What Makes a Good Human Smuggler? The Differences between Satisfaction with and Recommendation of Coyotes on the U.S.-Mexico Border

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This article draws on a unique dataset of more than eleven hundred postdeportation surveys to examine migrants' experiences with coyotes (human smugglers) along the U.S.-Mexico border. Our focus is on migrants' satisfaction with the services provided by their most recent smuggler and whether they would be willing to put family or friends in contact with that person. We find a distinct difference between people's expectations for their own migratory experience compared to what they would be willing to subject loved ones to. Expectations of comfort and safety are decidedly low for oneself; but for loved ones, a more expressive, qualitative assessment shapes their willingness to recommend a coyote: qualities such as trustworthiness, honesty, comportment, and treatment come to the fore. News coverage focusing on the deaths of smuggled migrants often portrays coyotes as nefarious and exploitative, but the migrant-smuggler relationship is much more complex than suggested by these media accounts. We provide empirical insight into the factors associated with successful, satisfactory, and safe relationships between migrants and their guides.

Keywords: U.S.-Mexico border; human smuggling; unauthorized migration; clandestine migration; border crossing; coyotes; *coyotaje*

The social scientific study of informal economies and illicit service providers is a complex and challenging task. This is the case not only because the very nature of these activities is intended to prevent them from being observed,

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DOI: 10.1177/0002716217750562

measured, and analyzed, but also because the norms, treatment, and acceptable practices vary widely. Human smuggling along the U.S.-Mexico border is just one example of such activities. In this article we examine the smuggler-migrant relationship by drawing on more than eleven hundred surveys with recent deportees in six different Mexican cities. Specifically, we identify the factors associated with undocumented Mexican migrants' self-reported satisfaction with the services they received from their guides, known colloquially as *coyotes*.[1] This provides greater insight into the ways in which consumers of illegal services conceptualize the positive and negative qualities of the interactions, exchanges, and relationships with their service providers. Furthermore, we examine the disjuncture between "satisfaction" with one's coyote and their "willingness to recommend" them to a family member or friend. While 75 percent of deportees who used a coyote reported being satisfied with the services, only 45 percent indicated that they would recommend them to a loved one. What accounts for this difference? Why are people generally satisfied with their guides but unwilling to subject their family and friends to the same treatment and experiences?

These questions provide the first empirical test of one particular aspect of the growing literature on Mexican coyotes, which asserts that word-of-mouth referrals lead to better treatment, and that smugglers are essentially good-faith actors providing a service (Spener 2009; Sanchez 2014; Izcara Palacios 2014, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). This contrasts with law enforcement narratives that often demonize coyotes for migrant deaths in the desert and cases of kidnapping and rape (see Spener 2009).

We aim to contribute to the creation of a more fully formed understanding of smugglers that neither demonizes nor romanticizes them. Doing so will help scholars to better understand some of the consequences of increased border enforcement by exploring how and why relationships between migrants and their guides may break down, leading to violence and dangerous situations. With controversies surrounding unauthorized immigration, including fears of smugglers as abusive victimizers as well as the deaths of migrants while being smuggled into the United States, our findings offer a new understanding of the factors contributing to successful, satisfactory, and safe relationships between migrants and smugglers. This article also provides key insights into the policies that cause these relationships to deteriorate and, in turn, increase the danger for migrants.

Our unique postdeportation survey offers insight on a broad range of situations and experiences that occur between smuggled migrants and their guides. For instance, we have documented forty-two instances of people being held captive by their coyotes,[2] which often involved coyotes charging exorbitant fees, much higher than the ones initially agreed upon (Slack 2015). We were also informed of several eyewitness accounts of rape or sexual assault committed by coyotes. However, we also have documented cases of migrants escaping from their guides and refusing to pay. We heard stories of violence committed against coyotes, including one murder where the migrants decapitated their coyote with a machete. This is obviously an extreme example, but it shows that neither coyotes nor smuggled migrants lack the capacity to commit violence or act outside of the normal parameters of the smuggling relationship.

In the following section, we discuss our theoretical approach to unpacking the migrant-smuggler relationship. We ask how, if at all, traditional modes of reciprocity and trust operate within the illegal milieu. We proceed with an overview of our data, sample, and research methodology before moving on to our findings, which identify the factors associated with satisfaction with one's coyote or guide. We then compare and contrast migrants' "satisfaction" with their coyotes with their "willingness to recommend" their guide to family or friends. We find that while satisfaction is based on instrumental outcomes or factors (e.g., "success"), a recommendation is far more complicated and subjective, often tied to expressive or affective factors or experiences. We conclude by discussing future needs for research and by addressing the limitations of our data.

Theoretical Orientation

There is a need for a robust theoretical framework that accounts for interactions that take place outside of a state's regulatory control. Without the legal apparatus of the state, violence can easily become the main leveling mechanism (Gibler 2011; Boyce, Banister, and Slack 2015). This seems to be less true (at least in terms of murder) in less violent contexts, as evidenced by Colombian drug dealers in the Netherlands (Zaitch 2002). However, within highly unequal power relations, one party tends to control the violence. While there are certainly variations and exceptions (for example, when coyotes are isolated in the desert with a group of twenty or more migrants), smuggled people are less likely to use force to ensure that the deal they struck is kept. Adapting sociological understandings of trust and cooperation to the illegal economy are essential for developing a better understanding of what leads to a successful transaction between an undocumented migrant and his or her smuggler.

The coyote-migrant relationship is unique when compared to other cases of illegal transactions because people seldom entrust their physical safety to a clandestine actor. The coyote is responsible not only for taking migrants to their final destination but also ensuring that they survive the journey. The process of choosing a coyote therefore requires a great deal of trust given the well-known life-and-death nature of the journey. This type of trust prioritizes the life-and-death nature of migration, over issues of treatment, courtesy, respect, and other factors that we normally would consider essential to customer satisfaction. When compared to Damien Zaitch's (2002) work on trust among Colombian drug dealers, trust, or, more frequently, distrust, is a commodity used for safety purposes. Not allowing people access to information about oneself is an important part of those clandestine relationships. However, the migrant-coyote relationship is distinct.

In this article, we do not analyze how migrants evaluate their guides before the journey but, rather, examine how they characterize this relationship after the fact, contrasting this with the prospect of a loved one placing her or his trust in that same guide. We find that there is a notable disjuncture between self-reported satisfaction with a guide and the willingness to subject a loved one to this

treatment. We hypothesize that this stems from the desperation that drives undocumented migration, which results in a utilitarian assessment of one's own experience, as opposed to deeper concerns for the treatment, well-being, and safety that shape people's willingness to recommend their guide to loved ones.

To test this hypothesis, we must first have an operational conception of *trust*. We draw from Hardin's (1991, 2001, 2002) discussion of "encapsulated interest" to expand upon how trust occurs outside of the regulatory mechanisms of the state. This conceptualization of trust is essentially contractual, defined as actor *A* entrusting *B* to effectively execute action *X* and not *Y*. In this case, the coyote must facilitate a successful crossing and not abandon, kidnap, extort, or expose the migrant to unnecessary risk. As Cook, Hardin, and Levi (2005) note, "We suppose you are competent to perform what we trust you to do and that we suppose your reason for doing so is not merely your immediate interest but also your concern with our interests and well-being" (p. 7). This trust requires some sort of consequence for poor performance. Other scholars have asserted that failing to recommend a guide would harm the guide's business, and therefore it is in the coyote's interest to perform well (Spener 2009; Sanchez 2014). The importance of word-of-mouth business relates to the need for some sort of built-in social consequence for failing to deliver on the bargain. Studies of criminal organizations such as the mafia have found that familial ties are prevalent within organized crime groups because such ties reinforce trust by increasing the social consequences for betrayal (Campana and Varese 2013; Zaitch 2005, 2002). However, it is impossible to have family ties that could ensure trust between the hundreds of thousands of migrants who cross the U.S.-Mexico border with coyotes each year. The important thing to note in both these scenarios is the need for some sort of social mechanism that takes the place of state regulations.

Scholars have noted that society has largely attempted to lessen the need for trust on a large scale. State regulation and coordination, third-party enforcers, contracts, and legal stipulations all serve to decrease the importance of trust, or trustworthiness in our day-to-day interactions (Cook, Hardin, and Levi 2005). We are generally assured that a third party will step in to rectify the situation, should a problem develop. This, however, does not hold true for the clandestine world. Outside of the purview of state regulation there are no, or at the least, a very limited version, of third-party enforcers. As Randall Collins asserts, "we should see individuals as transient fluxes charged up by situations" (2014, 6). Interpersonal relations are situational, and therefore we must start with the social field, rather than the person involved (Collins 2014). We should approach questions of interaction based on the situation in which people are interacting, and how people decide to classify that interaction, in this case, the migrant-coyote relationship. There are many nuances to the types of guides and settings in which people interact with their guides, ranging from someone in their hometown, to an unknown stranger in the plaza or running a convenience store as a cover business. From the encapsulated interest perspective, we have to assume that (1) there is some sort of ongoing relationship between the two, and (2) that there are some sort of mutual benefits at work. For the ongoing relationship stipulation to be true, migrants must assume that they may try to cross the border multiple

times, and the coyote also assumes that the migrant or other acquaintances will employ their services to cross with them in the future. However, this formation does not apply to everyone. Many migrants try to learn the trail so that they can travel alone in the future. Others have no intention of ever returning to Mexico. Further, some coyotes are only tangentially involved in smuggling, spending the majority of their time involved with other economic activities (Izcara Palacios 2014). Therefore, the lack in continuity of relationships between coyotes and migrants means that it is difficult to ensure that encapsulated interests balance cooperation and trust. This is especially true given our finding that the bar for recommending a coyote appears to be set much higher than for reporting satisfaction with their services.

Moreover, "unequal power may make it nearly impossible for the more powerful to convince the less powerful of their credibility of their trustworthiness" (Cook, Hardin, and Levi 2005, 4). This highlights how diverging interests between smuggler and migrant create many of the potential problems, whereupon a guide may abandon the migrant or attempt to extort payment without delivering them to their destination. Cook and colleagues state that "a violation of trust is especially likely to happen when there is a systematic conflict of interest between us, as when I could profit at your expense while seeming to act as your agent" (2005, 5). Demanding early payment, guiding migrants by phone, and deceiving people to believe that they have crossed into the United States despite still being in Mexico are possible scenarios in which coyotes can profit without the risk involved in undocumented migration. Placing these interactions outside of the regulatory control of the state, with essentially no third-party enforcers, further exacerbates these divergences in interests. To understand when these interests diverge we briefly discuss the literature on human smugglers and *coyotaje*, and the different processes by which people are smuggled, before proceeding to our research methodology and discussion.

Literature Review

Baird and van Liempt (2015) outline the different approaches to understanding human smuggling. Is it a business? Should it be understood in purely criminal terms or as a network analysis? Or is human smuggling part of a larger human rights discussion? While these debates will likely continue, this article provides a new methodology to examine how clients of human smugglers perceive their relationship with the smuggler. While scholars have speculated that smugglers treat migrants well in an attempt to garner repeat business and referrals (Spener 2009; Sanchez 2014), this is a challenge to test. Lopez-Castro's (1998) early study on coyotes indirectly addressed this question by creating a unique typology of guides based on in-depth interviews with coyotes in northeastern Mexico. Lopez-Castro identified at least three different types of guides: "local-interior" coyotes, who largely cross friends and family members from their communities of origin; "local and border" coyotes, who are from the same place in the interior of Mexico

as their clientele, but live and work at the border; and "border business" coyotes, who are full-time clandestine entrepreneurs and seldom personally know their clients (Lopez-Castro 1998, 967–68). Qualitative work by Spener (2009) and Sanchez (2014) found greater reliance on local-interior coyotes among their respondents, which helps to bolster the argument that word-of-mouth referrals, and the need to maintain a good reputation in small, rural towns, are of the utmost importance.

However, our survey research has demonstrated an increasing shift in the reliance on "border business" coyotes over "interior coyotes" (broadly conceived) since at least the mid-2000s (Martínez 2016). For instance, 45 percent of unauthorized Mexican migrants used border business coyotes on their most recent border crossing attempt compared to 30 percent who used someone from the interior (Martínez 2016). This, along with the rise in tolls being charged for *derecho de piso*, "right to use an area" (Izcara Palacios 2014), suggests that there are some changes happening that may have been affecting current migration, such as a monopolization of migrant smuggling and the impact of other illicit businesses such as drug smuggling on the use of clandestine spaces along the border (Slack and Campbell 2016). These notable changes have further complicated the narrative surrounding the migrant-coyote relationship.

The difference between these interpretations may be a result of variations in methodologies, geographic region, or the period in which each study was conducted, but it nonetheless causes us to question which factors improve the migrant/coyote experience. There are numerous factors outside the control of the coyote, and preconceived notions people have about the crossing experience can also alter people's evaluations of their guides. What is considered acceptable or unacceptable treatment? How long and how far and how hard must people walk in the harsh desert climate, before it is considered mistreatment? When do words of encouragement become insults or harsh admonitions? How much food or freedom is deemed acceptable when people wait in a safe house upon arrival to the United States?

These questions open an obvious, yet sometimes overlooked, reality of clandestine migration: it is not a pleasant experience. It is born out of necessity (see Rodríguez 1996). People expect to undergo some level of hardship. While the level of hardship people expect and are prepared for most likely varies by age, gender, and previous experiences, the primary concern is survival. With the changes to immigration enforcement on the U.S.-Mexico border in the mid-1990s, the number of fatalities increased exponentially (Eschbach et al. 1999; Cornelius 2001; Nevins and Aizeki 2008). The dangers of the desert are well known among potential migrants, and scholars have pointed out that knowing someone who has died actually increases the likelihood that a person will attempt a border crossing (Cornelius and Lewis 2007). The fear of being abandoned, of having a guide who does not know the way, or knowing how to find additional food and water along the trail are of the utmost importance for success, as well as survival. Despite a decrease in undocumented migration border-wide, the rate of death has remained high, suggesting that migration has become more dangerous and deadly since increased border enforcement in the 1990s and 2000s (Martínez et al. 2014; Slack et al. 2016).

Moreover, migrants constantly battle with the challenge of being deceived or extorted. Instances of phone calls extorting family members, either by lying about a kidnapping or claiming to have successfully crossed the border, are common (Slack 2015) and demonstrate that many would-be guides prefer to extort money without providing the service of a clandestine border crossing. For guides, not only is the border crossing dangerous, difficult, and unpleasant, but efforts from law enforcement on both sides of the border have attempted to clamp down on them, leading to harsher sentences. The most notable effort is the Operation against Smugglers. Initiative on Safety and Security (OASISS) that uses confessions extracted by law enforcement in the United States to incarcerate alleged smugglers once they are deported to Mexico (U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO] 2013). This takes advantage of the uneven legal geography of the two countries whereupon, in Mexico, a police report known as a "demanda" is sufficient evidence to incarcerate an individual, often for years. Once migrants have formally accused their guides, they are deported directly to the Procurador General de la República (PGR; Federal Prosecutor's Office) to sign the statement of admission, at which point the accused is also deported and sent straight to prison in Mexico.

OASISS stretches the limits of acceptable international cooperation between law enforcement and marks a new and extreme form of punishment. Because prosecuting coyotes has been challenging and has led to few arrests (Spener 2009), taking advantage of Mexico's legal system would be useful from the United States' perspective. However, this also serves to drive a wedge between migrants and their guides. The potential for someone to accuse a guide, while always a threat, must be met with either more convincing threats of violence upon removal, or preemptive accusations of their own, fingering one of their clients as the true guide. Moreover, according to our research, the fear of incarceration also leads many coyotes to preemptively abandon their clients in the desert. Migrants frequently complain about being left in the desert when authorities approach. Trust, therefore, has to work both ways, as guides are fearful of being accused by migrants and sentenced to jail in the United States or Mexico.

This raises one of the most important questions within the smuggling literature. Are the people who extort migrants or abandon them after getting money from family members actually coyotes; in other words, do they sometimes extort and other times comply with the full terms of the agreed-upon service? Scholars such as David Spener, Gabriella Sanchez, and Simón Izcara Palacios have asserted that *coyotaje* only involves the legitimate act of facilitating a border crossing (Spener 2009; Sanchez 2014; Izcara Palacios 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). Sanchez states that even *enganchadores*, people who recruit migrants, are also good-faith actors (2014). However, these claims are difficult, if not impossible, to verify.

While the rise of kidnapping on the border has attracted new types of organized crime, focused explicitly on kidnapping a large number of relatively poor people (Izcara Palacios 2014; Slack 2015), it is unclear how this relates to human smugglers. Izcara Palacios (2014) has discussed how organized crime groups have attempted to recruit coyotes, indicating that coyotes know which migrants have money and would therefore be good targets for extortion. It is difficult

to ascertain whether all coyotes only engage in facilitating a crossing, or if, depending on the situation, they take advantage of a particularly vulnerable, wealthy, careless, or naïve migrant. Simply relying on interviews with coyotes leads to the same authenticity trap, whereupon a highly persecuted group of people seeks to engage in boundary policing, defining what is and is not considered part of their profession.

On the other side of the methodological spectrum, interviews with migrants can shed light on the vast array of experiences associated with crossing the border but are unable to tie those experiences to a specific smuggler. The fact that coyotes are a heterogeneous group of people behaving in a variety of ways is not surprising, but it does raise challenges that must be addressed through careful research design. For example, our quantitative data explore the most recent interaction between a migrant and their guide. This includes people who successfully arrived at their destination (37 percent), only to be deported later, as well as those who were apprehended during a failed crossing attempt. This allows us to evaluate the factors that influenced migrants' perceptions of their guides, but it does not give us an understanding of the guides' perspectives, or a background on the intentions, level of experience, or sophistication of the guides migrants chose (i.e., problems may be caused by incompetence rather than maliciousness). Therefore, we hope to answer what influences migrants' perceptions of a successful guide-migrant relationship, and why a migrant may or may not recommend their guide to others, particularly loved ones.

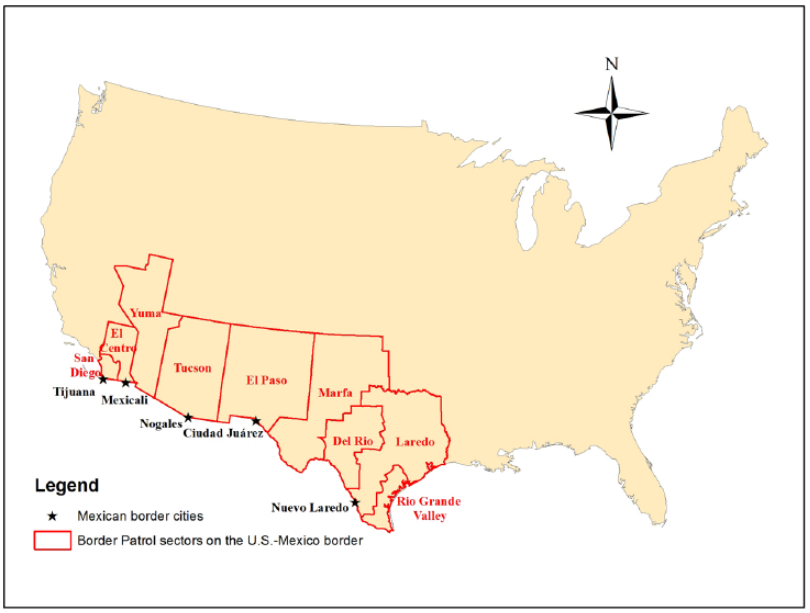
Data and Sample

We examine migrants' satisfaction with their coyotes and their willingness to recommend them to a family member or friend by drawing on a subsample of the second wave of the Migrant Border Crossing Study (MBCS). The subsample consists of recent border-crossers (i.e., people who most recently crossed the border within five years of being surveyed) and who relied on the services of a coyote to facilitate their most recent border crossing attempt ($N = 655$).

To the best of our knowledge, the second wave of the MBCS is the first quantitative study of Mexican border-crossers to ask respondents questions pertaining to the satisfaction with their coyotes as well as their willingness to recommend them to others. Specifically, we ask: (1) "Were you satisfied with the services of your coyote?" and (2) "Would you be willing to recommend your coyote to family members or friends?"

The MBCS is an unprecedented cross-sectional survey of Mexican migrants who attempted an unauthorized border crossing, were apprehended by any U.S. authority (either while crossing the border or once at their destination in the U.S. interior), and ultimately returned to Mexico. Interviews were completed with migrants in person at ports of entry and in migrant shelters immediately following respondents' most recent deportation experience. We selected shelters that work directly with the Mexican government (although none were government-operated)

FIGURE 1
Research Site



SOURCE: Rolando Díaz Caravantes, El Colegio de Sonora.

because Mexican authorities directly transport migrants to these shelters from ports of entry upon repatriation, thus providing the most representative sample. The MBCS limits its sample frame to individuals 18 years of age or older, who had not previously been interviewed for the study, who crossed the U.S.-Mexico border post–September 11, 2001, and who had been repatriated to Mexico within one month of the interview. Potential study participants were randomly selected using a spatial sampling technique, screened for eligibility, and then invited to participate if they met the eligibility requirements. These criteria were established to allow for reasonable comparison between cases within a specific timeframe, most notably during an era of increased border and immigration enforcement. Interviews lasted about 45 minutes and were completed in Spanish by the authors, graduate students, and professional interviewers. The response rate for the survey was approximately 94 percent.

The surveys were completed in Tijuana and Mexicali, Baja California; Nogales, Sonora; Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua; Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas; and Mexico City (see Figure 1) between 2010 and 2012, with the overwhelming majority (90 percent) of interviews being completed in 2011. All respondents surveyed in Mexico City had participated in the Mexican Interior Repatriation Program (MIRP), which provides flights to Mexico City among an eligible subsample of people apprehended in the Tucson Sector during summer months. Sixty-six percent of all migrants repatriated to Mexico in 2011 were returned to one of these six cities (Slack et al. 2015). And although surveys were only carried out in five of the nine

border patrol sectors along the border, all sectors are represented in terms of where deportees/returnees had attempted their most recent crossing. In terms of place of origin, all thirty-one Mexican states and the federal district are represented in the wave II sample of the MBCS. The MBCS is therefore generalizable to Mexican deportees from the six study cities during the study period.

Variables Used in the Analysis

Dependent variables

Table 1 provides the descriptions, proportions, and standard errors for the dependent variables examined in our analyses. As noted, 75 percent of the analytic sample indicated that they were satisfied with the services of their coyote (1 = yes; 0 = no). On the other hand, only 45 percent suggested that they would recommend their coyote to a family member or friend (1 = yes; 0 = no).

Focal independent variables: Most recent crossing

Table 1 also illustrates the descriptions, proportions, and standard errors for the focal independent variables used in the analyses, which consist of factors associated with migrants' most recent border crossing attempt.

We included a measure representing the border patrol sector in which each respondent had attempted their most recent border crossing (*sector of crossing*). There are a total of nine border patrol sectors along the U.S.-Mexico border, which are listed in Table 1 from the most western (i.e., San Diego) to the most eastern sector (i.e., Rio Grande Valley). Each sector was dichotomized for our analyses. Thirty-one percent crossed through the Tucson sector, 31 percent through the Laredo sector, 13 percent through the Rio Grande Valley sector, 12 percent through the San Diego sector, and 7 percent through the El Centro sector.

This analysis operationalizes a *coyote* as an individual who guided or physically accompanied a migrant across the border. Prior research has highlighted the diversity and complexity of *coyojate* (Spener 2009). We contend that what truly matters, especially when it comes to whether "enforceable trust" serves as a form of informal social control against mistreatment, exploitation, or abandonment—and ultimately "satisfaction" and "willingness to recommend"—is the nature of one's social tie to his or her coyote. In other words, we have moved away from differentiating between *coyote types* and focus instead on the *types of ties* migrants have to their coyotes. In doing so, we identified three types of ties: "no tie," an "indirect tie," and a "direct tie." No tie indicates that the respondent did not know the coyote prior to their most recent crossing attempt; nor was he or she put into contact with the coyote by family or a friend, but rather met the coyote for the first time near the border while preparing to cross the border. An indirect tie indicates that someone referred the respondent to his or her coyote, but that he or she did not know the coyote before his or her most recent crossing

TABLE 1
Proportions and Descriptions of Dependent and Independent Variables Used in the Analysis (Multiply Imputed Data)

	Mean	Std. Err.
Dependent variables		
Satisfied?	0.75	0.02
Recommend?	0.45	0.03
Focal independent variables: Most recent crossing		
Sector of crossing		
San Diego (Ref.)	0.12	0.01
El Centro	0.07	0.01
Yuma	0.00	0.00
Tucson	0.31	0.02
El Paso	0.02	0.00
Big Bend (formerly Marfa)	0.00	0.00
Del Rio	0.03	0.01
Laredo	0.31	0.02
Rio Grande Valley	0.13	0.02
Tie to coyote		
No tie (Ref.)	0.36	0.02
Indirect tie	0.53	0.02
Direct tie	0.11	0.02
Smuggling fee (in $US)	2,357.10	50.21
Days traveled	2.19	0.10
Group size	10.38	0.37
Bajadores (i.e., "border bandits")	0.12	0.02
Witnessed abuse of group members?	0.06	0.01
Abused by group members?	0.03	0.01
Abandoned by coyote?	0.16	0.02
Abandoned group members?	0.15	0.02
Successfully reached destination?	0.37	0.02
Control variables: Demographic characteristics		
Male	0.89	0.01
Age		
18–24 years old	0.23	0.02
25–34 years old	0.41	0.02
35–44 years old	0.28	0.02
45 years or older	0.07	0.01
Years of education	8.29	0.12
Monthly household income (in $US)	341.97	16.88
Indigenous	0.07	0.01
Region of origin		
North	0.17	0.02
Traditional (west-central)	0.37	0.02
Central	0.17	0.02
South-southeast	0.28	0.02
Number of lifetime crossings	4.29	0.21
M = 20		
N = 655		

SOURCE: MBCS, wave II (weighted data).
NOTE: Analytic sample limited to people who had used the services of a guide and had crossed the border within five years of being surveyed.

attempt. Finally, a direct tie denotes that the respondent personally knew his or her coyote prior to his or her most recent crossing attempt. These types of ties were dichotomized for inclusion in the analysis. As noted in Table 1, 36 percent of respondents did not have a tie to their coyote, while 53 percent had an indirect tie and 11 percent had a direct tie to their coyote.

We also controlled for the smuggling fee one paid (or agreed to pay) their coyote, the number of days one traveled during their most recent crossing before either being apprehended by U.S. authorities or being picked up by a *raitero* (i.e., driver) and transported to a drop house, and the size of the group in which one traveled while crossing the border. On average, the typical migrant paid or agreed to pay $2,357 to her or his coyote, walked for just over two days, and traveled in a group of about ten other individuals, not including the respondent or coyote. During the most recent crossing attempt, 12 percent encountered *bajadores* (i.e., stick-up crews), 6 percent witnessed physical abuse of fellow group members, 3 percent experienced physical abuse by someone in their group, 16 percent were abandoned by their coyote, and 15 percent were abandoned by at least some of their group members. Finally, 37 percent successfully reached their desired U.S. destination.

Control variables: Demographic characteristics

We also controlled for a series of demographic factors, including gender, age, years of formal education, monthly household income (in hundreds of $US), whether the respondent was an indigenous language speaker, Mexican region of origin, and number of lifetime unauthorized crossing attempts. Overall, the typical respondent in the analytic sample can be described as a male (89 percent), between 18 and 34 years of age (64 percent; 18–24 years old and 25–34 years old categories combined), with just over eight years of formal education, earning about $342 before his most recent crossing attempt. Seven percent spoke an indigenous language in addition to Spanish. Seventeen percent were from northern Mexico, 37 percent from west-central Mexico, 17 percent from central Mexico, and 28 percent from the south-southeastern part of the country. The typical migrant, on average, had just over four lifetime unauthorized crossing attempts before his most recent journey across the border.

Methods

Our analytic plan consisted of two approaches. First, we utilized logistic regression to identify the factors associated with "satisfaction" with the services of one's coyote. Second, we employed a bivariate (chi-squared) analysis to examine the association between "willingness to recommend" one's coyotes and "satisfaction" as well as the association between "willingness to recommend" and successfully reaching one's desired destination.

The methodological challenges associated with missing data were addressed by using multiple imputation (MI) to deal with missing observations (Rubin

1987; Schafer 1997). We also used qualitative responses to why people decide to recommend or not to recommend their coyote to differentiate between those who are satisfied and yet decline to give a recommendation.

Results

Logistic regression results for "satisfaction"

Table 2 illustrates the coefficients, standard errors, and significance levels for the logistic regression predicting satisfaction with one's coyote. Odds ratios can be obtained by exponentiating the statistically significant coefficients associated with each predictor variable. As noted, several factors are associated with satisfaction, including the strength of one's tie to his or her coyote, encountering *bajadores*, and having successfully reached one's desired destination in the United States. Specifically, the odds of "satisfaction" are 1.5 times larger for respondents with an indirect tie to their coyote compared to those without a tie (exp [0.42] = 1.52). In a similar vein, the odds of "satisfaction" are nearly two times larger for respondents with a direct tie to their coyote relative to those without a tie. This supports the findings from the extant qualitative literature on coyotes (Spener 2009; Sanchez 2014; Izcara Palacios 2012d). We also find that the odds of a respondent who encountered *bajadores* on their most recent crossing attempt noting that they were satisfied with their coyote are about 1.5 times larger than the odds of a respondent who did not encounter *bajadores*. Perhaps migrants thought that the guide protected them from harm, which often happens if the guide has paid the correct tolls to organized crime (Slack and Campbell 2016). More research is needed to expand upon this finding. However, unsurprisingly, the strongest predictor of satisfaction is having successfully reached one's desired U.S. destination during their most recent crossing: the odds of satisfaction are 3.6 times larger among those who successfully made it relative to those who did not. This suggests that satisfaction is highly dependent upon utilitarian factors, as the goal of migration is paramount for predicting a positive experience between migrant and coyote.

On the other hand, several factors appear to decrease one's odds of satisfaction with his or her coyote. There appear to be important regional differences, such as being from the north of Mexico and crossing through the El Paso sector. For instance, migrants who crossed through the El Paso sector have 80 percent lower odds of satisfaction when compared to those who crossed through the San Diego sector. The El Paso sector has been subject to increased enforcement, as well as a drastic drop in apprehensions since the mid-1990s. It also had high rates of incarceration of migrants (due to the reduced flow) for longer periods and higher instances of people's possessions being taken away and not returned (Martínez, Slack, and Heyman 2013). These factors, more attributable to migration enforcement policies than to the guides themselves, may contribute to lower satisfaction with coyotes.

We also find that higher coyote fees are associated with lower odds of satisfaction. The treatment that one experiences during his or her crossing attempt also influences the odds of satisfaction. Specifically, migrants who were physically

TABLE 2
Logistic Regression Results for Coyote Satisfaction and Recommendation (Multiply Imputed Data)

	"Coyote Satisfaction: Yes"	
Variable	Coefficient	Std. Err.
Focal independent variables: Most recent crossing		
Sector of crossing		
San Diego (Ref.)		
El Centro	–0.54	(0.38)
Yuma	–1.95	(1.47)
Tucson	–0.67	(0.45)
El Paso	–1.57****	(0.37)
Big Bend (formerly known as Marfa)	–1.54	(1.20)
Del Rio	0.25	(1.02)
Laredo	0.18	(0.47)
Rio Grande Valley	–0.66	(0.48)
Tie to coyote		
No tie (Ref.)		
Indirect tie	0.42**	(0.17)
Direct tie	0.68***	(0.23)
Smuggling fee (in $US)	–0.00**	(0.00)
Days traveled	–0.02	(0.03)
Group size	–0.02	(0.02)
Bajadores (i.e., "border bandits")	0.41**	(0.18)
Witnessed abuse of group members?	–1.16*	(0.60)
Abused by group members?	–0.90**	(0.41)
Abandoned by coyote?	–1.31****	(0.21)
Abandoned group members?	–0.54	(0.46)
Successfully reached destination?	1.30****	(0.34)
Control variables: Demographic characteristics		
Male	0.11	(0.27)
Age		
18–24 years old (Ref.)		
25–34 years old	0.47*	(0.28)
35–44 years old	0.08	(0.39)
45 years or older	0.22	(0.14)
Years of education	–0.05	(0.03)
Monthly household income (in $US)	–0.00	(0.00)
Indigenous	0.03	(0.25)
Region of origin		
North	–0.49****	(0.11)
Traditional (Ref.)		
Central	0.07	(0.27)
South-southeast	0.29	(0.27)
Number of lifetime crossings	–0.01	(0.01)
M = 20		
N = 655		
Pseudo-R^2 = .1949		

SOURCE: MBCS, wave II (unweighted data).
NOTE: Analytic sample limited to people who used the services of a guide and had crossed the border within five years of being surveyed.
*p < .10. **p < .05. ***p < .01. ****p < .001.

TABLE 3
Adjusted Predictions at Representative Values, all Other Variables Set at Means

	"Satisfied"
Succeeded	.88
Direct tie to coyote	.84
Indirect tie to coyote	.78
Not abandoned	.78
No tie to coyote	.69
Did not succeed	.67
Abandoned	.49

SOURCE: MBCS, wave II (unweighted data).
NOTE: All adjusted predictions are statistically significant beyond $p < .01$. $M = 20$. $N = 655$.

abused by fellow group members and those who were abandoned by coyotes have 60 percent and 73 percent lower odds of satisfaction, respectively, when compared to migrants who did not experience these events.

Table 3 illustrates the adjusted predictions of "satisfaction" for having succeeded in reaching one's U.S. destination, having been abandoned by one's coyote, and the strength of one's tie to his or her coyote, with all other factors set at their means. These adjusted predictions help to provide a more substantive illustration of our findings.

Overall, we find that "success" appears to be the strongest predictor of satisfaction with one's coyote, followed by having a direct tie to one's coyotes, and an indirect tie to one's coyote. For example, respondents who successfully reached their desired U.S. destination on their most recent crossing attempt have an 88 percent likelihood of satisfaction, while those with a direct tie to their coyote have an 84 percent likelihood of satisfaction, and those with an indirect tie have a 78 percent likelihood of satisfaction. In other words, "success" and the strength of one's tie to their coyote appear to matter most when predicting satisfaction. Interestingly, we also find that people who did not succeed in reaching their desired destination still have a 67 percent likelihood of satisfaction, while those who were abandoned have a 49 percent probability of satisfaction. In other words, it appears that the bar for "satisfaction" with one's coyote is set relatively low. Indeed, a full 75 percent of our respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their coyote. However, it seems that satisfaction is ultimately shaped by instrumental factors—namely, "success" or staying out of harm's way (e.g., not being abandoned). We return to the implications of these results below.

Bivariate results: "Recommend" and "satisfaction"

While the rather obvious conclusion is that satisfaction is correlated to the material outcomes of the migrant/guide relationship (successfully crossing the border), this contrasts with the more complex question of whether the migrant

TABLE 4
Willingness to Recommend Coyote to a Family Member or Friend, by Satisfaction with Coyote

		Were you satisfied with your coyote?		
		No	Yes	Total
Would you put a family member or friend in contact with your coyote?	No	91%	32%	48%
	Yes	7%	57%	44%
	Don't know	2%	11%	8%
	Total	100%	100%	100%

NOTE: Column percentages reported. N = 632 (weighted data). Pearson's chi-squared = 167.12. p = .000.

would recommend a guide to others. What, if any, is the association between "willingness to recommend" one's coyote to his or her family members or friends? Table 4 provides greater insight into the relationship between these two outcomes.

Table 4 provides the column percentages for "willingness to recommend" by "satisfaction" among the weighted analytic subsample. As illustrated in this table, there appears to be a notable association between *not* being satisfied and *not* being willing to recommend. In fact, only 7 percent of people who were not satisfied with their coyote indicated that they would put a family member or friend in contact with them. In other words, it appears that "satisfaction" approaches what could be described as a necessary condition for a recommendation. However, "satisfaction" is by no means a sufficient condition for a recommendation. Among those who were satisfied, only 57 percent indicated that they would put a family member or friend in contact with their coyote.

Bivariate results: "Recommend" and "success"

While success is the strongest predictor of satisfaction, it does not fully explain willingness to make a recommendation. What is the relationship between "success" and "willingness to recommend" one's coyote? Table 5 offers greater insight into the association between these two outcomes.

Recall that 37 percent of our subsample successfully arrived at their desired destination after their most recent crossing attempt. Successfully reaching one's destination certainly helps to influence a recommendation, but it is not the only factor that matters, as 36 percent of respondents who *did not* reach their destination indicated that they would still recommend their coyote to a family member or friend. In other words, unlike *satisfaction, success* does not nearly come close to being a necessary condition for a recommendation. In our discussion, we draw on direct quotes from our respondents to help contextualize the complex

TABLE 5
Willingness to Recommend, by Successful Crossing

		Did you successfully arrive to your desired destination?		
		No	Yes	Total
Would you put a family member or friend in contact with your coyote?	No	59%	30%	48%
	Yes	36%	56%	44%
	Don't know	5%	14%	8%
	Total	100%	100%	100%

NOTE: Column percentages reported. N = 627 (weighted data). Pearson's chi-squared = 50.93. p = .000.

relationship between coyote satisfaction and willingness to recommend one's coyote to a family member or friend.

Discussion

We hypothesized that trust was significantly more important when related to the safety of others than with one's own well-being. Encapsulated interest (Hardin 2001, 2002, 1991) is no longer such a simple formula, as people must worry about poor treatment and the possibility that negative events occurring during migration will affect their own social capital. Moreover, a better understanding of the true dangers of crossing may discourage a migrant to involve himself or herself in the migration experiences of others. This finding, however, does raise important questions for other research on human smuggling and migration in general. Namely, if we are to accept the premise that human smugglers rely almost entirely on word-of-mouth recommendations (and the social networks involved in the cumulative causation of migration for that matter), why are people so hesitant to provide a recommendation post migration?

We argue that while satisfaction is largely based on instrumental outcomes (i.e., success), a recommendation is expressive, relying on subjective classifications such as treatment, competence, temperament, and courtesy. Open-ended responses give us some insight into this thought process. For people who were satisfied and would recommend, we hear stories of intense loyalty and help. Eighteen-year-old Amado, from Veracruz, who paid a $2,700 fee, and had an indirect tie to his smuggler, described his experience. "Really, it's luck—it's a game if you make it [across the border] or not. But my guy crossed my father before. He's not like these other guys that will leave you. I was vomiting blood [while crossing] and he stayed with me." Another migrant asserted: "He's a good person. There were women in our group and he treated them all well. We made

it safe and sound" (Andres, 32, Jalisco; $1,300 fee, no tie). Sometimes assertions made as to why their guide was satisfactory give us reason to assert that standards for treatment are, in fact, extremely low: "He doesn't mistreat people and is honest. He didn't abandon anyone along the way. And he got me out of where I was (in Mexico)!" (Ricardo, 22, Michoacán; $1,500 fee, direct tie). Not abandoning people can be seen as a low bar, but considering the realities of the southwest border crossing experience, it is a constant threat.

For people who report being satisfied, but would not recommend their coyote, lack of trust and fear of the uncertainty in crossing are important themes.[3] "He lied and the passage isn't safe" (Jose, 34, Tabasco; $3,300 fee, indirect tie). "He left a 16-year-old girl by herself [in the desert] who couldn't cross. That's why I didn't make it [across], because I didn't want to leave the girl alone" (Juana, 30, Morelos, indirect tie). Others were concerned about treatment: "He's not a responsible person, he didn't help us. He said he was going to support us along the way and he didn't, instead he insulted us" (Yesenia, 36, Oaxaca; $3,000 fee, indirect tie).

However, the potential for extortion or dishonesty stood out as well. Even those who were satisfied with their guides expressed doubt about the honesty of their coyotes. "They asked for my family's phone number back home. They also kept sending me to other people and I got the run-around" (Gloria, 41, Guerrero; $3,000 fee, direct tie). "They called my sister and asked her for money" (Pancho, 24, Guerrero; $3,600, indirect tie).

We should also note that during this research the prevalence of cyber coyotes, guides who do not walk with the migrants, but guide them over cell phones, increased. We did not have questions directly about this change but noted that migrants universally disliked this trend. They felt unsafe, abandoned, and scared of being alone in the desert. Coyotes, however, were understandably concerned about efforts to arrest and prosecute them should they get caught in the United States.

One migrant in particular noted that recommendations create a lot of responsibility, which is a scary proposition considering the unpredictability of the crossing. "If I recommend him to someone and then something happens to that person—they'll blame me! No, it's not good to recommend" (Eduardo, 50, Oaxaca; $600 fee, no tie). Many people who were shocked at the danger and difficulty of the crossing simply stated that they would not do anything to encourage another person to undertake the journey. The risk of death or harm is too great to have on one's conscious. This poses a significant challenge to previous understandings of *coyotaje*. If word of mouth was the primary driver of coyotes as a business model, then we can see why hesitance to recommend may lead to greater monopolization of human smuggling at the border and the rise of border business coyotes (Martínez 2016). Fewer recommendations do seem to lead to less satisfaction, although it is unclear which way the causal arrow points in this case. Does a recommendation improve treatment, or does it increase the likelihood of finding a good guide?

When trying to understand issues related to organized crime such as coyote involvement with drug cartels, scholars must seriously confront these questions.

How has the border milieu changed? Has it changed in such a way that promotes greater specialization (i.e. full-time, professional coyotes with ties to organized crime that can protect them) and, therefore, monopolization, excluding guides who may have closer social ties to the migrants but less knowledge of the rules of the border (Slack and Campbell 2016)?

It is also clear that enforcement measures play a part in these challenges. Scholars have already noted that increased enforcement has led to more expensive coyote fees (Durand and Massey 2004); however, does it also cause a worse experience for migrants? As crossing the border continues to receive greater scrutiny and significantly more intense criminal charges, changes such as cyber coyotes may lead to greater lethality and an increase in migrant deaths. Do criminalization and enforcement also lead to a lower standard of treatment for migrants and the possibility for more exploitation? More research is needed to fully answer these questions.

Conclusion

Migrants' satisfaction with coyote services appears to be driven by utilitarian factors; however, the prospect that a migrant will recommend his or her coyote appears to be more complex. Scholars who support a business model of smuggling, as well as those highlighting the human rights aspects of smuggling, are likely to disagree on how to interpret these results. The disconnect between personal satisfaction and the desire to give a recommendation hints that people may have lower standards for treatment throughout the harsh journey for themselves than for their loved ones. This suggests that their conceptions of trust change when projected onto others. Migration, particularly undocumented migration, is an act of desperation that people do not enter into lightly; therefore, they are willing to accept many of the risks. However, when asked about their willingness to subject other people to those same risks, after having immediately gone through this experience, people hesitate. Affective issues such as treatment, demeanor, and trustworthiness are key in determining whether people will make a recommendation, whereas satisfaction is much more dependent on utilitarian factors of survival and success. More work should be done to analyze how people go about deciding whom to trust as well as constructing an understanding of what characteristics are more highly valued than others. Since the border is highly dynamic and can change significantly from one year to the next, additional studies are necessary.

Moreover, it is important to recognize that smugglers and migrants are a complex, heterogeneous group of people, with varying levels of skill, honesty, and incentives to fulfill their responsibilities. The debate about coyotes as evil criminals or noble facilitators, while helpful in combating the straw man smuggler portrayed by law enforcement, is highly limited in intellectual merit. Generally, defining people in such value-laden terms as good or bad is far too simplistic for social science and should be avoided. More attention should be focused on how

the relationships produced within these clandestine situations leads to unique bonds and mechanisms for trust. While human smugglers represent a special case, other situations could also be studied, such as relationships between addicts and drug dealers, for example.

From a policy perspective, we should take a closer look at programs designed to arrest smugglers and curtail undocumented migration, because these programs exacerbate the danger faced by migrants and lead to increased death on the border. This has been the major criticism of all border enforcement strategies to date. They are essentially predicated on making it more dangerous and more deadly to cross the border, leading to a loss of life. Attempts to arrest human smugglers are one of the main reasons that the relationships between migrants and their guides break down. Programs to arrest and incarcerate migrants have led to cyber coyotes, which means that no one is walking with the group of migrants, and the migrants are more likely to get lost and die in the treacherous terrain. Forcing migrants to testify against their guides not only can put them in danger for reprisals upon return to Mexico, but it also makes it more likely for guides to abandon migrants in the desert if they expect that they will be caught. Programs like OASISS as well as most antitrafficking initiatives that are aimed at smugglers should be ended, not only because they rely on a dubious bending of the law, and have failed to stop human smuggling, but also because they continue the politics of death and danger as a deterrence. It is firmly established that this does not work.

Moreover, we should note that the factor most related to migrants' dissatisfaction with their guide is not mistreatment or kidnapping or violence; rather, it is abandonment. Being left behind, and witnessing others left behind, is a reminder about what is at stake here: people's lives. Guides are there to help people cross, but more importantly they are hired to make sure people do not die. The move to demonize smugglers, often blaming them for migrant deaths, comes after decades of policies designed to make it more dangerous to cross the border.

To prevent these breakdowns between migrants and their guides, we must fully understand the incentives for coyotes to behave in different ways. While most of the research with coyotes has helped to demystify stereotypes of coyotes, it is difficult to provide a fully formed picture of their activities. The activities we see represented in our survey are not fully accounted for in the qualitative research with coyotes. Part of this is due to the very nature of clandestine industries; another aspect of this stems from the long-standing demonization of coyotes. While it is important to document these voices, we must be wary of reproducing an authenticity narrative.

Finding the points where the goals and intentions of migrants and coyotes diverge is the key. What are the incentives to successfully cross a group of migrants (paying up-front versus upon arrival)? What are the incentives to build trust, or treat people well? The motives of migrants (successful international migration without detection) and coyotes (payment) do not always coincide. Creating a fully formed understanding of the motivating factors that drive positive and negative relationships between migrants and guides is paramount for a full understanding of the negative consequences of enforcement, criminalization,

and even the thousands of deaths that occur every year along our world's borders.

Notes

1. For the purposes of this article, we use the terms *coyote*, *guide*, and *smuggler* interchangeably. There are a great many terms used along the U.S.-Mexico border for guides, such as *patero*, or *polleros*; however, *coyote* is by far the most common. In our survey, we asked migrants if they used a coyote and if they used a guide, which is a more benign term. Sometimes migrants would differentiate the two, stating that the coyote is akin to a manager, the person who organizes the different groups of crossers, while other times they are considered one and the same. Some people responded in the negative when asked whether they used a coyote, but in the positive to a guide, although there appears to be no significant difference in treatment. To standardize our questionnaire for people who may have had multiple people involved in their crossing (not including the *raiteros* who pick them up in vehicles once they leave the desert), we focused strictly on the individual who spent the most time walking with them. We considered the desert crossing to be the most risky (e.g., possibility of apprehension; risk of death) part of the journey and, therefore, the most important context to analyze for the purposes of this study.

2. The respondents self-identified the kidnapper as their coyote. Whether these persons intended to provide legitimate services is difficult to determine.

3. All quotes from people who are satisfied but would not recommend.

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