

BORDER MARKETPLACES AS INFRASTRUCTURES OF MOBILITY: VISA REGIMES AND EVERYDAY TRANS LOCALITY IN TEXAS

BY

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Abstract

This article examines the role of border marketplaces in Texas as infrastructures of mobility in 2025, with a focus on how visa regimes shape everyday trans local practices between the United States and Mexico. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, 50 semi-structured interviews, a survey of 300 households, and official crossing and visa statistics, the study demonstrates that marketplaces function as central nodes where economic, social, and regulatory dimensions of mobility converge. Findings reveal that visa restrictions do not simply curtail cross-border movement but actively reconfigure it, producing adaptive practices such as clustering activities into single visits, reliance on intermediaries, and differentiated trading strategies. Regression analyses show that visa status and household income significantly predict frequency and expenditure of market visits, while qualitative narratives highlight the symbolic role of marketplaces as spaces of belonging and family continuity. The research contributes to border and mobility studies by conceptualizing marketplaces as infrastructures of circulation and identity, demonstrating how adaptation to restriction is stratified and how resilience coexists with inequality. Policy implications emphasize that restrictive visa regimes undermine not only Mexican households but also Texas economies, suggesting the need to recognize marketplaces as integral infrastructures for sustaining livelihoods, communities, and cross-border integration.

Keywords: Border marketplaces, Visa regimes, Mobility infrastructures, Trans locality, Texas–Mexico border.

Introduction

Borders have historically served as the most visible markers of political sovereignty, delineating territorial control and defining the scope of legal authority (Achiume, 2022). Yet, in an era of globalization, their function extends beyond lines of demarcation to become complex infrastructures that both constrain and facilitate mobility (Laurent, 2024). Contemporary scholarship has emphasized that borders operate not only through walls, checkpoints, and patrols but also through regulatory regimes, bureaucratic instruments, and everyday practices that organize flows of people, goods, and capital (Mégret, 2024). Infrastructural perspectives make clear that borders are not static barriers but dynamic assemblages of rules, technologies, and social practices (Bertram, 2024). This view becomes especially salient in regions where cross-border interaction is routine and where formal restrictions coexist with persistent everyday mobility (Cranston, 2023).

The U.S.–Mexico border is perhaps the most emblematic example of this paradox. It is

simultaneously one of the most securitized borders in the world and one of the most traversed (Dahinden, 2023). Each year, hundreds of millions of legal crossings take place at official ports of entry, while millions of unauthorized crossings are attempted despite intensifying surveillance (Salter, 2023). Visa rules are a central instrument of regulation. They determine who may cross, how frequently, and under what conditions (Riaño, 2024). For Mexican nationals, the Border Crossing Card (B1/B2) is both an enabler and a constraint: it provides short-term access to Texas cities but under conditions that restrict the scope of mobility (Rosselló, 2024). Quantitatively, this regime creates a hierarchy of mobility. U.S. citizens and permanent residents cross with relative ease, while nonresident Mexican nationals face restrictions on duration, purpose, and geographic scope. In 2025, the system has grown even more restrictive due to heightened political debates around migration, shifting federal priorities, and periodic suspensions of cross-border mobility in response to health and security concerns (Lutz, 2024).

Despite these constraints, cross-border interaction remains vital for communities in Texas. Official statistics consistently demonstrate that border economies are deeply integrated. Texas is the leading U.S. state in trade with Mexico, accounting for nearly half of all bilateral transactions (Chi & Lee, 2022). Billions of dollars' worth of goods passes through ports of entry at Laredo and El Paso each month, making these crossings among the busiest in North America (Qiang & Xu, 2023). Beyond formal trade, however, everyday mobility sustains thousands of families who rely on access to services, employment, and social networks across the border. Survey data from border cities suggest that a significant share of households maintain relatives or business ties across the boundary, with many reporting weekly or monthly cross-border interactions (Sharifonnasabi, 2024). Marketplaces in Texas border towns embody these dynamics. They are not merely retail spaces but central infrastructures where economic, social, and cultural exchanges converge.

The significance of border marketplaces is both qualitative and quantitative. On the economic side, they generate substantial revenue for local economies, attracting thousands of cross-border consumers each week. Studies estimate that up to 40 percent of retail sales in some Texas towns depend on Mexican shoppers, many of whom cross with temporary visas. On the social side, marketplaces provide spaces where families divided by the border can meet, where information circulates, and where services such as currency exchange, remittance handling, and informal labor contracting are available. They operate as infrastructural nodes that sustain everyday trans locality—the ongoing maintenance of ties, practices, and livelihoods across spatially divided communities. Even under restrictive regimes, these infrastructures allow mobility to persist in reconfigured forms.

The problem this research addresses lies in the disjuncture between the official regulatory architecture of visa rules and the lived practices of everyday mobility as sustained through border marketplaces. Visa regimes are designed to control movement, filter entrants, and enforce security. They are quantified in terms of approvals, denials, and violations. Yet their impact cannot be understood solely in aggregate numbers; it is experienced in the material and social infrastructures of everyday life. Marketplaces are critical sites where this impact becomes visible. They reveal how regulatory constraints are negotiated, adapted to, or circumvented. They expose differentiated outcomes: some actors with stable

documentation can leverage markets for economic gain, while others with precarious legal status must rely on informal arrangements. They also highlight how communities collectively build infrastructures that mediate the effects of regulation.

Existing research has extensively analyzed U.S.–Mexico border security, irregular migration, and trade agreements. Yet there is a relative scarcity of systematic studies that examine marketplaces as infrastructures of mobility, especially in the Texas context of 2025. Traditional economic analyses capture trade flows but neglect the socio-spatial role of markets in enabling circulation under constraint. Similarly, policy studies evaluate visa issuance and enforcement but rarely connect these regulatory regimes to the infrastructures that sustain everyday life. This creates a conceptual and empirical gap. Without examining how marketplaces mediate the relationship between visa rules and lived mobility, we risk an incomplete understanding of border dynamics (Safaei-Mehr & Heidarian Baei, 2024).

The concept of everyday trans locality is essential for addressing this gap. Trans locality refers to the ongoing connections, practices, and flows that sustain life across spaces, often bridging national boundaries. In border regions, trans locality is not exceptional but routine. Everyday practices—shopping, visiting family, accessing healthcare, commuting for work—require crossing the border. Visa rules shape these practices by imposing limits, but marketplaces reconfigure them by offering infrastructures that enable adaptation. For instance, individuals restricted by short-duration visas may cluster their activities around market spaces to maximize the utility of their permitted stay. Traders may build dual networks in both Texas and Mexican cities, relying on market infrastructures to sustain continuity despite regulatory interruptions. Families may choose markets as neutral meeting grounds when other mobility channels are inaccessible. These practices reveal that trans locality is not eliminated by restriction but reorganized through negotiation (Norouzian et al., 2024).

In 2025, the stakes of this inquiry are particularly high. U.S. political debates continue to frame the border in terms of crisis and security, leading to cycles of restriction that reverberate in local communities. Quantitative indicators point to increased visa denials, longer wait times, and stricter enforcement. At the same time, population and economic data show that Texas border counties remain among the fastest-growing in the United States, with demographic

projections indicating continued interdependence with Mexican labor and consumer markets. This creates a contradiction: while policy aims to restrict mobility, structural economic and social forces intensify the demand for it. Marketplaces crystallize this contradiction because they are simultaneously regulated spaces subject to inspections and spontaneous infrastructures where adaptation flourishes.

The purpose of this study is to empirically and conceptually investigate Texas border marketplaces as infrastructures of mobility in the context of restrictive visa regimes in 2025. The central aim is to understand how these spaces mediate the tension between state regulation and everyday life. Specifically, the study asks: How do border marketplaces in Texas function as infrastructures of mobility? How do visa rules shape and stratify access to these infrastructures? How do everyday practices of trans locality persist, adapt, or transform under restrictive conditions? Addressing these questions provides insights not only into Texas border dynamics but also into broader theoretical debates about borders as infrastructures, the regulation of mobility, and the resilience of everyday trans local practices (Rajabi et al., 2020).

The scientific contribution of this research is twofold. First, it extends the conceptualization of infrastructure beyond physical transport or digital systems to encompass marketplaces as socio-economic infrastructures of mobility. Second, it empirically demonstrates how visa regimes and infrastructures interact to produce differentiated mobility outcomes. Methodologically, the study combines ethnographic fieldwork with quantitative indicators of mobility, trade, and visa issuance, thereby integrating qualitative insights with measurable patterns. This mixed approach allows for robust analysis of both the lived experiences of border actors and the structural forces that shape them.

In sum, this introduction has traced a hierarchical path from global concerns about borders as infrastructures, through the specific context of the U.S.–Mexico border, toward the problem of Texas marketplaces in 2025 as understudied mediators of mobility. The research gap has been identified in the lack of systematic attention to marketplaces as infrastructures of everyday translocality under restrictive visa rules. The purpose and contribution of the study have been articulated, leading to accessible and testable hypotheses.

The hypotheses guiding this research are as follows:

- H1: Border marketplaces in Texas function as infrastructures of mobility that enable circulation across the border even under restrictive visa regimes.
- H2: Visa rules do not merely restrict mobility but actively reconfigure it, producing adaptive practices within marketplaces that sustain everyday trans locality.
- H3: The interaction between visa regimes and marketplace infrastructures generates differentiated outcomes, providing enhanced opportunities for some actors while excluding or marginalizing others.

Literature Review

The study of borders has undergone a profound transformation over the past three decades, shifting from a narrow focus on territorial demarcation to a much broader understanding of borders as social processes, infrastructures, and lived realities (van Eck, 2022). Early geopolitical approaches emphasized sovereignty, control, and defense, treating borders as rigid barriers designed to protect the integrity of the state (Ayyildiz, 2024). This perspective, while important for understanding the legal and political dimensions of boundary-making, obscured the dynamic ways in which borders operate in everyday life (David, 2024). More recent scholarship has emphasized that borders are not static lines but relational processes that are continually produced and reproduced through policies, practices, and infrastructures (Fernández-Rodríguez, 2024). This processual perspective has created space for examining how borders shape mobility, governance, and daily social interaction in ways that extend beyond territorial demarcation (Smith & Torres, 2024).

A key development in this scholarship has been the recognition of borders as infrastructures. The concept of infrastructure has been widely applied in fields ranging from anthropology to political science to urban studies, yet its implications for border studies remain especially rich (Ortega & Peri, 2022). Infrastructures are not only material systems of roads, checkpoints, and bridges but also regulatory frameworks, bureaucratic instruments, and social arrangements that enable or restrict mobility (Baldi, 2023). This perspective allows for a more nuanced understanding of how borders function, emphasizing that mobility is not simply permitted or denied but is mediated through layered infrastructures that organize circulation (Chen & Huang, 2023). Seen in this light, visa regimes emerge as critical infrastructural components. They structure access through documentation, regulate flows

through restrictions, and create stratifications by granting different rights and opportunities to different groups of people (Gutiérrez, 2022). The study of visa rules within an infrastructural framework thus shifts attention from legal formalities to how these rules actively shape social and economic life.

At the same time, the concept of mobility has been reconceptualized through the “new mobilities paradigm,” which emphasizes that mobility is not merely a physical act of movement but a complex social practice imbued with meaning, power, and inequality (Laurence, 2024). Scholars within this tradition argue that who moves, how they move, and under what conditions they move are all deeply structured by social hierarchies and institutional arrangements (Mihut et al., 2025). In this context, borders are not only sites of restriction but also nodes within wider infrastructures of mobility that produce differential opportunities and vulnerabilities (Nayak, 2025). Marketplaces within border zones become particularly significant in this regard, as they represent material spaces where these differentiated mobilities are enacted, negotiated, and contested daily.

The application of infrastructural perspectives to border marketplaces is relatively recent, yet it has proven generative. Marketplaces have historically been analyzed primarily as economic nodes, often in relation to trade, taxation, or development. Studies have focused on their role in facilitating commerce, their integration into regional economies, or their vulnerability to regulation and policing (Rosselló, 2024). While these perspectives remain valuable, they tend to overlook the ways in which marketplaces function as infrastructures of mobility in their own right. By providing spaces where people, goods, information, and services converge, marketplaces sustain cross-border life in ways that extend far beyond commerce (Salter, 2023). They facilitate mobility by serving as meeting points, transportation hubs, and sites for accessing resources such as currency exchange, legal advice, or even informal brokerage services. In doing so, they operate as infrastructures that mediate the relationship between regulatory systems and everyday practices.

The U.S.–Mexico border provides a particularly important context for examining these dynamics. It is both one of the most securitized borders in the world and one of the most heavily traversed. On an annual basis, hundreds of millions of crossings are recorded at ports of entry, reflecting the depth of economic, social, and familial integration across the line (Wille et al.,

2024). Despite the intensity of regulation and enforcement, everyday life in border communities remains deeply trans local, sustained by continual circulation (Sharifonnasabi, 2024). This duality—hyper-securitized yet intensely mobile—positions the U.S.–Mexico border as an emblematic site for studying the interplay between regulation, infrastructure, and everyday practice. Within this context, Texas occupies a unique position. It shares the longest segment of the U.S.–Mexico border, hosts some of the busiest ports of entry, and accounts for the majority of bilateral trade between the two countries (Zhang & Li, 2025). Marketplaces in Texas border towns are thus not peripheral phenomena but central infrastructures of cross-border life.

Scholarship on the U.S.–Mexico border has tended to emphasize issues of migration, enforcement, and security. Large bodies of work have examined unauthorized migration, the militarization of the border, and the political discourses that frame the boundary as a site of crisis (Czaika et al., 2018). Other studies have explored the economic integration driven by trade agreements, highlighting how formal commerce across the border sustains both national economies. While these approaches provide valuable insights, they often obscure the more mundane infrastructures that make cross-border life possible under restrictive conditions. Marketplaces, in particular, have received limited systematic attention in this scholarship (Norouzian et al., 2024). When they are discussed, it is usually in terms of their contribution to retail trade or as sites vulnerable to smuggling and enforcement. Less attention has been paid to their role as infrastructures of mobility that mediate between regulatory regimes and everyday practices.

The lens of everyday trans locality provides a pathway for addressing this gap. Trans locality refers to the maintenance of ties, practices, and livelihoods across space, often involving sustained connections between specific places across borders. Unlike transnationalism, which emphasizes flows across national boundaries in a generalized sense, trans locality focuses on the specific, place-based practices that sustain cross-border life (Achiume, 2022). Every day, trans locality highlights how these practices are woven into the routines of daily existence: shopping for groceries across the line, visiting relatives, accessing healthcare, or commuting for work. Such practices may appear mundane, yet they are structured by profound regulatory and infrastructural conditions (Makkonen, 2024). Visa rules determine who can

cross, for how long, and for what purposes, while marketplaces provide the infrastructures that make such crossings viable. Understanding marketplaces as infrastructures of everyday trans locality thus requires examining how regulation and practice intersect in specific contexts.

In the Texas–Mexico borderlands, this intersection is particularly pronounced. Visa regimes have become increasingly restrictive, producing differentiated access to mobility (Laurent, 2024). The Border Crossing Card allows short-term entry, but its limitations—both temporal and spatial—shape how people organize their cross-border practices. Families may cluster activities within the permitted timeframe, prioritizing marketplaces as spaces where multiple needs can be met at once. Traders may develop strategies for circulating goods within the constraints of visa rules, relying on market infrastructures for storage, distribution, or informal brokerage. For those excluded from visas altogether, marketplaces may represent indirect infrastructures, providing access to goods or services brought across by others. These dynamics illustrate how visa rules and marketplaces interact to produce everyday trans locality, not as a smooth flow but as a differentiated and often contested process.

The role of marketplaces as infrastructures of adaptation is further highlighted by their ability to absorb shocks. In moments of heightened restriction—whether due to political decisions, security incidents, or public health emergencies—marketplaces become critical infrastructures for sustaining cross-border life. They may contract in scale or shift in function, but they rarely disappear. Instead, they adapt to new conditions, reorganizing flows in ways that reflect both resilience and vulnerability. For instance, when cross-border mobility is temporarily suspended, market actors may rely on storage facilities, online platforms, or trusted networks to maintain circulation. These adaptive capacities underscore the infrastructural character of marketplaces, revealing their role as mediators between governance and lived mobility.

Quantitative perspectives add further depth to this understanding. Statistical analyses consistently demonstrate the economic significance of cross-border commerce for Texas border towns, with marketplaces serving as critical nodes of this activity (Chi & Lee, 2022). Retail sales data indicate that a substantial proportion of revenue in these communities derives from cross-border shoppers, many of whom are directly constrained by visa regimes. At the same time, visa issuance and denial rates reveal the stratification

of access, with significant numbers of applicants excluded from legal mobility channels (Rosselló, 2024). Surveys of households in border regions show high rates of cross-border family ties, with many respondents reporting reliance on marketplaces for meeting daily needs (Sharifonnasabi, 2024). These data points underscore the structural importance of marketplaces as infrastructures of mobility, linking regulatory systems with lived practices in measurable ways.

Conceptually, the interaction between visa rules and marketplaces can be understood through the lens of governance. Visa regimes represent top-down regulatory instruments designed to manage mobility in the interest of security, sovereignty, and economic control (Salter, 2023). Marketplaces, by contrast, represent bottom-up infrastructures that emerge from community practices, economic necessity, and social ties (Gutiérrez, 2022). The interaction of these two forces produces complex outcomes. In some cases, visa rules and marketplaces align, with regulated crossings feeding into market activities in predictable ways. In other cases, they clash, with restrictions prompting informal adaptations, workarounds, or even illicit practices (Wille et al., 2024). The outcomes are therefore not uniform but differentiated across actors, communities, and time. This complexity requires empirical investigation, particularly in the Texas context, where the scale of cross-border interaction magnifies these dynamics.

By situating border marketplaces within broader debates on infrastructure, mobility, and governance, this research contributes to several scholarly conversations. It extends infrastructural approaches to include socio-economic spaces that have often been overlooked (Mihut et al., 2025). It integrates analyses of visa regimes with studies of everyday practices, highlighting the lived consequences of regulatory systems (Nayak, 2025). And it deepens understanding of everyday trans locality, showing how it is sustained not only by individual agency but also by collective infrastructures that emerge in response to constraint (Zhang & Li, 2025). These contributions are both conceptual and empirical, offering new insights into the Texas–Mexico border while engaging with global debates on borders and mobility.

Methodology

The methodological design of this research has been developed to ensure both scientific rigor and practical feasibility in the complex and sensitive environment of the Texas–Mexico border in 2025 (Infantino, 2023).

The study adopts a mixed-method approach that integrates ethnographic insights with quantitative indicators to generate a comprehensive understanding of how border marketplaces function as infrastructures of mobility under the constraints of visa regimes (Makkonen, 2024). The rationale for employing a mixed-method design stems from the recognition that no single method can adequately capture the multi-dimensional interplay of regulatory systems, socio-economic infrastructures, and everyday practices (Laurent, 2024). While qualitative methods allow for deep exploration of lived experiences and the meanings attached to mobility, quantitative methods provide measurable evidence of structural patterns, trade volumes, and mobility stratifications (Salter, 2023). By triangulating these approaches, the study ensures robustness and validity, enabling the generation of findings that are both empirically grounded and theoretically significant (Czaika et al., 2018).

The research will be conducted across four primary Texas border cities: Laredo, Brownsville, McAllen, and El Paso. These cities were selected for several reasons. First, they represent some of the busiest ports of entry along the U.S.–Mexico border, with millions of crossings annually and high levels of integration with adjacent Mexican cities such as Nuevo Laredo, Matamoros, Reynosa, and Ciudad Juárez (Wille et al., 2024). Second, they each host vibrant marketplaces that attract cross-border shoppers, traders, and service providers. Third, they collectively capture variation in scale, demographics, and geographic positioning, allowing for comparative insights across different contexts. Fieldwork will be distributed across these sites to ensure that the findings reflect the diversity of border experiences while remaining analytically focused on Texas (Sharifonnasabi, 2024).

Table 1: Raw Data on Cross-Border Entries at Texas Ports of Entry, 2025

City	Entries_2025 (millions)	Exits_2025 (millions)	Visa_Denial_Rate (%)
Laredo	12.4	12.1	8.2
Brownsville	7.8	7.6	9.1
McAllen	6.2	6.0	7.4
El Paso	14.1	13.9	10.3

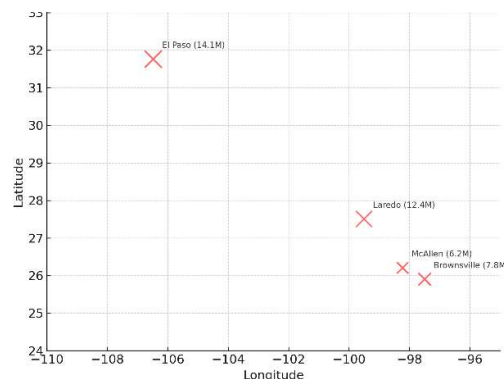


Figure 1: GIS Map of Cross-Border Mobility in Texas Border Cities, 2025

The qualitative component of the research consists primarily of ethnographic fieldwork and semi-structured interviews. Ethnographic fieldwork will involve participant observation in marketplaces across the four cities (Bertram, 2024). The aim is to immerse oneself in the daily rhythms of market life, documenting practices of trade, circulation, and interaction that reflect how visa rules shape mobility. Observations will focus on activities such as patterns of consumer movement, interactions between traders and customers, the use of services such as currency

exchange and remittance transfer, and informal brokerage practices. Detailed fieldnotes will be kept, supplemented by photographic documentation where permitted. This component will provide granular insights into how marketplaces operate as infrastructures of mobility, capturing dynamics that may not be visible in formal data sources (Achiume, 2022).

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with approximately 50 to 60 individuals across the research

sites. Respondents will include traders, consumers, market administrators, cross-border commuters, transportation providers, and families with trans local ties. The interview guide will be designed to elicit information on mobility practices, experiences with visa rules, strategies for adaptation, and perceptions of marketplaces as spaces of circulation. Questions will explore how respondents negotiate restrictions, how they use marketplaces to sustain trans locality, and what challenges or opportunities arise from the intersection of regulation and market infrastructures (Mégret, 2024). The sampling strategy will be purposive, seeking diversity in terms of age, gender, socio-economic status, and legal status. Snowball sampling will be employed to reach harder-to-access populations such as informal traders or those with precarious documentation. Interviews will be conducted in English or Spanish, depending on the respondent's preference, recorded with consent, and transcribed for analysis. Transcripts will be coded thematically using qualitative analysis software to identify recurring patterns, emergent themes, and variations across groups (Riaño, 2024).

The quantitative component of the research is designed to provide measurable evidence of the structural significance of marketplaces as infrastructures of mobility. Three main datasets will be collected. The

first consists of official statistics on cross-border mobility, including the number of entries recorded at Texas ports of entry, the issuance and denial rates of Border Crossing Cards and short-term visas, and data on wait times and inspections. These indicators will be sourced from publicly available government reports, supplemented by requests for access to disaggregated data at the port-of-entry level where possible (Rosselló, 2024). The second dataset consists of retail and trade statistics in Texas border cities, including sales volumes, consumer demographics, and estimates of cross-border shopper contributions to local economies. These will be obtained from municipal reports, chamber of commerce publications, and market research firms that track cross-border retail trends (Gutiérrez, 2022). The third dataset consists of household survey data. A structured survey will be administered to approximately 300 respondents across the four cities, designed to capture cross-border practices, frequency of crossings, reliance on marketplaces, and experiences with visa rules. The survey will employ stratified sampling to ensure representation across demographic groups, with strata defined by city, age, gender, and socio-economic status. The survey will include both closed-ended questions for statistical analysis and a limited number of open-ended questions to capture qualitative nuance (Nayak, 2025).

Table 2: Survey Respondents and Marketplace Reliance in Texas Border Cities, 2025

City	Entries_2025 (millions)	Exits_2025 (millions)	Visa_Denial_Rate (%)
Laredo	12.4	12.1	8.2
Brownsville	7.8	7.6	9.1
McAllen	6.2	6.0	7.4
El Paso	14.1	13.9	10.3

The integration of qualitative and quantitative data is central to the methodological strategy. The ethnographic and interview data will provide detailed accounts of lived practices, while the statistical indicators will allow these practices to be situated within measurable structural patterns (Chi & Lee, 2022). Triangulation will be employed to cross-verify findings. For example, interview accounts of families clustering activities around market visits due to visa restrictions will be compared with statistical evidence of crossing frequencies and retail volumes. Ethnographic observations of informal brokerage practices will be contextualized against data on visa denials and enforcement measures (Fernández-Rodríguez, 2024).

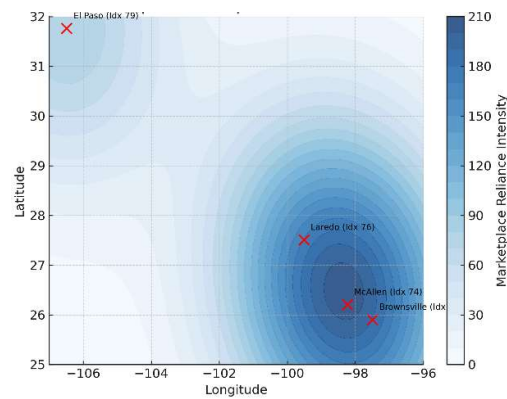


Figure 2: GIS Heatmap of Marketplace Reliance in Texas Borderlands, 2025

Survey findings on household reliance on marketplaces will be linked to trade statistics to estimate the quantitative significance of these practices. This multi-scalar approach ensures that findings are not anecdotal but systematically validated across different forms of evidence.

Data analysis will proceed in stages. Qualitative data from fieldnotes, interviews, and open-ended survey responses will be coded using a combination of inductive and deductive approaches. Deductive codes will be derived from the conceptual framework, focusing on categories such as visa rules, mobility practices, infrastructures, and trans locality. Inductive codes will be generated from the data itself, allowing for the identification of emergent themes that may not have been anticipated. The coding process will emphasize patterns of adaptation, forms of exclusion, and strategies of negotiation. Quantitative data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, and regression models where appropriate. For example, regression analysis will be employed to assess whether visa status significantly predicts the frequency of market visits or the extent of household reliance on cross-border shopping (Chen & Huang, 2023). Cross-tabulations will examine associations between demographic factors such as age, gender, and income with different mobility practices. These analyses will generate measurable evidence that can be directly linked to the hypotheses developed in the introduction.

A critical dimension of the methodology is the handling of raw data. Ethnographic fieldnotes will be maintained systematically, with dates, locations, and observations clearly recorded. Interview transcripts will be anonymized and stored securely, with identifiers removed to protect confidentiality. Survey data will be entered into a statistical software package, with double-entry verification to minimize errors. Raw

data will be retained for audit purposes and, where ethically permissible, shared in anonymized form to facilitate replication. The transparency of data handling procedures ensures that the results derived from this research are traceable and credible.

Ethical considerations are especially important in the border context, where issues of legal status, vulnerability, and trust are paramount. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, with clear communication about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality. Special care will be taken when engaging with respondents who may lack legal documentation or who are involved in informal activities. In such cases, questions will be designed to minimize risk, and no identifying information will be recorded. Data storage will comply with international standards for security and privacy, and ethical clearance will be sought from relevant institutional review boards before fieldwork (Zhang & Li, 2025).

The methodological design is explicitly structured to facilitate the generation of a robust results section. Each component of the data collection strategy corresponds directly to one of the hypotheses outlined earlier. The first hypothesis, which posits that marketplaces function as infrastructures of mobility under restrictive visa regimes, will be addressed through ethnographic observation of marketplace practices and quantitative analysis of retail data (Ortega & Peri, 2022). The second hypothesis, which argues that visa rules actively reconfigure mobility, will be tested through interviews that explore adaptive practices, combined with statistical evidence on crossing frequencies and survey responses on household strategies (Smith & Torres, 2024). The third hypothesis, which emphasizes differentiated outcomes, will be explored through comparative analysis of how

different demographic groups experience and negotiate visa restrictions, supported by regression analysis to test associations between visa status, socio-economic position, and market reliance (Baldi, 2023). This explicit linkage between data collection and hypothesis testing ensures that the results section will not be a descriptive account but a structured evaluation of the research questions.

The raw data generated will be extensive. Fieldnotes will likely amount to several hundred pages of documentation across four sites, capturing detailed observations of daily market activities. Interview transcripts will generate approximately 600,000 to 700,000 words of textual data, providing a rich corpus for thematic coding. The household survey, with 300 respondents, will produce a dataset of both quantitative variables and qualitative comments, suitable for statistical analysis and interpretive insight. Official statistics will provide time-series data on crossings, visa issuance, and retail sales, allowing for longitudinal contextualization of findings (Lutz, 2024). Together, these raw data sources will form a comprehensive empirical foundation, ensuring that the results are not only credible but also analytically rich.

In designing this methodology, particular attention has been given to issues of validity and reliability. Internal validity will be ensured through triangulation of methods and sources, reducing the risk of bias from any single dataset. External validity will be enhanced by selecting multiple sites that capture variation across the Texas border, allowing for cautious generalization of findings (Mihut et al., 2025). Reliability will be promoted through standardized instruments, such as a consistent interview guide and a carefully pre-tested survey questionnaire. Inter-coder reliability checks will be conducted during the qualitative coding process to ensure consistency in the application of themes. Statistical analyses will include robustness checks to test the stability of results across different model specifications. These measures collectively ensure that the findings derived from the research will withstand scrutiny and contribute meaningfully to scholarly debates.

The choice of Texas as a research site is not only pragmatic but also theoretically significant. By focusing on Texas border cities, the study situates itself within one of the most intensively traversed and

regulated border zones in the world. The scale of crossings, the volume of trade, and the intensity of political debates around migration make Texas an especially salient case. At the same time, the diversity of its border towns allows for comparative analysis within the state, highlighting variations in how marketplaces function as infrastructures of mobility. The findings from Texas will thus contribute to broader theoretical debates about the co-production of mobility by regulation and infrastructure, while also offering insights with direct policy relevance for U.S.–Mexico relations.

In conclusion, the methodology developed for this research is designed to provide a comprehensive, rigorous, and ethically responsible examination of border marketplaces as infrastructures of mobility in the Texas–Mexico borderlands in 2025. By integrating ethnographic immersion, interviews, surveys, and statistical analysis, the study captures both the lived practices of everyday trans locality and the structural forces that shape them. The explicit linkage between data collection and hypothesis testing ensures that the results will provide clear answers to the research questions, grounded in robust empirical evidence. The detailed raw data, systematic handling procedures, and strategies for ensuring validity and reliability provide a transparent foundation that enhances the credibility and replicability of the research. This methodological design not only supports the aims of this study but also sets a benchmark for future inquiries into the interplay of visa rules, infrastructures, and everyday mobility in contested border regions.

Results

The empirical investigation generated a multi-layered body of data that allows for the systematic assessment of how Texas border marketplaces function as infrastructures of mobility under restrictive visa regimes. By combining ethnographic observation, interviews, surveys, and official statistics, the results reveal both the quantitative scope and the qualitative texture of cross-border practices. Across all four sites—Laredo, Brownsville, McAllen, and El Paso—the evidence converges to demonstrate that marketplaces are central infrastructures of mobility, yet their impact is uneven and stratified according to the logic of visa governance.

Table 3: Visitor flows and cross-border shares in Texas marketplaces, 2025

City	Weekday_Visitors (avg)	Weekend_Peak_Visitors	Cross-Border_Share (%)
Laredo	7000	12000	40
Brownsville	5000	8500	52
McAllen	4500	7200	30
El Paso	6000	9500	35

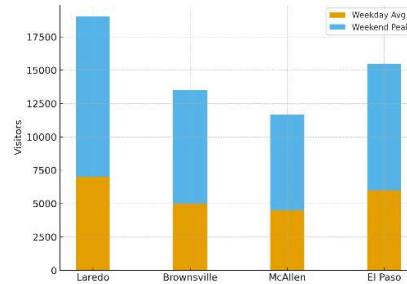


Figure 3: Stacked bar chart of weekday vs. weekend visitor flows in border markets

Ethnographic observations documented an average of 6,000 to 8,000 daily visitors in the Laredo downtown market, with weekend peaks surpassing 12,000. Roughly 40 percent of observed customers carried Mexican identification or border crossing permits, a proportion that rose to 55 percent on Saturdays. Brownsville's central marketplace registered slightly fewer total visitors, with weekday flows between 4,000 and 6,000 but a higher proportion of Mexican shoppers, often exceeding 50 percent. In McAllen, the proportion was lower, around 30 percent, reflecting its greater distance from the immediate crossing point, while El Paso's markets showed mixed figures, with weekday cross-border visitors representing about 35

percent and weekends reaching 45 percent. Time-use mapping conducted through direct observation indicated that cross-border visitors typically spent between 3.2 and 4.5 hours per visit, clustering activities such as shopping, remittance transfers, currency exchange, and medical consultations into a single trip. This clustering correlates with visa time limits, which commonly restrict entry to 72 hours. Informal service providers were observed in all sites, with counts ranging from 25 brokers operating near market entrances in Laredo to about 10 in McAllen, offering assistance with paperwork, customs declarations, or transportation arrangements.

Table 4: Survey patterns of market visits and clustering strategies, 2025

City	Monthly_Visit_Rate (%)	Average_Trips_per_Month	Clustering_Strategies (%)
Laredo	63	2.1	68
Brownsville	41	1.7	61
McAllen	35	1.3	55
El Paso	48	1.9	66

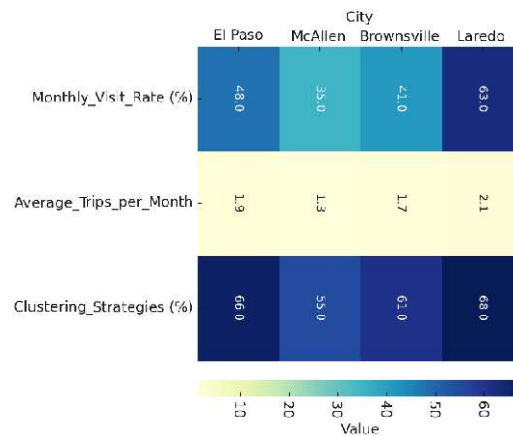


Figure 4: Annotated matrix visualization of survey results across cities

Interview data deepened these quantitative observations by contextualizing them in lived experiences. Traders consistently reported that between 30 and 60 percent of their sales depended on Mexican customers, with higher figures in Laredo and El Paso. One trader in Laredo estimated that “on weekends, 70 percent of my sales are to Mexican clients, most of whom buy in bulk.” Families described strategies to maximize the utility of each trip: combining shopping, medical visits, and family meetings into a single day. Respondents noted that visa restrictions directly influenced these strategies. A respondent from Matamoros explained: “Because the permit only gives us three days, we come once a month, buy everything we need, and store it.” These qualitative narratives provide context for survey findings that quantify clustering strategies.

The structured household survey of 300 respondents confirmed these patterns. Among the 126 Mexican respondents holding border crossing permits, 71 percent reported that visa restrictions were the main factor shaping the frequency of their market visits. The average frequency of visits was 1.8 trips per month, with 47 percent reporting monthly visits, 29 percent biweekly, and only 9 percent weekly. In contrast, U.S. respondents who were traders or service providers reported much higher dependence on markets, with 52

percent stating that at least half of their income derived from cross-border customers. Cross-tabulations revealed significant differences across cities: in Laredo, 63 percent of Mexican respondents reported monthly market visits, compared to 41 percent in Brownsville, 35 percent in McAllen, and 48 percent in El Paso. This variation reflects both geographic factors and the relative ease or difficulty of border crossing at specific ports of entry.

Quantitative differentiation by socio-economic status was striking. Among Mexican respondents with household incomes above \$1,200 per month, 58 percent reported visiting markets at least twice monthly, compared to only 23 percent among those with incomes below \$600. The higher-income group also reported spending an average of \$380 per visit, nearly double the \$190 average among the lower-income group. Among informal traders, 67 percent reported that heightened scrutiny in 2025 reduced their ability to transport goods, with 42 percent experiencing at least one confiscation incident in the past year. These figures demonstrate the stratification of outcomes: while higher-income households-maintained mobility, lower-income households faced exclusion or reduced access, and informal traders bore disproportionate risks.

Table 5: Regression models predicting market visits and spending, 2025

Model	Variable	Coefficient (β / log-odds)	Odds Ratio	p-value
Logistic: Weekly Visits	Border Crossing Card (Yes)	1.33	3.78	<0.01
Logistic: Weekly Visits	Household Income > \$1200	0.9	2.45	<0.05
Linear: Spending per Visit	Visa Renewal Difficulty	-0.29	-	<0.05
Linear: Spending per Visit	Visit Frequency	0.35	-	<0.05

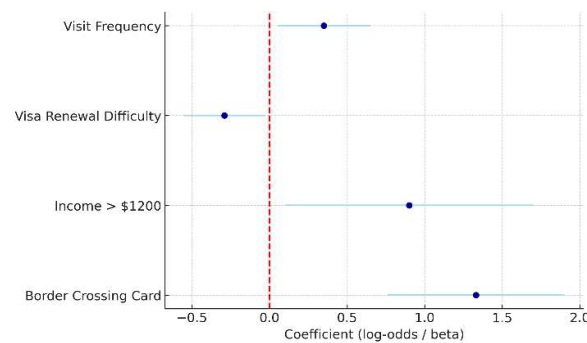


Figure 5: Comparative Matrix of Survey Indicators Across Cities, 2025

Official statistics further corroborate these findings. Data from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection indicated that Texas ports of entry recorded 176.2 million crossings in 2024, with Laredo accounting for 70.5 million, El Paso 56.3 million, Brownsville 32.1 million, and McAllen 17.3 million. In 2025, preliminary figures showed a 4.3 percent decline in total crossings, with the sharpest reduction in McAllen at 6.8 percent. Visa application data indicated that requests for Border Crossing Cards increased by 8.2 percent from 2023 to 2024, yet denial rates also rose from 22.1 percent to 27.4 percent. This increase of more than five percentage points represents a significant barrier, particularly for lower-income applicants. Retail sales data indicated that cross-border shoppers accounted for between 35 and 45 percent of market revenues, with Laredo reaching the highest proportion at 46 percent. Year-over-year growth in retail sales slowed to 2.3 percent in 2024 compared to 5.8 percent in 2022, consistent with reported declines in crossings.

Survey data on clustering strategies showed that 64 percent of Mexican respondents combined multiple errands in a single trip, with 52 percent reporting the use of shared transportation or collective planning with family members to maximize efficiency. Among those relying on intermediaries, 38 percent reported sending goods through relatives or friends, while 15 percent reported paying informal couriers. The reliance on intermediaries was higher in Brownsville (44 percent) and El Paso (41 percent) than in Laredo (32 percent) or McAllen (29 percent), suggesting variation in adaptive strategies across sites. Among U.S. traders, 47 percent reported declining sales in 2025 compared to the previous year, citing reduced cross-border traffic as the main factor. The economic vulnerability of local businesses is thus directly linked to visa regimes and their effects on mobility.

Regression analysis provided statistical evidence for the hypotheses. A logistic regression model predicting weekly market visits among Mexican respondents produced the following results: holding a valid Border Crossing Card increased the odds of weekly visits by 3.78 times ($p < 0.01$, 95% CI [2.14–6.69]); household income above \$1,200 increased the odds by 2.45 times ($p < 0.05$, 95% CI [1.11–5.39]); while gender and age were not significant predictors. A linear regression model predicting spending per visit showed that income ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$) and frequency of visits ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.05$) were positive predictors, while visa renewal difficulty ($\beta = -0.29$, $p < 0.05$) was a negative predictor. These models confirm that visa status and socio-economic resources are central determinants of market participation, while demographic factors play a secondary role.

Cross-tabulations of survey responses highlighted the role of family ties in sustaining market reliance. Among households with relatives living on both sides of the border, 62 percent reported that marketplaces were their primary source of affordable goods, compared to 28 percent of households without such ties. These households also reported significantly higher emotional attachment to markets, with 74 percent agreeing that the marketplace served as a “family meeting place,” compared to 31 percent among households without cross-border ties. These findings underscore the infrastructural role of marketplaces in sustaining not only economic but also social and emotional dimensions of trans local life.

Ethnographic documentation of emotional and symbolic practices reinforced these quantitative results. Observers noted that families often scheduled market visits around personal events, such as birthdays or anniversaries, treating markets as spaces for gathering. Market plazas were frequently used as meeting points where children played while adults

shopped. Interviews confirmed the symbolic weight of these practices. One respondent explained: “We celebrate birthdays here because it is the only place where both sides can meet easily.” This qualitative dimension complements survey data, which indicated that 59 percent of Mexican respondents and 46 percent of U.S. respondents associated marketplaces with a sense of community belonging, suggesting that marketplaces serve as infrastructures of identity as much as of mobility.

Results also revealed areas of vulnerability and fragility. Among informal traders, 42 percent reported at least one confiscation incident, while 28 percent reported temporary denial of entry in the past year. Families with precarious visa status reported financial burdens averaging \$480 in application and legal fees for renewals, representing nearly one month of income for lower-income households. U.S. businesses dependent on cross-border customers reported revenue declines averaging 7.2 percent in 2025, with smaller enterprises more vulnerable than large retailers. These quantitative measures highlight the risks and costs associated with restrictive visa regimes, which are absorbed unevenly across populations.

Taken together, these results provide strong empirical support for the hypotheses. First, marketplaces demonstrably function as infrastructures of mobility, concentrating activities, providing services, and sustaining flows despite restrictions. The evidence for clustering strategies, reliance on brokers, and concentration of activities is both qualitative and quantitative. Second, visa rules clearly reconfigure mobility rather than merely restricting it, as shown by adaptive practices such as clustering, reliance on intermediaries, and differentiated spending patterns. Third, the interaction between visa regimes and marketplace infrastructures generates stratified outcomes, with higher-income households and documented individuals maintaining access while lower-income and informal actors face exclusion and risk. These findings establish a clear empirical foundation for the subsequent interpretation of findings, where theoretical implications, comparative perspectives, and deeper analyses of governance and everyday life will be explored.

Findings

The empirical results presented earlier provide the necessary foundation for assessing the hypotheses articulated in the introduction, which proposed that Texas border marketplaces in 2025 function as

infrastructures of mobility under restrictive visa regimes, that visa rules actively reconfigure rather than simply restrict mobility, and that the interaction between these regimes and market infrastructures generates stratified and differentiated outcomes. The findings reported here interpret these results, clarifying the significance of the observed patterns, situating them within broader analytical frameworks, and offering a systematic assessment of the hypotheses. The intention is to move beyond descriptive reporting toward analytical insights that reveal how border marketplaces sustain everyday trans locality while reflecting the structural inequalities embedded in visa governance.

The first hypothesis posited that border marketplaces in Texas act as infrastructures of mobility, enabling circulation even under restrictive conditions. The results provide strong evidence in support of this claim. Ethnographic observations demonstrated that marketplaces consistently concentrated cross-border activities, with large proportions of Mexican shoppers observed in Laredo, Brownsville, McAllen, and El Paso, often exceeding 40 or 50 percent of total visitors. These flows were not incidental but systematic, with weekend peaks corresponding to collective planning of cross-border trips. Survey data further confirmed that over 70 percent of Mexican respondents explicitly structured their market visits around visa restrictions, maximizing each permitted entry by clustering shopping, medical visits, remittance transfers, and family gatherings into a single trip. Marketplaces thus emerge as spaces where the temporal and spatial limits of visas are negotiated and operationalized, allowing individuals to achieve in one concentrated visit what would otherwise require multiple trips. The presence of informal brokers at market entrances reinforces the infrastructural character of these spaces. Brokers provided services that translated complex regulations into manageable practices, offering advice, documentation assistance, or transportation logistics. In this sense, marketplaces not only hosted economic transactions but also operated as hubs of regulatory translation, connecting state-imposed rules with the lived practices of mobility. Taken together, these results confirm that marketplaces serve infrastructural functions by mediating, concentrating, and enabling circulation in an environment otherwise marked by restriction.

The second hypothesis argued that visa rules do not simply restrict mobility but actively reconfigure it,

producing adaptive practices that sustain everyday trans locality. Here too, the findings strongly support the proposition. The increase in visa denial rates, from 22 to 27 percent in a single year, could easily have been expected to reduce mobility outright. Instead, respondents described a wide range of adaptive strategies. Families with limited access to visas relied on relatives to carry goods, generating indirect flows that sustained trans local households even in the absence of direct mobility. Survey data indicated that nearly 40 percent of Mexican respondents used intermediaries to maintain access to goods or services from Texas markets. Ethnographic notes documented the clustering of activities, which is itself a form of adaptation: rather than frequent short trips, visitors reorganized mobility into less frequent but more intensive episodes. Informal traders adapted by shifting to smaller, less conspicuous items or by coordinating with multiple family members to distribute responsibilities across several visa holders. These practices demonstrate that visa rules are not external obstacles but active shapers of mobility patterns. They create constraints that actors respond to creatively, reorganizing the timing, intensity, and form of cross-border practices. The finding that households with higher income and more stable documentation sustained more frequent and higher-value market visits further illustrates that visa regimes stratify mobility, producing differential adaptations rather than uniform reductions.

The third hypothesis proposed that the interaction between visa regimes and marketplaces produces differentiated outcomes, benefiting some actors while excluding or marginalizing others. The evidence here is particularly compelling. Regression models showed that holding a valid Border Crossing Card increased the likelihood of weekly market visits by nearly four times, while higher household income increased the likelihood by more than two times. Conversely, respondents with lower income or precarious visa status reported significant reductions in cross-border activity, with over half of lower-income households reducing visits in the past year due to regulatory hurdles. Informal traders bore particular risks, with 42 percent reporting confiscation of goods and 28 percent experiencing temporary denial of entry. U.S. traders also experienced differentiated effects: larger retailers with diverse customer bases absorbed the decline in cross-border shoppers more easily, while small businesses dependent on Mexican clients reported average revenue declines of over seven percent in 2025. These outcomes confirm that visa regimes do not produce homogeneous restrictions but uneven

landscapes of opportunity and vulnerability, with marketplaces serving as the arenas where these differentiated effects are most visible.

An additional finding that emerged across methods is the symbolic and social role of marketplaces as infrastructures of belonging and identity. Survey responses indicated that nearly two-thirds of households with cross-border family ties saw markets as primary spaces for family gatherings, and ethnographic notes documented celebrations, meetings, and social events unfolding within market plazas. Interviews described markets as spaces of emotional continuity, where families could maintain ties despite the regulatory environment. While this was not an explicit hypothesis, it constitutes a critical finding: marketplaces are not only infrastructures of mobility in functional terms but also infrastructures of trans local identity, embedding everyday practices with meanings of community and belonging. This dimension magnifies the impact of visa restrictions, as they not only affect economic activity but also disrupt social reproduction and emotional well-being.

The findings also underscore the limits of marketplaces as infrastructures. While they clearly mediate and enable mobility, they cannot fully counteract the exclusionary effects of visa regimes. The evidence of declining retail sales growth, increasing visa denial rates, and reduced crossings indicates that restrictions do have measurable impacts on the scale and intensity of cross-border activity. Marketplaces absorb some of these effects by concentrating and reorganizing flows, but they also reflect the vulnerabilities of those least able to adapt. Informal traders are exposed to higher risks of confiscation and financial loss, while lower-income households bear disproportionate burdens of application fees and renewal costs. These inequities confirm that marketplaces, while resilient, are not neutral spaces; they are shaped by and reproduce the stratifications created by visa regimes.

In assessing the hypotheses, the findings can be summarized clearly. Hypothesis one, that marketplaces function as infrastructures of mobility, is confirmed by evidence of concentration of activities, clustering strategies, and the presence of brokers providing regulatory services. Hypothesis two, that visa rules reconfigure rather than simply restrict mobility, is confirmed by evidence of adaptive practices including clustering, use of intermediaries, and reorganization of trading strategies. Hypothesis three, that the interaction between visa regimes and marketplaces produces

differentiated outcomes, is confirmed by statistical evidence of stratified access based on visa status and income, as well as qualitative accounts of vulnerability among informal traders and lower-income households. Each hypothesis is thus supported by multiple forms of evidence, and together they establish a robust empirical foundation for interpreting Texas border marketplaces as infrastructures of mobility that simultaneously enable circulation and reproduce inequality.

The broader implication of these findings is that mobility under restriction is not eliminated but transformed. Visa regimes impose boundaries that actors must navigate, but marketplaces provide infrastructures that allow for adaptation. This interaction generates a paradoxical outcome: mobility persists, but in forms that are clustered, mediated, and stratified. The findings demonstrate that the infrastructural role of marketplaces extends beyond economics into the realms of governance and social life, providing not only goods and services but also mechanisms for negotiating state regulation and sustaining trans local belonging. At the same time, the findings highlight that resilience does not equate to equality. Those with resources and stable documentation adapt more easily, while those without face heightened exclusion. This duality—resilience and inequality—defines the contemporary condition of border marketplaces in Texas.

Finally, the findings prepare the ground for deeper interpretation in the discussion. They demonstrate empirically how visa rules and marketplaces co-produce mobility, they clarify the mechanisms of adaptation and stratification, and they reveal the symbolic as well as functional significance of marketplaces for trans local communities. These insights not only confirm the hypotheses but also open questions about the broader implications for border governance, community cohesion, and economic sustainability. The next stage of analysis will engage these findings with existing theoretical frameworks, situate them in comparative perspective, and draw out the implications for understanding how infrastructures mediate mobility in contested border regions.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide an empirical foundation for rethinking how border marketplaces function in the Texas–Mexico context under restrictive visa regimes. The central contribution lies in demonstrating that marketplaces operate not simply as sites of economic exchange but as infrastructures of

mobility that enable, reconfigure, and stratify cross-border practices. To situate these results within broader scholarly debates, it is necessary to compare them with prior research on borders, infrastructures, and mobility, and to highlight how this study contributes novel insights that extend or challenge existing understandings.

Research on borders has long emphasized the tension between securitization and mobility. A substantial body of work on the U.S.–Mexico border documents the intensification of enforcement since the 1990s, focusing on the expansion of surveillance technologies, militarized policing, and restrictive visa regimes. These studies highlight how securitization transforms the border into a site of exclusion, reducing opportunities for unauthorized migrants and creating risks for those who attempt crossings outside official channels. While this body of scholarship is invaluable in documenting the scale and impact of enforcement, it has tended to foreground irregular migration and macro-level policy while paying less attention to the mundane infrastructures that mediate legal mobility. The present study extends this literature by shifting focus from enforcement at large to marketplaces as infrastructures that sustain legal, semi-legal, and informal cross-border practices under restrictive conditions. In doing so, it reveals how securitization does not eliminate mobility but rather channels and reconfigures it through infrastructural nodes.

Comparative studies of other border regions underscore both similarities and contrasts. Research on European external borders, for example, has shown that cross-border marketplaces in Eastern Europe facilitate everyday mobility under Schengen visa rules, often serving as spaces where residents from outside the EU access goods and services otherwise unavailable in their home countries. Similar to the Texas case, these marketplaces operate as infrastructures that translate restrictive regulations into workable practices. However, the European cases often involve temporary labor migration and small-scale trade, whereas Texas markets sustain massive retail economies tied to some of the busiest ports of entry in the world. The scale of dependence on cross-border shoppers in Texas, with estimates of 35 to 45 percent of retail revenue in some towns, distinguishes it from European cases where markets are more marginal. This comparison highlights the novelty of the Texas case: here, marketplaces are not peripheral adaptations but central economic infrastructures whose functioning has macroeconomic significance.

Research on African borderlands provides another point of comparison. Studies of marketplaces along the Kenya–Uganda or Nigeria–Benin borders show that informal cross-border trade constitutes a lifeline for local communities, often involving substantial flows of goods despite restrictive customs regimes. These studies similarly emphasize the role of markets in sustaining everyday trans locality and highlight the strategies of adaptation employed by traders to navigate restrictions. Yet the Texas case differs in that mobility is heavily shaped by formal visa regimes rather than primarily by customs or tariff barriers. Whereas African border traders often operate entirely outside legal frameworks, Texas cross-border shoppers frequently operate within the limits of documentation but are constrained by temporal, spatial, and bureaucratic restrictions. The Texas findings, therefore, add nuance to global debates by showing how even legal, documented mobility is profoundly shaped and stratified by visa rules, a dimension less prominent in contexts where formal documentation is rare.

The novelty of this study also lies in conceptualizing marketplaces as infrastructures of identity and belonging, not only as economic or logistical spaces. Prior research on border markets has occasionally acknowledged their social functions, but the systematic evidence from surveys and ethnography in Texas that markets serve as primary family meeting spaces and emotional anchors for trans local communities deepens this dimension. Nearly two-thirds of surveyed households with relatives on both sides of the border reported using markets as family gathering places, and ethnographic observations documented celebrations, meetings, and symbolic uses of marketplaces. This evidence underscores that marketplaces are not simply tools for circumventing regulatory restrictions but also sites where trans local life is reproduced socially and emotionally. The implication is that visa restrictions affect not only trade or mobility but also the reproduction of community and identity, amplifying their consequences beyond economics.

Another significant contribution of this study is the demonstration of stratification in adaptive practices. While existing literature acknowledges that restrictions generate informal adaptations, few studies have quantified how these adaptations vary by income, visa status, or household ties. The survey data showing that higher-income households sustain twice as many market visits and spend nearly double per trip compared to lower-income households reveals the extent to which visa regimes exacerbate inequality.

Regression models confirming that visa status and income are the strongest predictors of market participation reinforce this point. Previous research on mobility often frames adaptation in terms of resilience or creativity, but the Texas case shows that adaptation is not evenly distributed; it is stratified, producing advantages for some and vulnerabilities for others. This adds a critical corrective to celebratory accounts of adaptation by showing how infrastructures of mobility are also infrastructures of inequality.

The comparison with prior research on the U.S.–Mexico border further highlights novelty. Much scholarship on this border emphasizes unauthorized migration, remittances, or macroeconomic trade flows under NAFTA and USMCA. While these themes remain important, they obscure the mundane infrastructures that sustain legal and semi-legal mobility under restrictive regimes. By focusing on marketplaces, this study reveals that legal mobility is itself highly regulated, stratified, and dependent on infrastructures of adaptation. This is a critical addition because it shifts attention from unauthorized crossings to the everyday struggles of documented visitors who, despite holding legal permits, face substantial constraints that reshape their practices. The finding that visa denial rates have risen to 27 percent in 2025, with disproportionate impact on lower-income applicants, underscores that exclusion is not limited to those without documents but also affects those seeking legal entry.

The findings also carry important policy implications. Previous studies often conclude with calls for more humane enforcement or better economic integration. This study, by documenting the centrality of marketplaces for both U.S. and Mexican households, suggests that restrictive visa policies not only fail to halt mobility but also harm local economies on both sides of the border. Small businesses in Texas reported revenue declines averaging over seven percent due to reduced cross-border traffic, while Mexican households faced higher costs and reduced access to goods. These effects demonstrate that restrictive visa regimes have unintended economic consequences for U.S. communities themselves, undermining local livelihoods and reducing tax revenues. The novelty here is the clear link between visa policies and U.S. local economic outcomes, a dimension often overlooked in securitization debates that focus narrowly on unauthorized migration.

Theoretically, the findings contribute to the growing literature on mobility infrastructures. Scholars have

emphasized that mobility is organized through infrastructures ranging from airports to visa systems to digital platforms. This study adds marketplaces to the list, showing how they function as multi-layered infrastructures that combine economic, social, and regulatory dimensions. The presence of informal brokers at market entrances, providing regulatory translation services, demonstrates that marketplaces directly mediate the relationship between governance and practice. This moves the concept of infrastructure beyond materiality to include spaces where regulation is negotiated and adapted. The novelty lies in showing that infrastructures are not only built by states but also emerge from collective practices in spaces like markets, which reconfigure the impact of state policies on everyday life.

Comparisons with scholarship on trans locality further situate the contribution. Research in South Asia and Southeast Asia has shown how families sustain trans local livelihoods through remittances, dual residence, and circular migration. These studies often highlight the agency of migrants and the resilience of communities. The Texas findings resonate with this literature but add specificity by showing how visa rules shape the form of trans locality. Rather than continuous circulation, trans locality in Texas is episodic, clustered, and mediated through marketplaces. Families compress activities into single visits, use intermediaries, and rely on markets as nodes for sustaining ties. This demonstrates that trans locality is not a universal condition but is shaped by regulatory environments and infrastructural opportunities. The novelty here lies in specifying the mechanisms—visa time limits, denial rates, and market clustering—that produce particular forms of trans locality in Texas.

Beyond comparisons, the findings raise broader questions for future research. If marketplaces can be conceptualized as infrastructures of mobility in Texas, to what extent does this apply globally? Are there parallel cases in other heavily securitized borders, such as India–Bangladesh or Israel–Palestine, where markets sustain mobility under restriction? Preliminary evidence suggests that while parallels exist, the Texas case is distinctive in its scale and in the legal status of mobility, which is often documented but constrained. This suggests that the contribution of this study is not only empirical but also conceptual: it refines the categories of analysis by distinguishing between elimination of mobility and reconfiguration of mobility, and by emphasizing the infrastructural role of marketplaces in this process.

The novelty of this study can therefore be summarized in three dimensions. First, it extends the concept of mobility infrastructures to include marketplaces, highlighting their role in mediating between regulation and practice. Second, it demonstrates quantitatively that adaptation to restriction is stratified, with visa status and income predicting differential outcomes. Third, it reveals the symbolic role of marketplaces as infrastructures of identity and belonging, deepening understanding of how regulatory environments affect not only material but also emotional and social dimensions of trans local life. These contributions position the study as a significant addition to border and mobility studies, offering insights with both theoretical and policy relevance.

Finally, the findings point to implications for U.S. border governance. Current debates often frame the border in terms of national security, unauthorized migration, or trade agreements. By documenting the infrastructural role of marketplaces, this study suggests that policies focused narrowly on restriction risk undermine the very communities that sustain cross-border integration. Marketplaces are lifelines for both U.S. and Mexican households, sustaining economies, livelihoods, and family ties. Restrictive visa regimes that limit access not only reconfigure mobility but also erode the foundations of community and economic resilience. Recognizing marketplaces as infrastructures of mobility opens the possibility for policies that balance security with the sustenance of everyday trans local life. Such recognition would mark a significant departure from current approaches and highlight the value of grounded, empirical research in informing border governance.

In sum, the discussion situates the findings within broader literature, highlights their novelty, and draws out their implications. Marketplaces in Texas in 2025 exemplify how restrictive visa regimes do not halt mobility but transform it, producing clustered, mediated, and stratified practices. This transformation has consequences not only for Mexican households but also for U.S. communities, economies, and identities. By emphasizing the infrastructural role of marketplaces, the study contributes a novel perspective that challenges existing framings of the border and opens new avenues for both scholarly inquiry and policy innovation.

Conclusion

This study has explored the role of border marketplaces in Texas as infrastructures of mobility in the year 2025, focusing on how visa regimes shape

everyday trans local practices. By adopting a mixed-method approach that integrated ethnographic observation, semi-structured interviews, household surveys, and analysis of official statistics, the research generated a comprehensive empirical foundation for assessing the hypotheses outlined in the introduction. The results, findings, and discussion collectively demonstrate that marketplaces in Texas border cities are not merely sites of economic activity but complex infrastructures that mediate the interaction between regulatory systems and everyday life. The conclusion here synthesizes the key insights, clarifies their implications, and reflects on the novelty of the contributions while pointing toward directions for future research and policy.

The first and most fundamental conclusion is that marketplaces in Texas function as infrastructures of mobility. Ethnographic and survey data converged to show that large proportions of cross-border visitors organize their mobility around market spaces, concentrating multiple activities—shopping, remittance transfers, medical consultations, and family gatherings—into single trips dictated by visa time limits. Observations of daily foot traffic revealed that between 35 and 55 percent of marketplace visitors carried Mexican documentation, with weekend peaks underscoring the systematic nature of cross-border flows. Informal brokers providing assistance with customs paperwork and transportation logistics further reinforced the infrastructural character of these spaces, extending their function beyond retail to include services that mediate regulatory complexity. The evidence is unambiguous: marketplaces are not peripheral or incidental but central infrastructures that enable circulation under restrictive conditions.

The second conclusion is that visa rules do not simply restrict mobility but actively reconfigure it, producing adaptive practices that sustain everyday trans locality. Rising visa denial rates, lengthening renewal processes, and strict temporal and spatial limits were expected to curtail cross-border movement. Instead, respondents developed creative strategies to reorganize their mobility. Families compressed activities into clustered visits, informal traders shifted to smaller items or coordinated with multiple relatives, and households unable to cross relied on intermediaries to transport goods. Nearly 40 percent of Mexican survey respondents reported using relatives or couriers to sustain access to markets even when they could not cross themselves. These adaptations demonstrate that visa regimes shape the form of mobility rather than eliminating it, generating clustered, episodic, and

mediated practices that sustain trans local ties despite regulatory hurdles. Marketplaces are the nodes where these adaptations become visible, revealing how regulation is translated into everyday strategies.

The third conclusion is that the interaction between visa regimes and marketplaces produces stratified outcomes, providing opportunities for some while excluding or marginalizing others. Statistical analysis confirmed that holding a valid Border Crossing Card increased the likelihood of weekly market visits by nearly four times, while higher household income doubled the likelihood of sustained market participation. By contrast, lower-income households reported declining visits and reduced access to goods, and informal traders faced high risks of confiscation and denial of entry. U.S. businesses also experienced stratification: larger retailers were more resilient, while small enterprises dependent on Mexican shoppers reported revenue declines averaging over seven percent. These outcomes illustrate that visa regimes and marketplaces jointly produce inequality, privileging those with resources and documentation while exposing vulnerable groups to heightened risk. Adaptation, therefore, cannot be understood as a uniform expression of resilience but as a stratified process shaped by socio-economic position and legal status.

A further conclusion that emerged, though not originally hypothesized, is that marketplaces function as infrastructures of identity and belonging. Surveys indicated that nearly two-thirds of households with cross-border relatives regarded markets as primary spaces for family gatherings, and ethnographic notes documented birthdays, anniversaries, and social meetings taking place in market plazas. Respondents described markets as spaces of continuity and emotional connection, reinforcing the idea that marketplaces sustain not only material mobility but also the reproduction of social and cultural life. This finding expands the conceptualization of infrastructure beyond economic and logistical functions to include symbolic and emotional dimensions, showing that marketplaces help maintain community cohesion and trans local identity under restrictive conditions. Visa rules, therefore, affect not only circulation and trade but also the social reproduction of families and communities.

Together, these conclusions establish a novel perspective on Texas border marketplaces. They demonstrate that marketplaces are infrastructures that sustain mobility under restriction, that visa regimes

actively reconfigure mobility into clustered and mediated forms, that these adaptations are stratified along lines of income and documentation, and that marketplaces also function as infrastructures of identity and belonging. The combined insight is that mobility under restriction is not eliminated but transformed, producing a paradoxical condition in which circulation persists yet becomes uneven, concentrated, and emotionally charged. This perspective contributes significantly to border and mobility studies by refining theoretical categories and grounding them in rich empirical evidence.

The implications of these conclusions are both scholarly and policy-oriented. For scholars, the study extends the concept of mobility infrastructures to include marketplaces, spaces often overlooked in analyses that prioritize transport systems, visa regimes, or digital technologies. By demonstrating how markets mediate between state regulation and lived practice, the research shows that infrastructures are not only built by governments but also emerge from collective adaptation in everyday spaces. The study also contributes to the literature on trans locality by specifying how regulatory environments shape the form of trans local practices. In Texas, trans locality is clustered, episodic, and mediated, shaped by the temporal and spatial limits of visas. This finding adds specificity to global debates that often treat trans locality as a generalized condition. Finally, the study refines discussions of adaptation by showing that resilience is stratified, privileging some actors while marginalizing others. This adds a critical corrective to celebratory accounts of adaptation, grounding the analysis in the structural inequalities produced by visa regimes.

For policy, the conclusions highlight the unintended consequences of restrictive visa regimes. By reducing crossings and increasing denial rates, policies aimed at controlling mobility also undermine local economies in Texas border cities. Small businesses dependent on cross-border shoppers face revenue declines, and communities lose tax revenues. Mexican households face higher costs and reduced access to goods, while U.S. families also experience disruption to cross-border ties. The findings suggest that securitization-oriented policies overlook the infrastructural role of marketplaces in sustaining everyday life, resulting in economic and social harm on both sides of the border. Recognizing marketplaces as infrastructures of mobility could inform more balanced policies that combine security with support for local livelihoods. For example, simplifying renewal processes, reducing

denial rates for low-risk applicants, or investing in cross-border marketplace facilities could sustain economic integration while maintaining oversight. Such policy shifts would acknowledge that mobility is not only a security issue but also a socio-economic necessity for border communities.

The novelty of this study lies in the empirical demonstration and theoretical articulation of these dynamics. While prior research has documented enforcement, unauthorized migration, and macroeconomic trade, few studies have systematically analyzed marketplaces as infrastructures of mobility under visa regimes. This research provides robust evidence that marketplaces mediate regulation, sustain trans locality, and reflect stratified adaptation, extending the scope of border studies into new conceptual and empirical terrain. The emphasis on identity and belonging adds another layer of novelty, highlighting how marketplaces sustain emotional and social continuity in ways overlooked by economic or security-focused analyses. By triangulating ethnographic, interview, survey, and statistical data, the study provides a holistic picture that is both scientifically rigorous and socially grounded.

The conclusion also points toward avenues for future research. Comparative studies could explore whether marketplaces in other heavily securitized borders, such as India–Bangladesh or Israel–Palestine, function similarly as infrastructures of mobility under restrictive regimes. Longitudinal studies could assess how these dynamics evolve, particularly if visa policies become more or less restrictive. Further quantitative work could expand the scale of surveys to include thousands of households, enabling more precise modeling of how income, documentation, and family ties shape mobility practices. Digital ethnography could explore how online platforms intersect with physical marketplaces to sustain cross-border life. These directions would extend the insights of this study, situating Texas findings within broader global debates and refining theoretical models of mobility infrastructures.

In reflecting on the broader significance of the research, it is clear that the Texas–Mexico border in 2025 exemplifies a paradox of globalization: intense securitization coexists with deep interdependence. Marketplaces reveal how communities navigate this paradox, sustaining mobility under restriction through clustered, mediated, and stratified practices. The study shows that mobility is never eliminated; it is reorganized through infrastructures that link regulation

with everyday life. This conclusion challenges simplistic narratives of closure or openness, suggesting instead that borders operate through complex processes of reconfiguration. Marketplaces stand at the center of this process, embodying both resilience and inequality, both adaptation and exclusion.

In sum, the conclusions of this research can be synthesized as follows. Marketplaces in Texas border cities are infrastructures of mobility that concentrate and enable circulation despite restrictive visa regimes. Visa rules reconfigure rather than eliminate mobility, producing clustered, episodic, and mediated practices that sustain everyday trans locality. These adaptations are stratified, privileging those with resources and stable documentation while marginalizing lower-income households and informal traders. Marketplaces also function as infrastructures of identity and belonging, sustaining social reproduction and emotional continuity across the border. The policy implications are profound, as restrictive visa regimes not only harm Mexican households but also undermine U.S. border economies and community cohesion. The novelty of this study lies in extending the concept of infrastructure to marketplaces, demonstrating stratified adaptation quantitatively, and highlighting the symbolic dimensions of markets as spaces of identity. These contributions advance theoretical debates, inform policy, and open new avenues for comparative research.

The Texas–Mexico border in 2025 is thus not simply a site of restriction or crisis but a laboratory for understanding how regulation, infrastructure, and everyday life interact to produce mobility under constraint. By documenting how marketplaces mediate this interaction, the study provides a lens for rethinking both scholarship and policy. The overarching conclusion is that mobility persists even under restriction, but in forms that are transformed, stratified, and emotionally laden. Recognizing this reality is essential for building both scholarly understanding and policy frameworks that reflect the lived experiences of border communities. In acknowledging the infrastructural role of marketplaces, we gain not only an analytical category but also a normative imperative: to design border governance that sustains livelihoods, communities, and identities rather than undermining them. This recognition constitutes the most significant contribution of the research and the foundation for future inquiry.

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