Secondly, the absence of data at the administrative level 2 presented a serious challenge to the construction of a reliable VES. The VES in this analysis was only determined by poverty, education, and unsatisfied basic needs and the data used corresponded to different time periods.

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Sources: DANE (2011), European Commission (2015), GADM (2009), HIS (2018), IGAC (2013), INEC (2010, 2013, and 2018), Natural Earth (2017), UNODC-OCHA (2015).

Photography: "Turbo" by Charlie Bentley

Projection: SIRGAS 2000 UTM Zone 18N