

MIGRATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA

An analysis of migration trends, drivers, policy and actors

This report was commissioned by Seattle International Foundation and prepared by Anita Isaacs, Haverford College Professor and The New York Times Contributor.

About Seattle International Foundation

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Table of Contents

Page	Chapter Title
3	Executive Summary
9	Trends in Migration: Numbers, Destinations and Demographics
15	Migration Drivers
25	US Policy and Central American Migration
39	NTCA Governments, Civil Society and Migration

Executive Summary

The past decade has witnessed a surge in unauthorized migration from the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (NTCA) to the United States that shows little sign of abating. Despite the rising costs and risks associated with the journey, and awareness of the growing likelihood of apprehension within Mexico or at the US border, almost 30 percent of adults from the NTCA considered migrating in 2016/2017,[1] a two to three-fold increase since 2012. Preliminary data on migration from the region to the United States indicates that NTCA residents are making good on their intentions. In FY 2017, 141,304 unauthorized NTCA citizens were apprehended entering the United States. Another 121,703 followed suit in FY 2018. [2]

This paper documents and analyzes the stubborn persistence of migration from the NTCA, while also raising questions that could form the basis of policy relevant research and analysis. It is divided into four sections. The first highlights key data points indicative of change and continuity in patterns of migration. The second explores the core push drivers of migration from the NTCA -- poverty, aggravated by environmental crisis, and violence-induced insecurity. The third examines the paradoxical role of the US as a driver of migration from the region, addressing its role as a pull and, to a lesser degree, push factor of migration. The fourth, probes the permissive role of Central American governments in fueling migration and their perfunctory assistance to the growing influx of returning migrants. Migration provides the political leadership of the region with a convenient safety, or escape, valve and generates enormous revenue with migrant remittances constituting the single largest contributor to the GDP of the region.

The data:

Since 1980, the numbers of Central American immigrants in the US has increased tenfold. Most of this growth is fueled by movement out of NTCA countries. In 2015 Central Americans comprised 7.9% of the foreign-born US resident population, and roughly 85 % of those inhabitants are from the Northern Triangle countries. An estimated 3 million, or 55% of Northern Triangle residents in the United States are unauthorized. Add FIGURE 1

The growth is occurring in tandem with net out migration from Mexico and against a backdrop of expansion in apprehensions, detentions and deportations back to the region. Between 2008 and 2013,

deportations from the United States to Northern Triangle countries increased by over 150 percent. In 2016 and 2017, the US deported 163,291 NTCA citizens.

Patterns of migration from the NTCA are also changing. Close to 300,000 NTCA citizens sought asylum globally in 2017, sixteen times the numbers recorded in 2011. Migration, formerly an overwhelmingly male phenomenon, is becoming increasingly feminized and more and more children are migrating on their own and as members of family units.

Drivers:

The optics of how we understand migration are shifting. Once seen as a choice, migration from the NTCA is more and more forced, a measure of last resort pursued by the structural and physical violence that afflicts the region. The surge and the demographic shift in which women, children and entire households are increasingly uprooted stems from an intensification and layering of the traditional drivers of migration.

Poverty in the region has generated a food insecurity crisis of epidemic proportions, especially from Guatemala. The consolidation of land through the spread of agribusiness and extractive industries, the dearth of formal labor employment opportunities and environmental degradation that is both a response to unfettered and unregulated development and to climate change, create growing despair as already poor families exhaust one option after another in seeking to cope with worsening hunger.

Gangs, organized crime and, frighteningly, a renewal of political repression reminiscent of the armed conflicts of the 1980s, are contributing to the pervasive violence and fear that engulfs the region and drives NTCA residents to flee. A 2016-2017 survey found that more than a third of Salvadorans and Hondurans, and 17.2 percent of Guatemalans considered migrating because of insecurity.

Predatory gangs bear the greatest share of responsibility for migration. Gangs are well ensconced in the Northern Triangle countries. Rough estimates placed the numbers of MS-13 and B-18 gang members in the NTCA at 85,000 in 2012. Gang membership is a direct consequence of forcible and voluntary recruitment. They are at once symptom and response to the poverty and despair that a bulging youth population without access to education or jobs faces. Central American and US iron-fisted policy responses, that involve the imprisonment and deportation of gang members fuels a continual replenishment and expansion of their ranks.

Gangs resort to extreme violence to intimidate and uproot the civilian population living in the areas they vie to control. They forcibly recruit members, they perform a range of crimes, including extortion, kidnapping, drug and sex trafficking and sexual assault. Refusal to join, to abide by the prevailing criminal code of conduct, file an official complaint, or attempt to escape are considered acts of betrayal that exact violent revenge. The life of the individual betrayer and that of his entire family are permanently threatened.

US Policy and Central American Migration:

US domestic policy and its policies towards the NTCA add a further layer of push and pull factors driving migration.

Since the end of the Cold war US policy has become more supportive of human rights and democracy in the region. That support, however, remains inconsistent and timid, a reflection of US privileging of stability over democratic preservation and deepening. It also comes at a cost. US failure to use its influence in the region to demand compliance with the rule of law serves to strengthen organized crime and green lights intensified state repression, with attendant consequences for further violence-fueled migration.

The growing integration of the US and Central American economies, sealed by free trade deals, has also been policy-deaf to its multiple migratory impacts. Hemispheric trade deals have differed from the European integration model, excluding provisions ensuring respect for human rights and democracy and the free movement of labor, while also tolerating lax labor and environmental standards. These omissions permit inequality to grow, poverty to remain engrained, and the environment to deteriorate.

On the pull side, a US labor market which is both readily accessible and demands high levels of unskilled labor, attracts migrants in search of economic opportunity. Family reunification further incentivizes migration from the NTCA. Both these factors act in concert with local drivers: economic opportunity as a means to address the food insecurity crisis gripping the region, while family reunification ease the psychological, social and economic burdens of migrant assimilation and adjustment, and can provide a boost to relatives already living in the United States.

Restrictive US immigration policy, characterized by ever tighter enforcement, has had mixed impacts on migration. It hasn't succeeded in substantially deterring migration. Rather, its chief effects have been to make the migrant journey costlier and more perilous and the US environment increasingly hostile to immigrants from the NTCA. Absent a set of policies that regulate migration through immigration reform

that comprehensively addresses the push and pull drivers of migration, an enforcement-focused policy is set up to fail.

Such a policy may actually be counterproductive. Mass deportations, especially of former gang members and convicts, but also of individuals who are bound to feel socially isolated and bereft of economic opportunities upon return, fuel increased gang recruitment and the violence generative of new waves of forced migration.

Tough enforcement also carries severe consequences for migrant and native-born communities alike. Deportation and the threat of deportation, harm the psychological, social and economic well-being of migrant individuals, families and communities pushed ever further into the shadows. It has spinoff effects on US neighbors and society more broadly, measured chiefly in economic terms by decreased consumer spending and labor shortages. It also makes communities less secure, mainly because growing mistrust and fear of authorities make unauthorized immigrants much less likely to report a crime to authorities.

NTCA governments, civil society and migration

The contribution of Central American governments is a missing piece of a well-studied puzzle. They play a role as transit and destination countries for migrants, they contribute directly to the structural and physical violence that drives unauthorized migration, and they are woefully negligent in assuming their responsibilities towards the hundreds of thousands of returning migrants.

Lost in the focus on US-bound migration, NTCA countries are recipient and transit destinations for migrants. Honduras and Guatemala (but not yet El Salvador) have passed legislation that inch these countries closer to compliance with Sustainable Development Goals that call upon governments to “facilitate the orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people.” Nonetheless, migrants passing through or living in the NTCA are regularly preyed upon by gangs, organized trafficking networks, and the police.

Central American governments shoulder considerable responsibility for the structural violence that drives the massive internal displacement and international migration of their poorer and more vulnerable populations. Their indifference to the social and economic plight of the more vulnerable sectors of society, tolerates stubbornly high levels of poverty and inequality, manifest in the lack of attention to the nutritional, health and education needs of poorer citizens. Resource poor states, a reflection of corruption and elite influence, hamper state capacities. Tax revenues as a percentage of GDP among NTCA rank

among the lowest in the region. Poverty is further exacerbated by NTCA governments' resistance to address inequities in land distribution or to facilitate rural entrepreneurship, through a process of integral rural development reform.

Local human rights organizations have missed an opportunity to highlight structural violence. They have a narrow interpretation of rights that focuses on abuses of civil and political liberties rather than economic and social rights. They have yet to develop a capacity to monitor respect for these other fundamental rights that threaten the lives of a majority of their fellow citizens and cause massive displacement.

Through a combination of acts of omission and commission, NTCA governments also shoulder responsibility for the epidemic levels of violence perpetrated by organized crime and gangs that fuel internal displacement and international migration. Government complicity, compounded by the institutional weakness of states, allow organized crime to act unimpeded within much of the NTCA.

When NTCA governments' have paid attention to the gang violence that engulfs their societies, their punitive responses fuel mara growth and belligerence. Imprisoning gang members in overcrowded jails accompanied by a policy of separating gang members to reduce prison violence contributes to their strengthening within and beyond prisons. Jails become "incubators" for gangs, serving as staging grounds for gang operations and for the recruitment of new members.

Northern Triangle governments' indifference may stem from a cost benefit analysis, in which they perceive the loss of able-bodied citizens to emigration as more than compensated for by the inflow of remittance funds to remaining family members. The estimated size of remittances sent back to developing countries exceeds overseas development assistance and foreign exchange reserves. Remittances are the single largest contributor to the GDP of the NTCA, and in 2017 remittances comprised roughly 11 % of GDP in Guatemala, and close to 20% in Honduras and El Salvador. Their rate of increase between 2016 and 2017 surpassed the 9 percent growth in exports recorded during the same time frame.

Central American governments and the elite-controlled private banking sector profit from remittances without helping to multiply their impact. Migrant remittances further relieve the state from its responsibility to provide for the basic health, housing and educational needs of poorer communities. At the same time, the Central American political leadership hinders the productive investment that could alleviate the poverty that drives migration. Pervasive corruption, extortion, and weak rule of law provides a

further disincentive to investing remittances in business opportunities, an obstacle compounded by a generalized lack of access to financial services.

Deportation: Reception and Reintegration

Data provided in Figure 4 (Section 1) highlights the steady growth in deportations of unauthorized migrants between 1996 and 2014. Despite a decline in subsequent years, almost 142,000 unauthorized migrants were returned to the Northern Triangle in 2017 and 2018 portends a substantial increase in deportations. 141, 828 migrants were returned to the NTCA during the first six months of 2018, the lion's share to Guatemala which registered a 64.5% increase and Honduras a 55.6% increase in deportations over the same period in 2017.

Returning migrants face severe psychological, social and economic challenges that hinder their (re)integration. Most return deeply traumatized by the abuse and dangers they face on their migratory journey, their lives as unauthorized migrants, endured in constant fear and complicated by frequently difficult family situations, and their experiences of apprehension and detention. The social stigmatization migrants face upon their return exacerbates and creates new trauma. Children raised in the United States find it hard to reintegrate into schools, adults, especially those with tattoos, are typically regarded as criminals, and deportees contend with enormous anxiety, in the face of likely reprisal from the gangs they fled or being preyed upon by extortionists. Returning migrants confront enormous economic insecurity. The vast majority join the ranks of the informally employed. The scarcity of jobs is exacerbated by difficulties in certifying their educational and professional skills acquired abroad and employer reluctance to hire returning migrants lest they be criminals.

A concerted effort by international organizations, especially the IOM, has generated greater official awareness of the challenges facing returnees, inculcated some sense of government responsibility and spurred modest programmatic initiatives. The bulk have focused on beefing up reception services, while reintegration programs remain woefully inadequate in both scale and substance to address the massive influx of returning migrants. A handful of promising initiatives exist, especially in Honduras and El Salvador, that could serve as models worthy of study, expansion and duplication. Absent a concerted effort on this front, returning migrants will be increasingly susceptible to appeals from organized crime and gangs, and more likely to attempt a return journey, prolonging the vicious cycle of migration.

I. Trends in Migration: Numbers, Destinations and Demographics

Numbers and Destinations

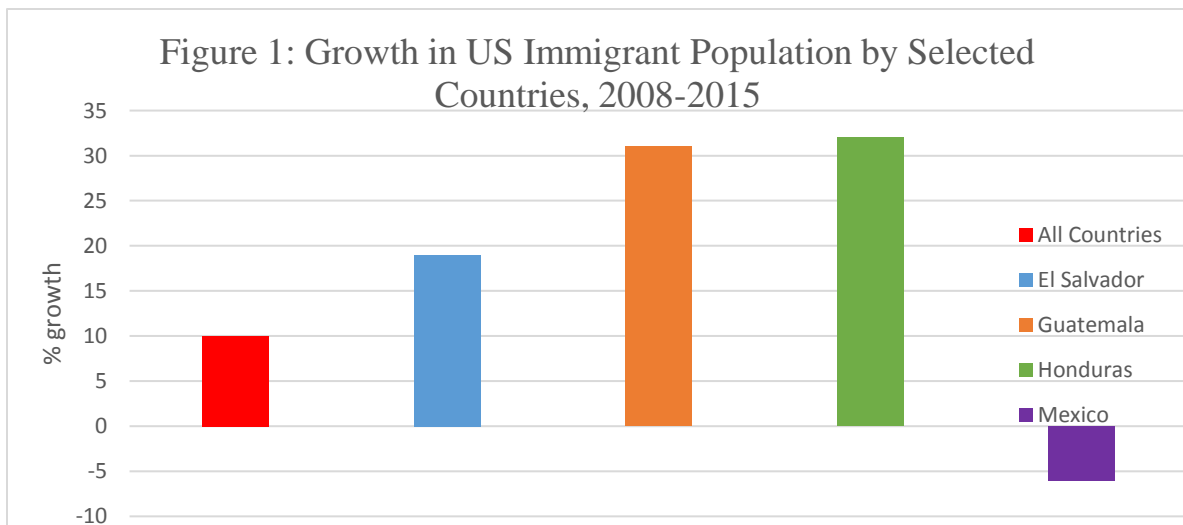
In 2015 Central Americans comprised 7.9% of the foreign-born US resident population, and roughly 85 % of those inhabitants are from the Northern Triangle countries (see Table 1).

Table 1: Central Americans and Citizens of Northern Triangle Countries in the US, 2015

Region/Country	# of Central Americans in Foreign Born US resident population	% of Central Americans in Foreign Born US resident population
Total Central Americans	3,393,853	100.00%
El Salvador	1,359,100	40.0%
Guatemala	933,328	27.5%
Honduras	596,876	17.6%

Source: Pew Research Center, Facts on US Immigrants, 2015.

This relatively small number masks a long-term steady growth in Central Americans as a portion of US foreign born residents. Since 1980, the numbers of Central American immigrants in the US has increased tenfold.¹ Most of this growth is fueled by movement out of NTCA countries. Figure 1 below estimates a 25 percent growth rate in migration from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras between 2008 and 2015.



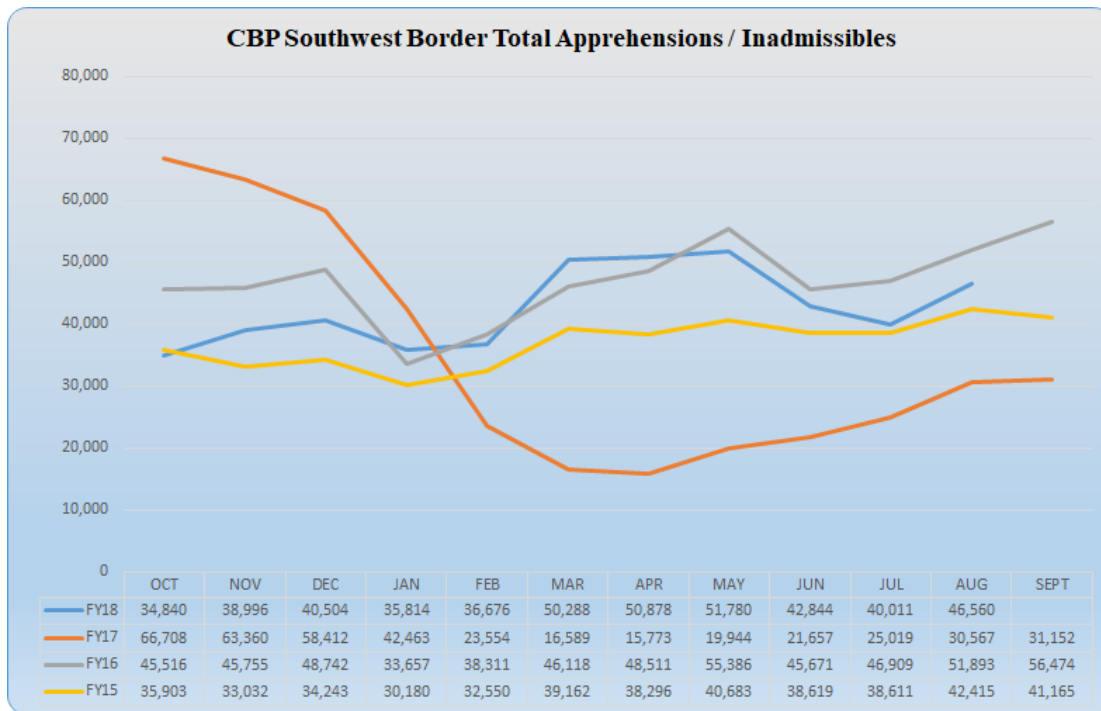
Source: Pew Research Center, Facts on US Immigrants, 2015.

¹ Gabriel Lesser and Jeanne Batalova, Central American Migrants in the United States, Migration Policy Institute, April 5, 2017, available at <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-immigrants-united-states/>, accessed September 2, 2018.

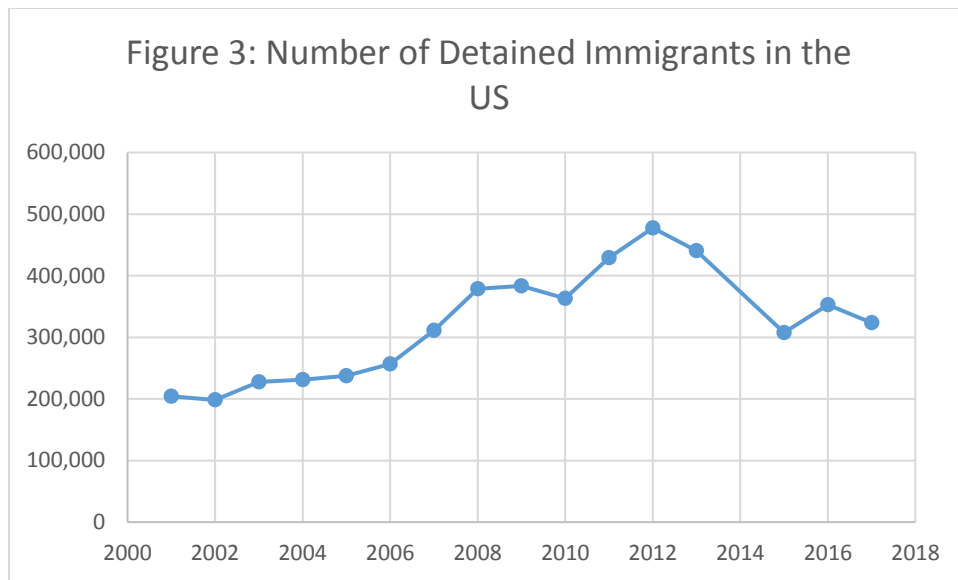
This growth is striking in several key aspects:

- It is occurring at a time when migration from Mexico, historically the largest migrant sending country, has experienced a reverse trend. During the same period the number of Mexican born migrants living in the United States declined by 6 percent.
- Migration from the NTCA to the United States is two and a half times greater than the growth rate of foreign-born migrants from all other countries to the United States.
- The increase in migration is occurring against a backdrop of expansion in apprehensions, detentions and deportations back to the region. Between 2008 and 2013, deportations from the United States to Northern Triangle countries increased by over 150 percent. Data for FY 2016 and 2017 highlight a continuation of the trend with 75,747 Northern Triangle residents deported back to their countries in 2016 and an additional 87,544 in 2017.²

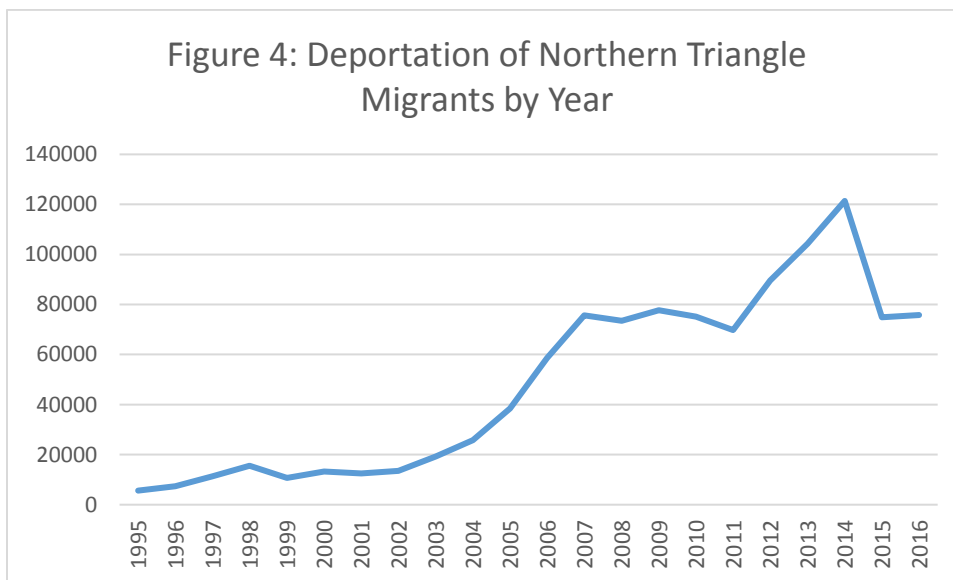
Figure 2:



² Department of Homeland Security, Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2016, available at <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2016>, accessed September 2, 2018 and data provided by Manuel Orozoco, Inter-American Dialogue, September 12, 2018.



Source: Global Detention Project. In both 2015 and 2016, the highest number of detainees were from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. NTCA immigrants have figured among the top four detained groups since 2010.



- Although between 80 and 90 percent of Northern Triangle residents continue to migrate to the United States, increasing barriers to entry are gradually diversifying patterns of migration. Mexico has become an alternative destination. 2010 Mexican census data registered more than 35,000 Guatemalans, 11,000 Hondurans and 8,000 Salvadoran residents, equivalent to 6.2 percent of Mexico's foreign-born population. Those numbers have likely increased substantially since.

Mexico received 8,656 applications for refugee status from NTCA citizens in 2017, up 875% from 2013.³

- Countries in the region have also registered rapid increases in immigration from the Northern Triangle. Belize, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama witnessed a 13-fold increase in asylum seekers between 2008 and 2014.⁴
- Canada has also received steadily growing numbers of Northern Triangle migrants although absolute levels remain low because of the geographical separation of the two regions.
- Canada is anxiously bracing for a massive influx of migrants from both Honduras and El Salvador in the coming two years, as a quarter million Hondurans and Salvadorans lose their Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in the United States in 2019 and 2020.⁵ Canada's refugee and family reunification policies have historically been more lenient than those of the United States, perhaps because the numbers of applicants remain small.⁶ In 2016 the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada granted refugee status to 62 % of Hondurans, 34% of Guatemalans and 71% of Salvadoran asylum seekers although the numbers remain low at 261.⁷⁸ With potentially thousands of migrants leaving the US for Canada in the next two years, these policies will be further tested. Early signs indicate an effort by Canadian authorities to discourage mass migration through dissuasion campaigns and enforcement of the Safe Third Country Agreement according to which asylum seekers must request asylum in the first safe country they reach.⁹

³ International Crisis Group, "Mexico's Southern Border: Security, Violence and Migration in the Trump Era," May 9, 2018, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/066-mexicos-southern-border.pdf>, accessed September 25, 2018.

⁴ UNHCR, Women on the Run, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/publications/operations/5630f24c6/women-run.html>, accessed September 2, 2018.

⁵ D'Vera Cohn et al., "Rise in US immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras Outpaces Growth from Elsewhere," available at: <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2017/12/07/rise-in-u-s-immigrants-from-el-salvador-guatemala-and-honduras-outpaces-growth-from-elsewhere/>, accessed September 15, 2018.

⁶ Center for Demographic, Urban and Environmental Studies, El Colegio de Mexico, "A Migration System in the Making," October 2016, available at: https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/naf_2017_n-ntcamigrationsystem.pdf, accessed September 9, 2018, esp p.12-13

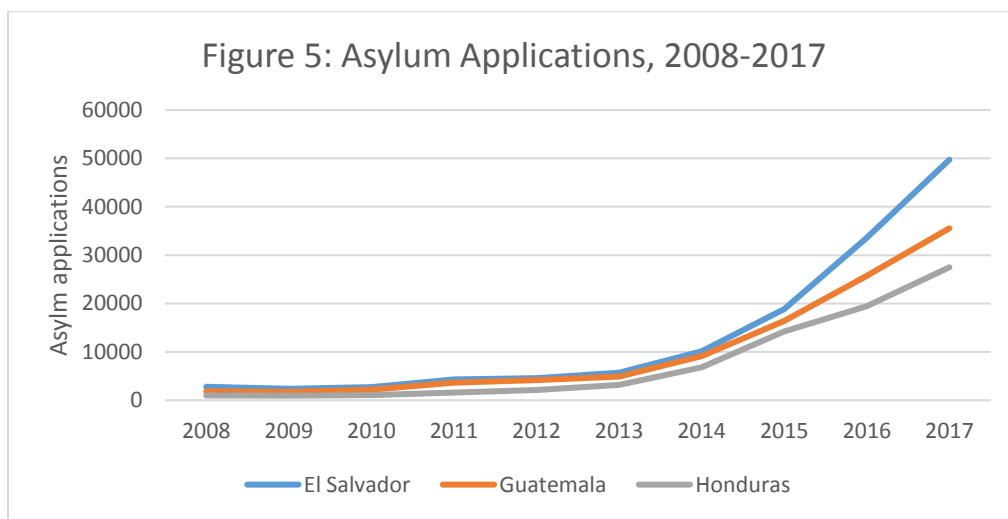
⁷ Maria Cristina Garcia, "Canada: a Northern refuge for Central Americans," Migration Policy Institute, April 1, 2006, available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/canada-northern-refuge-central-americans>, accessed September 15, 2018 and Claudia Maferrier et al, Connecting the Dots: Emerging Migration Trends and Policy Questions in North and Central America," March 7, 2018, available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/connecting-dots-emerging-migration-trends-and-policy-questions-north-and-central-america>, accessed September 2, 2018

⁹ <http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/june-2018/canada-is-turning-its-back-on-central-american-refugees/>

Demographic data

Demographic data on migration trends provides an appreciation of the character and dimensions of the surge in migration from the NTCA.

- There has been a steady increase in the numbers and share of unauthorized migrants from the Northern Triangle. In 2015 they numbered an estimated 3 million, equivalent to roughly a quarter of the total unauthorized population. They also account for 55% of Northern triangle residents in the United States, twice the average of all other countries.¹⁰
- There has been an equally dramatic increase in NTCA citizens seeking asylum. Close to 300,000 NTCA citizens sought asylum globally in 2017, equivalent to a 58 percent single year increase and sixteen times the numbers recorded in 2011.¹¹
- Northern Triangle asylum applications to the US witnessed the greatest increase. Those numbers have grown steadily since 2009, and accelerated markedly after 2013 (see Figure 5).



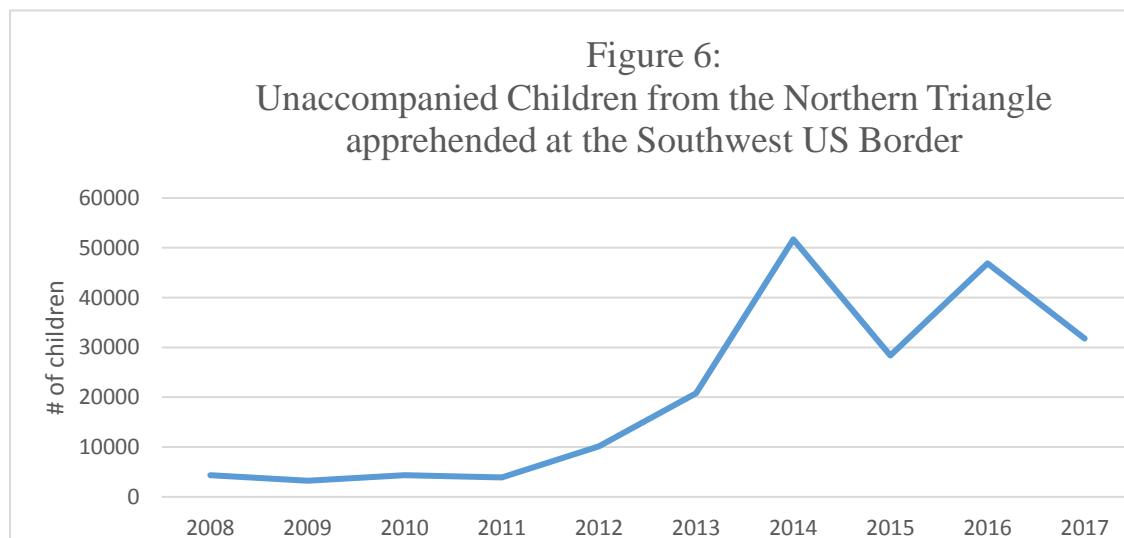
Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

¹⁰ D'Vera Cohn et. al., "Rise in US Immigrants From El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras Outpaces Growth (Growth) from Elsewhere," Pew Research Center, December 7, 2017, available at: <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2017/12/07/rise-in-u-s-immigrants-from-el-salvador-guatemala-and-honduras-outpaces-growth-from-elsewhere/>, Migration Policy Institute, "Profile of the Unauthorized Population: United States <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/US>, accessed September 2, 2018.

Inter-American Dialogue, Recent Trends in Central American Migration, <https://www.thedialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Recent-Trends-in-Central-American-Migration-1.pdf>,

¹¹ UNHCR, "UNHCR alarmed by sharp rise in forced displacement in North of Central America," available at <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/briefing/2018/5/5b03d89c4/unhcr-alarmed-sharp-rise-forced-displacement-north-central-america.html>, accessed September 2, 2018.

- Unable to keep up with the surge, at the end of 2017 US courts had a backlog of 216, 777 pending applications from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala.
- By the end of 2017, 190,000 Hondurans, 242,000 Guatemalans and 296,000 El Salvadorans had been internally displaced from their homes due to conflict and violence.¹² Illustrative of a growing phenomenon, the numbers of Salvadoran homes with at least one displaced person jumped from 2.1% in 2012 to 5.1% in 2017.¹³
- The demographic profile of NTCA migrants has shifted as increasing numbers of women and children are fleeing their homes. Women as a percent of apprehended migrants in Mexico and in the United States doubled between FY 2012 and FY 2017.¹⁴ The number of apprehended children roughly doubled every year from 2011 to 2014, the peak year when 51,705 unaccompanied children were apprehended (see Figure 6). Although the numbers have oscillated since, a staggering 30,000 were apprehended in 2017.



Source: Department of Homeland Security, Border Security Metric report, 2017 and U.S. Border Patrol Southwest Border Apprehensions by Sector FY2018

¹² Internal displacement Monitoring Center, Global Internal Displacement Database, available at <http://internal-displacement.org/countries>, accessed September 3, 2018.

¹³ Wilson Center, "The Hidden Problem of Forced Displacement in Central America," August 21, 2018, available at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/the-hidden-problem-forced-internal-displacement-central-america>, accessed September 24, 2018.

¹⁴ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/search-safety-growing-numbers-women-flee-central-america>

II. Migration Drivers

The surge in emigration from Central America's Northern triangle stems from a number of causes. Either on their own or more likely in combination with each other, economic, environmental and security crises drive internal displacement and international migration.

Poverty and Economic Opportunity

41 percent of Salvadorans, 59 percent of Guatemalans, and 62 percent of Hondurans live in conditions of poverty or extreme poverty.¹⁵ While poverty fuels migration in each of these countries, it looms as a larger driver in Guatemala because of its persistence, continual upward trend, and heavy concentration among rural indigenous communities. Competition for scarce formal sector jobs by a ballooning population between the ages of 15 and 29, sluggish growth, and low skill and education levels make migration the only viable escape from poverty. The problem is especially severe for poor women and children. Partly a legacy of war, and partly of male migration, at least a quarter of households in the region are female-headed. Pushed into the work force, their wages are half that of men and they are overrepresented among informal workers. Their dual roles as caregiver and economic provider, reinforced by residual *machista* attitudes, limit women's capacity to work full time (see table 2).

Table 2: Labor Market Statistics, 2017

	Labor Force Participation		Estimated Earned Income (PPP-USD)		Workers in informal employment		Workers employed part-time	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Guatemala	85.7%	43.8%	\$10,592	\$5,385	69.0%	79.1%	15.7%	36.0%
Honduras	86.5%	49.0%	\$6,210	\$3,275	71.1%	77.3%	N/A	N/A
El Salvador	82.9%	53.4%	\$11,029	\$6,482	54.6%	71.9%	15.4%	23.6%

"The Global Gender Gap Report 2017." World Economic Forum. Accessed December 29, 2017.
<https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2017/>.

¹⁵ These numbers give the percent of the population living below the national poverty line in years 2014 to 2016 and are available at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/indicator>.

While nearly two million young adults (15-24) in the region are neither in school nor employed (the so-called *ninīs*),¹⁶ an estimated 6.3 %, 5.9% and 8.6% of children under the age of 14 work in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, respectively.¹⁷ They are especially vulnerable to exploitation by their employees, are victims of forced commercial sexual exploitation, and targets of recruitment by gangs to carry out extortionist activities.

Environmental Crises

Environmental drivers of internal displacement and international migration from the Northern Triangle take four distinct forms, exacerbating the poverty that drives migration. They are triggered by sudden-onset disasters, slower-onset crises, large-scale private and transnational development projects, and the increased presence of narco-traffickers. Furthermore, environmental crises align almost perfectly with the increasing flow of immigrants from the Northern Triangle and survey data support the correlation.

Sudden onset disasters such as hurricanes, landslides and earthquakes tend to result in immediate and internal displacement. If the physical, environmental, and economic damage is too severe, communities are compelled to uproot more permanently and may migrate internationally. Hurricane Mitch in 1987 and Stan in 2005 permanently uprooted tens of thousands of Hondurans and Guatemalans. The same is likely to occur as a result of the June 2018 volcanic eruption in Guatemala, where a month after the event 86 percent of those displaced has lost their livelihoods.¹⁸

Slower-onset crises refer to more gradual processes of environmental change and human over-exploitation of the environment, and include deforestation, soil erosion, droughts and flooding that dry up rivers and cause pests that decimate crops, threatening the subsistence of fishing and farming families. This problem is most serious in the Dry Corridor, a group of ecosystems covering a third of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. A 2012 -2014 outbreak of coffee rust coincided with an El Nino event,

¹⁶ International Labour Organization, Youth NEET rate, https://www.ilo.org/ilostat/faces/oracle/webcenter/portalapp/pagehierarchy/Page3.jspx?MBI_ID=20&_adf.ctrl-state=rh8zpen6y_57&_afLoop=894513575846746&_afWindowMode=0&_afWindowId=null, accessed September 24, 2018

¹⁷ Bureau of International Labor Affairs, United States Department of Labor, 2016, available at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/latin-america-caribbean>, accessed September 6, 2018.

¹⁸ OIM: "86 % de las personas afectadas por volcan perdieron fuentes de ingresos," July 7, 2018, available at: <https://www.iom.int/es/news/oim-86-de-las-personas-afectadas-por-volcan-perdieron-fuentes-de-ingresos-en-guatemala>, accessed September 17, 2018.

resulting in a two-year drought that dramatically increased food insecurity in the region.¹⁹ Affected households sought to cope by reducing consumption, selling off their assets and borrowing, being finally forced to migrate. Between 2014 and 2016, 7 percent of Salvadoran, 12 percent of Guatemalan and 16 percent of Honduran households from the Dry Corridor had one or more family members who had recently migrated, the majority attributing their decision to food insecurity.²⁰ Hunger is driving the dramatic escalation in migration from Guatemala in 2018, with the highest percentage of migrants coming from the department of Huehuetenango, where malnutrition rates hover near 70 percent.²¹

Development-induced displacement stems from the spread of agri-business, hydro-power and extractive industries. These mega projects encroach on peasant lands and water, ravaging eco systems and subsistence farming and fishing, disrupting traditional livelihoods without generating alternative employment opportunities. An estimated one job is created for every \$2 million invested in mining and hydropower, and four for every \$1 million invested in the food industry. Meanwhile, roughly one third of the surface devoted to palm cultivation today was used for corn production a decade ago.²²

Drug trafficking is an understudied contributor to environmental crisis and migration, estimated to account for over 30 percent of the annual deforestation in Nicaragua, Honduras and Guatemala. Without the forest to act as a natural shield, populations living within these regions become increasingly vulnerable to flooding and concomitant displacement.²³

¹⁹ "Beyond Violence: Drought and Migration in Central America's Northern Triangle," April 2018 by Carrie Seay-Fleming in New Security Beat, Wilson Center. Accessed August 30, 2018 at www.newsecuritybeat.org/2018/04/violence-drought-migration-central-americas-northern-triangle/.

²⁰ Food Security and Emigration: Why People Flee and the impact on Family members left behind in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras," available at: https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000022124/download/?_ga=2.209221844.777663412.1536935232-715853939.1514492322, accessed September 12, 2018.

²¹ "Hunger not violence, fuels Guatemalan migration surge, U.S. says," Washington Post, September 22, 2018, available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/hunger-not-violence-fuels-guatemalan-migration-surge-us-says/2018/09/21/65c6a546-bdb3-11e8-be70-52bd11fe18af_story.html?utm_term=.809104b0b817, accessed September 24, 2018.

²² <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/static/oa4/the-power-of-oil-palm.pdf>, and Shannon O'Neill, Foreign Direct Investment and Jobs in Latin America, Council on Foreign Relations, September 12, 2013 accessed September 6, 2018, available at: <https://www.cfr.org/blog/foreign-direct-investment-and-jobs-latin-america>, accessed September 19, 2018.

²³ Steven E. Sesnie, et al, "A Spatio-Temporal Analysis of forest loss related to cocaine trafficking in Central America," Environmental Research Letters, 12, 5 (May, 2017) available at <http://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/aa6fff>

Violence

Survey data are remarkably consistent in confirming that violence and insecurity are chief drivers of migration from the NTCA, especially in El Salvador and Honduras. A 2016-2017 survey found that more than a third of Salvadorans and Hondurans, and 17.2 percent of Guatemalans considered migrating because of insecurity.²⁴ Insecurity-induced crime takes the form of personal attacks, violence against a family member, extortion and gang recruitment, with a majority fleeing the most violent municipalities in the NTCA.²⁵

The scale of violence is staggering. The 2017 murder rate in El Salvador is 60 per 100,000, 37.9 percent in Honduras, and 26.1 in Guatemala, indicative of declines from peak levels registered in previous years, but still considered to be of epidemic proportions. By way of comparison, the comparable homicide rate in the US remains under 6 percent per 100,000 inhabitants.²⁶ In 2014 and 2015, the NTCA ranked among the top ten countries in terms of intentional homicides, and child homicide rates were among the highest in Latin America. Modest improvements notwithstanding, they still figure among the most violent countries in the world, according to the 2018 Global Peace Index.²⁷

Non-homicidal violence is ever-present, including intimidation, threats, assault, extortion and robbery, torture, sexual violence and kidnapping.²⁸ Individuals of all ages and walks of life are victims, at times

Narco deforestation leaves Central America Vulnerable to Natural Disasters,"

<https://weather.com/science/environment/news/2018-06-21-narco-deforestation-central-america-disasters-flooding-drug>, accessed September 6, 2018

²⁴ Inter-American Dialogue, "Beneath the Violence: How Insecurity Shapes Daily Life and Emigration in Central America," p. 5 available at <https://www.thedialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Crime-Avoidance-Report-FINAL-ONLINE.pdf>

²⁵ Insight Crime, "Crime, Violence Driving Migration from Central America," March 2, 2016 available at: <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/news/030216.AB-InSightCrime.pdf>, MSF, "Forced To Flee: Central America's Northern Triangle," May 2017, available at https://www.msf.org/sites/msf.org/files/msf_forced-to-flee-central-america-northern-triangle_e.pdf, Inter-American Dialogue, "Understanding Central American Migration," available at https://www.thedialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/FinalDraft_ChildMigrants_81314.pdf, accessed September 9, 2018.

²⁶ The Guardian, "US Murder rate rose in 2016 but experts question claims of long-term trend," September 25, 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/sep/25/us-rate-rose-in-2016-but-this-years-numbers-suggest-decline-ahead>, accessed September 19, 2018.

²⁷ Global Peace Index 2018, available at: <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2018/06/Global-Peace-Index-2018-2.pdf> and Index Mundi, "Intentional Homicides (per 100,000 people), available at: <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/indicators/VC.IHR.PSRC.P5/rankings>, accessed September 19, 2018.

²⁸ See for example, UDEFEGUA, "Por el derecho a defender derechos: Informe 2017," available at: http://udefegua.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Informe-2017.FINAL_5.compressed.pdf, graph p. 14 and 15.

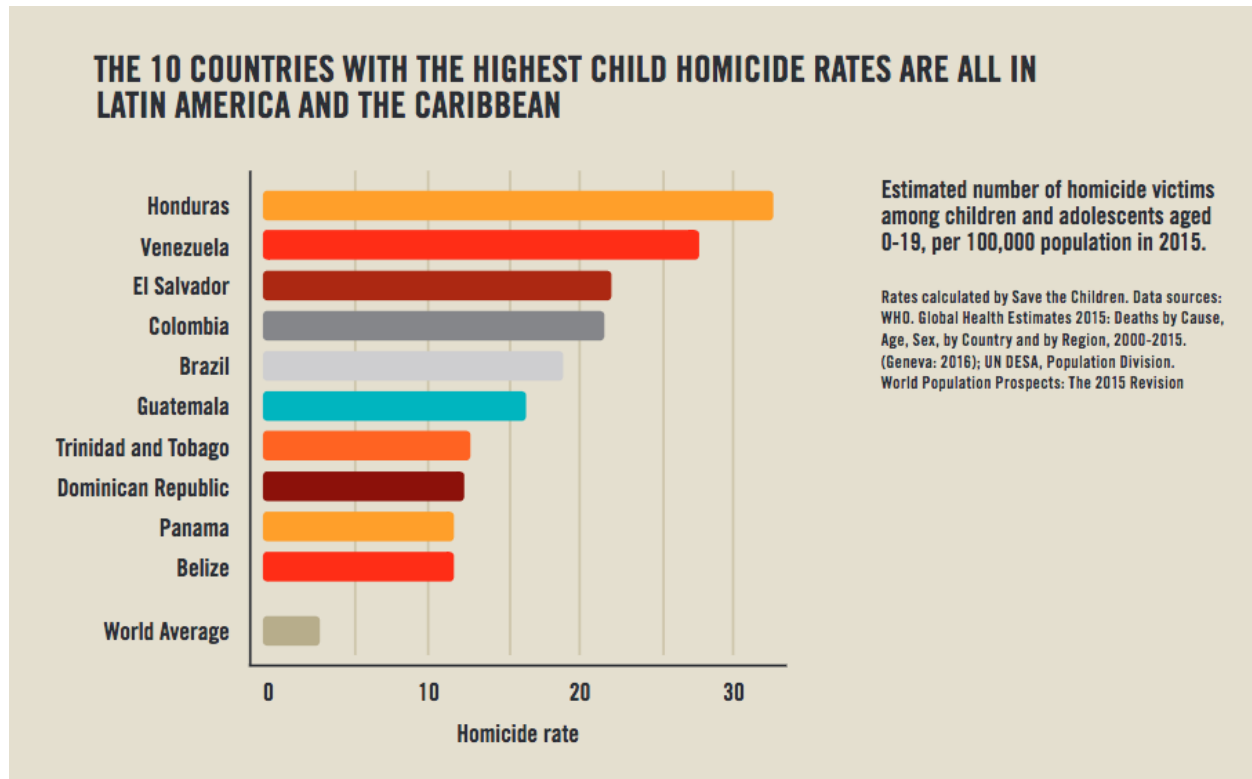
caught in the crossfire, but also targeted because of their membership in particular groups (including domestic partners, members of the LGBTI community, environmental and peasant activists and journalists) or because they belong to or defy an organized criminal group, or gang.²⁹ Certain professions, notably shopkeepers and transportation workers, are prime targets for extortionists in a region aptly described as the “world’s epicenter for extortion.” Returning migrants are another especially vulnerable and growing segment of the population victimized by violence. Taking into consideration that extortion is among the most underreported crimes, Salvadorans are estimated to have paid \$400 million annually, Hondurans \$200 million and Guatemalans \$61 million in extortion fees in 2015.³⁰

²⁹ On violence against women see, for instance, Gobierno de El Salvador, Ministerio de Justicia y Seguridad Publica, Informe Sobre Hechos de Violencia Contra Las Mujeres, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Informe%20LEIV%202016-2017.pdf>, accessed September 12, 2018.

“Mas de mil mujeres vivieron una situacion de violencia en el pais,” Publinews, 22 November 2017, available at “Honduras, Violencia contra las mujeres alcanza nivel epidemico, October 6, 2017, available at: <http://kaosenlared.net/honduras-violencia-las-mujeres-alcanza-nivel-epidemico/> accessed September 6, 2018. On violence against the LGBTI community see IAHCR, “Violence Against LGBTI Persons,” Organization of American States, 12 November 2015, available at: <http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/violence-lgbt-persons.pdf>, accessed September 9, 2018. On domestic violence see UN Women: Global Database on Violence Against Women, available at: <http://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/fr/countries/americas/el-salvador?formofviolence=b51b5bac425b470883736a3245b7cbe6>, <http://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en/search?keywords=guatemala>, and <http://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en/search?keywords=honduras>, accessed September 19, 2018.

³⁰ Steven Dudley and Michael Lohmuller, “Northern Triangle is the World’s Extortion Hotspot,” Insight Crime, July 1, 2015, available at <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/northern-triangle-world-extortion-hotspot/>, and International Crisis Group, Mafia of the Poor: Gang Violence and Extortion in Central America, available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/central-america/62-mafia-poor-gang-violence-and-extortion-central-america>, accessed September 6, 2018

Figure 7:



Data from Save the Children, "Stolen Childhoods: End of Childhood Report, 2017." ³¹

Perpetrators:

State-sponsored repression

In an ominous echo of the Cold War, Central American countries (the NTCA, especially Honduras and Guatemala, now joined by Nicaragua) are experiencing severe democratic crises. These are marked by increasing political persecution of regime and business sector opponents and their relatives. Victims include individuals protesting electoral fraud, political corruption, the usurpation of land and resources, and the denial of the internationally enshrined right to popular consultation of indigenous communities affected by development projects. As repression of opponents and activists increases, violators seek to cover their tracks by attacking journalists and to protect their impunity by targeting lawyers and judges. Guatemala, for instance, registered 493 attacks on human rights defenders and their relatives during 2017,

³¹ See Save the Children, "Stolen Childhoods: End of Childhood Report, 2017," available at: https://campaigns.savethechildren.net/sites/campaigns.savethechildren.net/files/report/EndofChildhood_Report_2017_ENGLISH.pdf, accessed September 14, 2018. Graph reproduced in Insight Crime, "Ten Countries with Highest Child Homicide Rates All in LatAm: report," June 6, 2017, available at: <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/ten-countries-highest-child-homicide-rates-all-latam-report/>, accessed September 13, 2018.

twice the number of attacks recorded in 2016. There has been an especially worrisome shift in nature of attacks, from intimidation to murder, with 52 human rights defenders murdered in 2017 alone.³² There is every reason to believe that the collapse of the rule of law, marked by the expulsion of CICIG Commissioner Ivan Velasquez, nation-wide civilian mobilization, and government deployment of tanks, troops and undercover agents, are the prelude to a campaign of intensifying political violence that will fuel politically-driven migration that has already expelled highland peasants protesting mega development projects.

Organized Crime: Drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) and Gangs

The growth of drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) stems from two sets of events. During the armed conflicts of the 1980s, the military took advantage of its political and territorial control to establish criminal networks engaged in a range of illicit economic activities that survived the transition from war to peace. The crackdown on Mexican drug cartels, during the Calderon administration in particular (2006-2012) pushed their members trafficking (and some production) activities south into the Northern Triangle.

The development of gang or *mara* violence in the region originated during the same era but followed a different path. The massive flight of Salvadorans from the civil war (1979-1992) especially to the United States exacerbated gang warfare in poor and disadvantaged communities in the Los Angeles area where many Salvadorans settled. Although some Chicano Gangs (notably the B Street Gang or B-18) accepted Salvadoran recruits, others preyed on them, prompting Salvadorans to defend themselves by forming their own gangs, the most notorious being the Mara Salvatrucha gang, or MS-13. The massive crackdown and deportation of roughly one thousand gang members back to El Salvador in the aftermath of the 1992 riots in Los Angeles, followed by the deportation of even greater numbers in the aftermath of the passage of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Responsibility Act of 1996 that targeted the deportation of unauthorized immigrants who had committed crimes, fueled the rise and intensification of gang violence in the region. Alienated and unemployed in the societal context of widespread poverty, deported gang members absorbed preexisting neighborhood *pandillas* and established local branches of the gangs they had belonged to in the United States.³³

³² UDEFEGUA, Por el Derecho a Defender Derechos, Informe 2017, available at: http://udefegua.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Informe-2017.FINAL_5.compressed.pdf, accessed September 24, 2018

³³ International Crisis Group, "Mafia of the Poor, Gang Violence and Extortion in Central America," April 2017, available at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/central-america/62-mafia-poor-gang-violence-and-extortion->

To a certain degree, cartels and gangs contribute to displacement in similar ways. Their sheer presence and power create a generalized sense of insecurity that fuels migration. Their actions give credence to these fears. Both vie for control of territory, resorting to extreme violence to intimidate and uproot the civilian population living in these areas. They recruit members and coerce residents within their controlled territories to perform criminal acts. Refusal to comply, filing an official complaint, or attempting to escape are considered acts of betrayal that exact extremely violent forms of vengeance. The life of the individual betrayer and that of his entire family are permanently threatened.³⁴

These similarities notwithstanding, the link between gang violence and migration is both more direct, multifaceted, visible and significant. Gangs are well ensconced in the Northern Triangle countries. Rough estimates placed the numbers of MS-13 and B-18 gang members in the NTCA at 85,000 in 2012³⁵ Gang membership is a direct consequence of forcible and voluntary recruitment. Prevailing conditions of poverty, lack of access to education and the dearth of job opportunities that confront a bulging youth population in the Northern Triangle make gang membership relatively attractive. Their ranks continue to be replenished by the oftentimes forcible recruitment of poor, young, alienated street youth, prison inmates, and wave after wave of deported gang members and convicts from the United States.

Gangs perpetrate a range of crimes including extortion, kidnapping, prostitution and local small drug sales. Extortion is simultaneously the most lucrative cash cow for gangs and a protection racket that serves to consolidate and maintain gang territorial control. Extortion also fuels poverty driven migration, by stymieing poor and middle-class citizen's capacity to operate a profitable small business.³⁶

[central-america](#), and UNHCR, "Gang Menace Central Americans Seeking Refuge in Guatemala," July 1, 2016 available at <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/stories/2016/7/577395af4/gangs-menace-central-americans-seeking-refuge-guatemala.html>, accessed September 9, 2018.

³⁴ Inter-American Dialogue, "Beneath the Violence: How Insecurity Shapes Daily Life and Emigration in Central America," p. 5 available at <https://www.thedialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Crime-Avoidance-Report-FINAL-ONLINE.pdf>

³⁵ Clare Ribando Seelke, "Gangs in Central America," Congressional Research Service, August 2016, available at: <https://fas.org/sqp/crs/row/RL34112.pdf>, p. 4, accessed September 9, 2018

³⁶ "The Bus route that Institutionalized Extortion in El Salvador, Insight Crime, December 2016, available at <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/bus-route-institutionalized-extortion-el-salvador/>, Carlos Mendoza, Pilotos de buses: una desproporcion de victimas, " Plaza Publica, September 2014, available at: <https://www.plazapublica.com.gt/content/pilotos-de-buses-una-desproporcion-de-victimas>, accessed September 14, 2018

The heightened numbers and geographic spread of gangs have also made it increasingly challenging to find a safe internal haven from gangs. Although the MS-13 and B-18 remain heavily concentrated in urban settings, they are increasingly branching out into the interior, especially in El Salvador where gang units are now active in each of the country's 14 departments. Their geographic expansion is partly opportunistic, a means of escaping the reach of law enforcement in parts of the country where the state is mostly absent.³⁷

The profile of gang-fueled migration is diverse and partly explains the changing demographics of migration that is both younger and more female. Individuals of all ages who have defied a gang by refusing to pay rising extortion fees or unwittingly crossed over into rival gang territories, gang members who attempt to leave, and women who are victims of gang rape represent the largest cohort of gang-violence related migrants.³⁸ Youth living in gang infested neighborhoods who have managed to escape gang clutches also migrate fearing that it is only a matter of time before they will be targeted for recruitment or rounded up by police, victims of a stereotyping that assumes marginal youth have gang affiliations.³⁹ Finally, there is increasing evidence that gang members themselves are migrating, motivated

³⁷Insight Crime: "MS-13 in the Americas," 2018, available at: <https://www.insightcrime.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/MS13-in-the-Americas-InSight-Crime-English-3.pdf>

³⁸ Council on Foreign Relations, "Central America's Violent Northern Triangle," June 26, 2018 available at: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/central-americas-violent-northern-triangle>, International Crisis Group, "Mafia of the Poor: Gang Violence and Extortion in Central America," available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/central-america/62-mafia-poor-gang-violence-and-extortion-central-america>, Latin America Working Group, "El Salvador's Gang Violence: Turf Wars, Internal Battles and Life Defined by Invisible Borders," February 2016, available at: <http://www.lawg.org/action-center/lawg-blog/69-general/1579-el-salvadors-gang-violence-turf-wars-internal-battles-and-life-defined-by-invisible-borders>, International Perspective, "The World's Least Visible Humanitarian Crisis in Central America," January 2018, available at: <http://www.internationalperspective.be/insight/2018/01/the-worlds-least-visible-humanitarian-crisis-in-central-america/>, Oscar Martinez, "Driving Across the Borders of El Salvador's Gang Territory," Insight Crime, January 11, 2016 available at: <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/driving-across-the-borders-of-el-salvador-gang-territory/>, Molly O'Toole, "El Salvador's Gangs are Targeting Young Girls," The Atlantic, March 4, 2018, available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/03/el-salvador-women-gangs-ms-13-trump-violence/554804/>, accessed September 24, 2018

³⁹ "El Salvador's Youth are Trapped Between Gang Violence and Police Abuse" The Intercept, January 12, 2018, available at: <https://theintercept.com/2018/01/12/el-salvador-tps-trump-gang-violence/>, and Insight Crime, El Salvador's Police Using WhatsApp, Facebook to Run Death Squads, August 24, 2017, available at <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/el-salvador-police-using-whatsapp-facebook-run-death-squads-report/>, accessed August 24, 2017.

by the prospect of economic opportunity and reunification with family and fellow gang members, and driven by poverty and, ironically, prevailing levels of insecurity.⁴⁰

Questions

- The path of the Central American migrant and whether and how it might have changed over time is an open question. The traditional route in which migrants with relatives and resources use well know routes and smugglers to travel directly from their hometowns to destination countries may be giving way to a two or three step process. Migrants without these contacts or networks may first migrate internally to the cities and then find groups who help them figure out the process before migrating internationally. In such a process does a migration momentum develop? Once uprooted from their community do individuals acquire a migrant mentality, in which they lose their sense of belonging and rootedness altogether and look beyond country borders to international opportunities and safety?
- Poverty and migration: is it still the case that the poorest of the poor don't migrate? If so, is it only because of income? Is there a threshold of income? Do family members finance the journey, even when they are not sending regular remittances?
- Are there examples of development and crime prevention/gang prevention strategies that have been implemented elsewhere, including the United States, that might guide strategies in the NTCA. (IAF offers a potentially interesting model in terms of its approach to income generating activities, autonomy and empowerment)

⁴⁰ Insight Crime, "MS13 in the Americas" op.cit.

III. US Policy and Central American Migration

US policy and Central American migration can perhaps best be described by contradictory impulses. The US simultaneously drives migration from the NTCA, and actively seeks to deter it. This section briefly highlights some of the core economic, social, security factors that make the US a driver of and magnet for migration from the region. It then focuses more specifically on US immigration policies and probes whether the increasingly restrictive enforcement thrust is up to the task of regulating migration and curbing unauthorized migration.

The US as a driver of Central American migration

US policy towards NTCA has historically contributed to internal displacement and international migration from the NTCA. Albeit to a lesser degree, it continues to influence present-day migration, acting both as a push and pull factor.

Push factors:

US corporations historically figured among the largest landowners in the region, dislodging peasant communities and benefiting from a migrant peasant labor force available and obligated to work on plantations. Echoes of that pattern exist today, thanks to a global development model premised on free trade and privileging commercial agriculture and extractive industries that encroach further on land ownership, provide scant job opportunities, damage the environment, exacerbate food insecurity and generate a cycle of protest and repression that drives migration.

US involvement in Central America's brutal civil wars of the late 1970s and 1980s contributed to the massive violence that caused hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans and more than a million Guatemalans to flee their countries. With the end of the Cold War, US policy interests appeared to align with those of human rights and democracy activists and the majority of poor and vulnerable citizens.

At the same time US policy remains inconsistent and timid, a reflection of its myopic emphasis on stability over democratic preservation and deepening, its short attention span when it comes to the region, and its failure to grasp the consequences of its actions and inaction. The result is, at best, wavering support for human rights and democracy in the region. The Obama administration's failure to condemn a 2009 coup in Honduras, and the Trump administration's passivity in the face of an alarming turn towards authoritarianism in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua are all cases in point. The US failure to use its

influence in the region to demand compliance with human rights and democracy is strengthening organized crime and green lighting intensified state repression, factors bound to generate further violence-fueled migration.

The growing integration of the US and Central American economies, sealed by free trade deals, has also been policy-deaf to its multiple migratory impacts. In striking contrast to the European integration model, hemispheric trade deals have excluded the free movement of labor and tolerated lax labor and environmental standards. The economic treaties have also desisted from including respect for human rights and democracy that are grounds for membership in the European Union. Partly because of these omissions, inequality has grown, poverty has remained engrained, and the environment deteriorated – collectively fueling migration.

Pull factors:

The US economy's readily accessible labor market that demands high levels of unskilled labor attracts migrants in search of economic opportunity. Demand for foreign labor waxes and wanes in concert with US economic performance. Yet the structural changes in the US economy towards high tech industries over the past several decades, accompanied by a shift in agriculture employment away from seasonal to a more year-round employment, and the boom in construction and the service sector to accommodate the need for a changing infrastructure, expand the niche for migrant labor from the region.

Family reunification remains an ancillary factor driving unauthorized migration from Mexico and the NTCA. Roughly 18 percent of Central American migrants living cited family reunification as their chief motivation for migrating in a 2011 Pew Survey of U.S. Hispanic adults.⁴¹ Although the numbers appear small, it is worth bearing in mind that the prospect of family reunification provides a reprieve from the physical and economic insecurities that generate migration.⁴² An established network of kin and community in the United States has been shown to ease the psychological, social and economic burdens of migrant assimilation and adjustment. They offer solidarity, expand family income by combining new

⁴¹ Pew Research Center, "Rise in U.S. Immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras Outpaces Growth From Elsewhere," December 7, 2017, available at: <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2017/12/07/rise-in-u-s-immigrants-from-el-salvador-guatemala-and-honduras-outpaces-growth-from-elsewhere/>, accessed September 24, 2018.

⁴² Michael Clemens, "Violence, Development and Migration Waves: Evidence from Central American Child Migrant Apprehensions," Center for Global Development, Working Paper, July 2017, available at: <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/violence-development-and-migration-waves-evidence-central-american-child-migrant.pdf>, accessed September 10, 2018.

and old breadwinners and allowing family members to work longer hours as women and children contribute unpaid “care work”. They have also been shown to encourage migrants to invest in small businesses that foster community and contribute to the economic improvement of marginal communities.

43

US immigration policy:

Decades of tough US enforcement policies aimed at deterring the flow of unauthorized migrants from the region has had limited impact, as evidenced by the data presented in section 1. There is no single or simple explanation for why US enforcement efforts have fallen short of their intended aims. The following discussion offers a brief overview of trends in US immigration policy and touches on some of the potential explanations, revealing a set of core contradictory impulses and paradoxes that contribute to understanding policy shortcomings.

A Restrictive US immigration policy:

Historically, US immigration policy has had contradictory impulses. On the one hand, the United States prides itself on being a nation of immigrants and a historical magnet for individuals fleeing oppression and seeking economic opportunity. On the other, immigration policy is often at odds with this inclusive vision. During the early days of the Republic and, increasingly from the late 19th century onward, US policymakers have frequently sought to regulate and restrict migration. Restrictive policies tend to be politically motivated, enacted in response to a spike in nativist attitudes or purposefully designed to scapegoat migrants at times of rising cultural and economic insecurity.⁴⁴

The formal termination of the Mexican farm labor program (the bracero program) in 1964 marked the initiation of increasingly restrictive policies towards migrants from Mexico and more recently Central America, aimed at limiting legal migration and deterring unauthorized migration across the southern border.⁴⁵ Restrictive policy has two interrelated aims. The first is to make living in the US so inhospitable

⁴³ Immigration Policy Center, “The Advantages of Family Based Reunification,” March 2013, available at <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/advantages-family-based-immigration>, accessed September 10, 2018 and Monica Boyd, “Family and Personal networks in International Migration: Recent Developments and New Agendas,” *The International Migration Review*, 23, 3 (Autumn 1989), pp. 638-670.

⁴⁴ Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004)

⁴⁵ See Douglass Massey and Karen A Pren, “Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy: Explaining the post 1965 surge from Latin America,” *Population Development Review*, 38:1 (2012) available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3407978/>, accessed September 20, 2018.

as to encourage unauthorized migrants to decide to return home (self-deport). The second is to deter further immigration into the United States.

Consistent with these aims, and in its mildest and arguably most ineffective form, US immigration policy has included public campaigns of getting the word out within the NTCA about everyday challenges unauthorized immigrant communities face, the dangers of crossing, and the low chances of success.⁴⁶ Yet the thrust of US immigration deterrence policies are focused on beefing up border enforcement through increased expenditures on personnel and technology, accompanied by the apprehension, detention and deportation of unauthorized migrants, with a particular focus on those with criminal records. Though traditionally the preserve of the federal government, immigration legislation introduced in 1996 also granted states authority to enact their own enforcement policies. States have taken the bait, passing laws denying immigrants (and even permanent residents at times) access to federal benefits, refusing them basic documentation (including driver's licenses or permits) and sanctioning racial profiling as a means of apprehending undocumented migrants.⁴⁷

The US has also long pressured Mexico to ramp up its own interdiction efforts. Beginning in the 1990s, a decade in which, hardly coincidentally, the two countries became partners in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Mexico became an increasingly willing deportation surrogate. During the 1990s alone, Mexico increased its apprehensions ten-fold, from a paltry 10,000 to over 100,000 per year.⁴⁸ In recent years, notably during the Obama administration, the so-called southern border program became an ever more vital and effective component of US interdiction strategy. By FY 2015, Mexico had surpassed

⁴⁶ American immigration Council, *Understanding the Central American Refugee Crisis*,

⁴⁷ California, Colorado and Arizona have been at the forefront of these efforts, with five additional southern states introducing copycat Arizona legislation. Although successful court challenges forced a temporary pause in several of these state-sponsored initiatives, the 2016 election marked a new turning point. At the behest of the Trump administration, states have been given carte blanche to crackdown on migration. Within the first five months of the Trump presidency, 24 states were considering anti-sanctuary legislation. See Muzaffar Chisti et al., "Texas Leads Resurgence in Restrictive State Actions on Immigration Enforcement," Migration Policy Institute, May 25, 2017 available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/texas-leads-resurgence-restrictive-state-actions-immigration-enforcement>, accessed September 10, 2018. February 2016, available at: https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/understanding_the_central_american_refugee_crisis.pdf, accessed September 10, 2018.

⁴⁸ Sarah J. Mahler and Dusun Ugrina, "Central America: Crossroads of the Americas," Migration Policy Institute, April 1, 2006, available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-america-crossroads-americas/>, accessed September 10, 2018.

the United States in border apprehensions, and in the years since, Mexico has deported as many as twice the number of US deportees of NTCA residents, including roughly 82,000 in FY 2017.⁴⁹

The Trump administration

The Trump administration's policy approach to migration from the region represents a substantial and cruel hardening of the restrictive focus that has been a hallmark of US policy towards immigration from the region since the mid 1990s. Indicative of this hardening, the comprehensive immigration reform pursued (unsuccessfully) by prior administrations is conspicuous in its absence from Trump's immigration agenda. Furthermore, the current administration's policies brazenly violate human rights, ignore due process, and challenge international legal conventions. Its zero-tolerance policy of separating families crossing the border and detaining children, along with its reversal of key policies, including the Dreamer Act currently in legal limbo, the termination of temporary protected status for Salvadorans and Hondurans, the Department of Justice's decree to end gang violence and domestic abuse as grounds for asylum, the lowering of the annual ceiling for refugees to 30,000 and the denial of residency to immigrants who have accepted federal benefits, are just the most salient examples. Equally significant, the Trump administration's attack on immigrants has taken a radical step further in challenging the legal status of permanent residents, naturalized citizens, and US-born children of NTCA migrants.

The Trump administration has also broken with prior administrations in cultivating and exploiting a longstanding Latino threat narrative.⁵⁰ Through a combination of tweets, media interviews, and speeches at mass rallies, Trump has used his bully pulpit to stigmatize migrants as rapists and gang members, who cheat the welfare system and steal jobs from hardworking Americans.

The depiction of migrants as criminals does not square with research that consistently finds that the foreign-born population commits less crime than the native-born population. In order to retain their TPS standing, holders must undergo background checks every six to 18 months to confirm that they have

⁴⁹Official data from Mexican Department of the Interior, cited in NPR, "Mexico Deploys a Formidable Deportation Force Near Its Own Southern Border, May 7, 2018, available at: <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/05/07/607700928/mexico-deploys-a-formidable-deportation-force-near-its-own-southern-border> and Rodrigo Dominguez-Villegas and Victoria Rettig, "Migrants Deported from the United States and Mexico to the Northern Triangle: A Statistical Profile," Migration Policy Institute, September 2015, available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-america-crossroads-americas/>, accessed September 10, 2018.

⁵⁰ See for instance, Leo Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens and the Nation*. (Stanford: CA: Stanford University Press, 2008) and Samuel Huntington, "The Hispanic Challenge," *Foreign Policy*, October 28, 2009, available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/28/the-hispanic-challenge/>, accessed September 20, 2018.

never been convicted of either a felony or more than two misdemeanors.⁵¹ More generally, unauthorized immigrants are 44 percent less likely and legal immigrants are 69 percent less likely to be incarcerated than the native-born population.⁵²

NTCA migrant contributions to the US economy and society are illustrated by an examination of TPS holders. Between 81 to 88% of Salvadoran and Honduran TPS holders are employed, a rate considerably higher than the 63% rate for the US-born population and 66% for the foreign-born population. Approximately 11 percent are self-employed, having created their own jobs and in all likelihood also jobs for others. Roughly a third of TPS holders have mortgages, and pay property taxes, while 29.7 percent volunteer in their communities, and on sports teams, a number similar to the rest of US society.⁵³

The impacts of an enforcement policy approach:

On immigration:

Historically, there is little evidence that self-deportation or enhanced interior enforcement strategies are effective strategies in dissuading or decreasing the stock of unauthorized migrants.⁵⁴ ⁵⁵ The tightening of border enforcement has instead been shown, over time, to generate a temporary dip in crossings. Eventually, smugglers and migrants discover new passageways and, absent efforts to reduce the push and pull drivers of migration, levels recover.

⁵¹ Center for American Progress, TPS Holders are Integral Members of the U.S. Economy and Society," October 20, 2017, available at: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2017/10/20/440400/tps-holders-are-integral-members-of-the-u-s-economy-and-society/>, accessed September 25, 2018.

⁵² "Immigration and Public Safety," The Sentencing Project, 2017, available at: <http://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Immigration-and-Public-Safety.pdf> and The Cato Institute, "Criminal Immigrants: Their Numbers, Demographics, and Countries of Origin," Immigration and Research Policy Brief, 1, March 15, 2017 available at: https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/immigration_brief-1.pdf, accessed September 25, 2018.

⁵³ Center for Migration Studies, "A Statistical and Demographic Profile of the US Temporary Protected Status Populations from El Salvador, Honduras and Haiti," drawing on Robert Warren and Donald Kerwin, Journal on Migration and Human Security, 2017, pp. 577-592, available at: <http://cmsny.org/publications/jmhs-tps-elsalvador-honduras-haiti/> and Center for American Progress, TPS Holders are Integral Members of the U.S. Economy and Society," op.cit., accessed September 25, 2018.

⁵⁴ Wayne Cornelius, "Why Immigrants won't self-deport," op-ed, Los Angeles Times, November 30, 2016, available at: <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-cornelius-self-deportation-20161130-story.html>

⁵⁵ "Deportations of Salvadorans fall as end of TPS slows migration: IOM data," May 8, 2018, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-el-salvador-immigration/deportations-of-salvadorans-fall-as-end-of-tps-slows-migration-iom-data-idUSKBN1IA00V>, accessed September 17, 2018.

Available data for the past few years present a mixed picture that both begs further research while also recognizing that it may be too soon to draw any conclusions. Guatemala appears to have followed the most predictable pattern of dip and recovery. 48,954 unauthorized Guatemalans were caught entering the United States in 2016, rebounding to 64,435 in 2017 and 60,247 to date in 2018.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, 60,513 unauthorized Hondurans attempted entry to the US in 2016 and 50,842 in 2018 – figures indicative of both a significant decline *and* a persistently high level. By contrast, migration from El Salvador has dropped precipitously, from 42,455 in 2016, to 10,614 in 2018. Although the termination of TPS has been identified as a possible reason behind the reduction in Salvadoran migrants, it curiously appears to have had much less impact on Honduran migrants who are similarly impacted.⁵⁷

Policy Tensions and Contradictions:

US immigration policy's failure to deter unauthorized migration highlights the limitations of an enforcement-only approach that fails to address the push and pull factors fueling migration.

Regulating unauthorized migrations requires abstaining from policies that fuel migration while simultaneously alleviating pressures to migrate. Despite reams of academic scholarship and policy analysis emphasizing the push and pull factors of migration and four decades of growth in unauthorized migration from the region, it took the 2014 child migration crisis for the Obama administration to endorse a policy response focused on alleviating pressures to migrate. Working in concert with governments in the region, the Obama administration coupled enforcement, interdiction, and deportation with a five-year assistance program for the NTCA. The Alliance for Prosperity built on longer standing USAID projects targeting poverty, security and governance in the region, committing US and Central American governments to invest over 8 billion in addressing these issues in the framework of alleviating migration from the NTCA.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Data provided By Manuel Orozco, Inter-American Dialogue.

⁵⁷ Data provided By Manuel Orozco, Inter-American Dialogue.

⁵⁸ See Department of State, "U.S. Programs and Engagement Promote a Prosperous, Secure, and Well-Governed Central America," available at: <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/276138.pdf>, accessed September 24, 2018; USAID accomplishments are summarized in "Addressing the Drivers of Illegal Immigration: USAID Results in the Northern Triangle," 2018 available at: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1862/USAID_NT_Results_FINAL_08.31.2018.pdf, and The White House: Fact Sheet: Support for the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle, available at: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/03/03/fact-sheet-support-alliance-prosperity-northern-triangle>, and Peter J. Meyer, "US Strategy for Engagement in Central America: Policy Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service, June 8, 2017, available at: <https://fas.org/srg/crs/row/R44812.pdf>, accessed September 10, 2018.

US policymakers are loath to take concerted action to curb the employment of unauthorized migrants. Existing guest worker programs are too limited in scope and size to satisfy the persistent demand for migrant labor. Additionally, the business community and especially the agricultural sector (roughly half of all agricultural workers are estimated to be undocumented) have lobbied successfully against efforts to enforce the E-verify program that would force employers to vet the migrant status of their workers and hold them accountable for hiring unauthorized workers.⁵⁹

US political structures and processes hamstring efforts to regulate and control the surge in unauthorized immigration through comprehensive legislation. Although democratically elected politicians everywhere tend to prioritize policies that have immediate impacts over longer term solutions, this short-term lens is especially acute in a US political system that prizes representative over responsible democracy and where Congress faces reelection every two years.

Intensifying political partisanship and social polarization exacerbate the impasse on immigration reform. Democrat and Republican administrations alike have given up on reconciling divergent views to fix a broken immigration system through legislation. Politically compelled to demonstrate action, they opt for the easier path of tightening border enforcement.

In a curious twist, the growing polarization over US immigration policy, especially since the election of President Trump, may lessen its deterrence impact. The administration's zero-tolerance policy responds to, cultivates and exploits growing nativist sentiment while granting border agents and vigilantes free reign to terrorize prospective migrants. But it has also generated significant pushback. It is emboldening opposition from pro-immigrant organizations and policy advocacy networks, encouraging boutique lawyers to devote pro-bono resources to asylum cases, and pushing municipal and state governments and community organizations to defy official policy by declaring themselves sanctuary cities with promises to shield unauthorized migrants. There is evidence from recent court rulings that, despite pressures from the Department of Justice, members of the judiciary are willing to challenge government zero-tolerance policy and ensure that prospective asylum seekers from the NTCA get a fair hearing. With the caveat that data predate the imposition of new restrictions on asylum grounds, favorable

⁵⁹ Data available at US Department of Labor, Table 1, National Demographic Characteristics, <https://doleta.gov/naws/pages/research/data-tables.cfm>, accessed August 30, 2018.

adjudications of credible fear have held fairly steady since 2015, ranging from 70 to 80 percent of presented cases.⁶⁰

Mass deportations fuel increased violence within the NTCA, generating new waves of forced migration. As highlighted earlier, the deportation of gang members professionalized gang violence in the region by transplanting the MS-13 and B-18 to the NTCA. This remains equally true today. Expansion of gang control over everyday life in the region accelerated in the last decade and a half as deportees from the United States streamed back into the three countries. Between 2008 and 2013 almost 200,000 Northern Triangle migrants with criminal records were deported from the United States, equivalent to 31 percent of all deportees, and including 62,000 individuals convicted of violent crimes. Even if a small number of these returnees turn to gangs and organized crime upon return, the impact on violence is sizeable. Recent research reveals that in a cross-section study of 123 countries between 2003 and 2015, an extra inflow of 10 deportees with criminal histories in the United States increases the homicide rate in the origin country by 2 homicides per 100,000. This robust and striking effect is largely driven by experiences in Central American and Caribbean countries.⁶¹

Deportees without a criminal past are also susceptible to appeals by gangs and other organized criminal elements. The dearth of employment opportunities and the stigmatization deportees face upon return make them more likely recruits. Furthermore, their knowledge of and contacts within the US, combined with their experience crossing the border, render them prize recruits. Organized crime mingles with relatives just outside returnee reception gates in Guatemala, waiting to pluck a new crop of members from among recent arrivals.

Deportation generates increased violence in additional respects. Although official data are sparse (as much because of underreporting as a failure to track), the assumption that returning migrants either possess or have access to financial resources render them prime targets of gang extortion. Furthermore, deportees become targets of the predatory crime syndicates and gangs they fled. Defiance carries a death sentence without statutory limitations. Upon return home, they are likely to be discovered, tortured and

⁶⁰ Data provided by Migration Policy Institute.

⁶¹ Ambrosius, Christian and Leblang, David A., Exporting Murder: US Deportations & the Spread of Violence (August 21, 2018). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3213383>

killed for having fled to avoid gang recruitment, continued membership, or extortion, or having refused to comply with demands from drug trafficking organizations.

Impacts within the United States

Enforcement policies exact an enormous toll on immigrant families and communities, with attendant economic and security consequences for US society.

Deportation harms the psychological and social well-being of individuals, families and communities. Those left behind, who often include US-born children, may no longer be able to afford their living quarters. Children may be forced to find a job to compensate for a loss in family income. Remaining relatives, especially children, also experience severe depression and trauma, manifested in withdrawal, fear, anxiety and anger. Unauthorized migrants cease attending church and other cultural activities, and they forsake visits to health clinics. Children no longer play outside freely and they sometimes drop out of school⁶² Preliminary conversations with unauthorized migrants from the NTCA also suggest that an already pervasive problem of alcoholism is exacerbated by constant fear and anxiety.

Tougher enforcement appears to threaten social solidarity in other respects. My research with Mexican deportees uncovered a phenomenon akin to the settling of scores that pertain during civil wars. Much as neighbors and even relatives inform on each other during armed conflicts as a means of resolving petty disputes and personal scores, evidence suggests that some migrants may do the same in the current context. Providing information to local authorities and border enforcement provides a convenient means of getting back at, or rid of, unauthorized migrants with whom they have disagreements.

Although much more research is required to understand the complex social dynamics of NTCA immigrant communities, anecdotal evidence suggests a similar pattern of division and settling of scores. These communities are especially vulnerable given the deep political divisions among their stalwart members who settled during the civil war and immediate post war years and whose politics continues to mirror the ideological differences that dominated during this era. At the same time, there are counter-examples of social bonding in the context of shared threats. Unauthorized migrant communities have formed social media networks to alert their members of ICE raids and share work opportunities. The most recent

⁶² American Psychological Association, "Statement on the Effects of Deportation and Forced Separation on Immigrants, their Families, and Communities," July 31, 2018, available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ajcp.12256>, accessed September 16, 2018.

example is on-line postings of the demand for labor to assist the reconstruction effort in the aftermath of the September 2018 hurricane that devastated the Carolinas.

Tighter enforcement policies impact safety security, by pushing undocumented immigrants further into the shadows also impacts safety and security. Their growing mistrust and fear of authorities make unauthorized immigrants much less likely to report a crime to authorities. A 2012 survey found that 70 percent of unauthorized Latino migrants were unwilling to report a crime to the police, in contrast to 44 percent of their authorized counterparts.⁶³

This constellation of factors also creates an environment conducive to heightened criminality, that may partly explain the renewed strengthening of gangs in the US also fueled by, as noted earlier, northbound migration by MS-13 members. Mistrust and fear of authorities creates a safe harbor for criminals. My research with Mexican deportees and preliminary conversations with NTCA migrants reveal a pattern in which undocumented adolescents deprived of the opportunities their legal peers enjoy -- to attend college or to find a good paying job -- turn to gangs or engage in crime in a desperate quest to belong and to earn.

The negative economic consequences of tighter enforcement policies are substantial. Local economies are hard hit as immigrants, fearful of being caught and deported, tend to stay at home and save rather than spend.⁶⁴ Think tanks spanning the ideological spectrum concur in predicting the disastrous impact mass deportation would have on the US economy. The deportation of an estimated 7 million unauthorized workers could reduce US GDP by \$4.7 trillion over 10 years with a particular impact on states with the

⁶³ Ibid and Nik Theodore, "Insecure Communities: Perceptions of Police Involvement in Immigration Enforcement," May 2013, available at: https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/INSECURE_COMMUNITIES_REPORT_FINAL.PDF, accessed September 16, 2018.

⁶⁴ Cited in US Today, "Immigration Crackdown hurting US economy, Federal Reserve Official says," May 31, 2017, available at: <https://www.azcentral.com/story/money/business/economy/2017/05/31/economic-effect-deportations-immigration-crackdown-federal-reserve-kaplan/359518001/>, accessed September 16, 2018.

largest unauthorized populations.⁶⁵ Manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, financial services and leisure and hospitality industries are expected to be hardest hit.⁶⁶

The economic toll of interior border enforcement is already apparent. The passage of SB 1070 cost Arizona roughly \$6 billion a year in revenues.⁶⁷ 40 percent of their unauthorized population left, causing steep labor shortages in both agriculture and construction, as native workers filled only 10 percent of vacant jobs. With unauthorized migrants pushed ever deeper into the shadows, employers in states that rely heavily on unauthorized migrants are also finding it harder to contract workers who are reluctant to frequent traditional recruiting locations.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ibid and Center for American Progress, "The Economic Impacts of Removing Unauthorized Immigrant Workers," September 21, 2016, available at:

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2016/09/21/144363/the-economic-impacts-of-removing-unauthorized-immigrant-workers/>, accessed September 15, 2018

⁶⁶ Center for American Progress, "The Economic Impacts of Removing Unauthorized Immigrant Workers," September 21, 2016, available at: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2016/09/21/144363/the-economic-impacts-of-removing-unauthorized-immigrant-workers/>, accessed September 15, 2018

⁶⁷ Cato Institute, "The Aftermath of Arizona's Immigration Laws," March 29, 2016, available at: <https://www.cato.org/blog/aftermath-arizonas-immigration-laws>, Mother Jones, "Arizona is Paying a High Price for Cracking Down on Illegal Immigration," citing Wall Street Journal Study, February 9, 2016, available at <https://www.motherjones.com/kevin-drum/2016/02/arizona-paying-high-price-cracking-down-illegal-immigration/> and Darius Assemi, "Illegal Immigrants can sink our economy if they leave," The Californian, available at: <https://www.thecalifornian.com/story/opinion/2017/05/03/illegal-immigrants-can-sink-economy-leave/101184456/>, accessed September 16, 2018.

⁶⁸ See Natalie Kitroeff and Geoffrey Mohan, "Wages rise on California farms. Americans Still don't want the jobs," LA Times, March 17, 2017, available at: <http://www.latimes.com/projects/la-fi-farms-immigration/>, accessed September 16, 2018.

The national economy will suffer losses if unauthorized immigrant workers are removed

Average annual GDP losses from removing unauthorized immigrant workers, by industry (in billions of dollars)



Notes: The annual estimates of GDP lost are the long-run impacts on production (in 2013 dollars) of a policy that removes all unauthorized immigrant workers. Total GDP lost excludes public-sector, or government, contributions to GDP, which are not shown separately because they do not change with the policy. Estimates are not available, or N/A, for industries within a state where there are too few unauthorized workers observed in the 2011–2013 pooled American Community Survey.

Source: Ryan Edwards and Francesc Ortega, "The Economic Impacts of Removing Unauthorized Immigrant Workers: An Industry and State-Level Analysis" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2016), available at: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2016/09/16/144363/>. See Methodology for further detail.

Questions

- How will the end of TPS impact Salvadoran and Honduran migration, absent an alleviation of the drivers? How will it affect the 200,000 Salvadorans and Hondurans living in the United States?
- How is the Alliance for Prosperity faring? Why has there been relatively little decrease in resulting migration, or more of an impact on the drivers? What are the limitations to international assistance? USAID touts successes and there is no reason to doubt these. At the same time, some brief conversations with migrant communities have expressed frustration with the initiatives, especially the disbursement of funds to private consulting firms with insufficient appreciation for the needs of migrant sending communities (lack of consultation, the development of rival and parallel organizations to existing community-based organizations). The A for P also appears hamstrung by bureaucratic delays.
- Is there a link between deportation, family separation and increased membership in gangs? Profiled, targeted and stigmatized, and deprived of the capacity to work safely, are migrants being pushed into criminal activities as an alternative means of earning income?
- What is the impact, if any, of the Alliance for Prosperity? How is aid being targeted and disbursed? Is it reaching communities? What impact might it be having on migration and intentions to migrate?

IV. NTCA Governments, Civil Society and Migration

Analyses of migration overwhelmingly focus on three sets of actors: NTCA migrants, the US government, and US society and civil society organizations. The critical role that Central American governments play as transit and destination countries for migrants, the responsibility they shoulder for the structural and physical violence that drives unauthorized migration, and their policies towards the tens of thousands of returning migrants are vastly understudied. The attitude and actions of NTCA societies and civil society organizations towards migrants and returning migrants are similarly absent from scholarship and policy analyses of migration. This section explores these three dimensions.

Transit and Destination Countries:

The sheer scope of US-bound migration obscures the fact that the NTCA are also recipient and transit destinations for migrants, preyed upon by gangs, organized trafficking networks, and the police. Under pressure from the United States, undocumented migrants in the NTCA are often also apprehended and detained.⁶⁹ International pressure and assistance have focused on improving government protections and the treatment of migrants within the NTCA.⁷⁰ To date, these efforts have contributed to the passage of legislation in Honduras and Guatemala that inch these countries closer to compliance with Sustainable Development Goals that call upon governments to “facilitate the orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people.” As of this writing, El Salvador continues to drag its feet in following suit and, as tends to be the case, laws exist in the books more than in practice.⁷¹

Drivers of Migration

Structural violence

⁶⁹ Global Detention Project, “Honduras Immigration Detention,” available at <https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/countries/americas/honduras>, Global Detention Project, “Immigration Detention in Guatemala,” 2016, available at: https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/guatemala_immigration_detention_profile.pdf and Global Detention Project, “El Salvador,” available at: <https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/countries/americas/el-salvador>, accessed September 17, 2018.

⁷⁰ IOM, “IOM Helps to Reduce the Vulnerability of Migrant Groups in Guatemala and Belize,” available at: <https://triangulonorteca.iom.int/news/iom-helps-reduce-vulnerability-migrant-groups-guatemala-and-belize>, accessed September 17, 2018.

⁷¹ An estimated 300,000 migrants pass through Guatemala each year, in addition to an estimated 760,000 foreign nationals, mostly from more violent neighboring countries live in Guatemala. IOM, “IOM Urges El Salvador to Modernize its Migration Law,” available at: <https://triangulonorteca.iom.int/news/iom-urges-el-salvador-modernize-its-migration-law>, accessed September 17, 2018.

Central American governments shoulder considerable responsibility for the structural violence that drives the massive internal displacement and international migration of their poorer and more vulnerable populations. Historically the purview of a small elite class and, increasingly, organized crime, governments in the region are indifferent to the economic plight of the poorer and more vulnerable sectors of society. Their indifference tolerates stubbornly high levels of poverty and inequality, manifest in the lack of government social safety nets and funds to address the health and education of poorer segments of society.

Resource poor states, a reflection of corruption and elite influence, hamper state capacities. Tax revenues as a percentage of GDP among NTCA rank among the lowest in the region. Guatemala boasts the lowest at 12.6 percent, while El Salvador fares marginally better at 17.9 percent and Honduras reaches 21.4 percent. By way of comparison, these numbers contrast with an OECD average of 34.3 percent approximated in the region by the Southern Cone countries of Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay.⁷²

Poverty is further exacerbated by NTCA governments' resistance to address inequities in land distribution or to facilitate rural entrepreneurship, through a process of integral rural development reform. Land concentration in the NTCA is higher than in Europe, Africa or Asia. The Gini coefficient for land (a measurement between 0 and 1, in which 1 represents maximum inequality) in the early 2000s was 0.81 in El Salvador and 0.84 in Guatemala.⁷³ Motivated by the prospects of achieving rapid economic growth and indifferent to the plight of the poor, NTCA governments are also key facilitators of the land grabbing currently generated by the development of extractive industries and agribusiness.⁷⁴ The gender gap in land holdings compounds the situation of female poverty, with a likely impact on the growing numbers of women migrating. The region boasts the lowest hemispheric rates of land ownership by women. In Guatemala, women possess just 7.8 percent of all land, while 12 percent of Salvadoran women own land.⁷⁵

⁷²OECD/ECLAC/CIAT/IDB, Revenue Statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018, available at: <http://www.oecd.org/tax/tax-policy/revenue-statistics-latin-america-caribbean-brochure.pdf>, accessed September 11, 2018.

⁷³ Oxfam, "Unearthed: Land, Power and Inequality in Latin America," November 2016, available at: https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bp-land-power-inequality-latin-america-301116-en.pdf, accessed September 12, 2018.

⁷⁴ See CISDE, "Impacts of Extractive Industries in Latin America: Analysis and Guidelines for Future Work," January 2009, available at: <https://trocaire.org/sites/default/files/resources/policy/latin-america-extractives.pdf>, accessed September 12, 2018.

⁷⁵ Oxfam, "Unearthed," op.cit., p. 28

Civil society, especially human rights organizations, has missed an opportunity to highlight structural violence. Despite the routine violation of economic and social rights in the Northern Triangle, human rights organizations hue to a narrow interpretation that focuses solely on abuses of civil and political liberties and have yet to develop a capacity to monitor respect for these other fundamental rights, that threaten the lives of a majority of their fellow citizens and cause massive displacement.⁷⁶

Physical Violence:

Through a combination of acts of omission and commission, NTCA governments also shoulder responsibility for the epidemic levels of violence perpetrated by organized crime and gangs that fuel internal displacement and international migration. Government complicity, compounded by the institutional weakness of states, allow organized crime to act unimpeded within much of the NTCA. Political leaders turn a blind eye to criminal networks to which they owe their ascendancy, that hold them captive, and with whom they engage in lucrative business dealings. In a region dominated by “brown areas” of state absence, organized crime establishes control and even acts as a surrogate state.⁷⁷ Law enforcement is no match. They lack the numbers, tools and skills to challenge organized crime. A mix of economic incentives and intimidation make police and judges available for cooptation.⁷⁸ Although beyond the scope of this document, the accomplishments, the challenges, and the current full-frontal assault against the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala provide a clear snapshot of the encrusted power and resilience of organized crime and its embedded ties to the state.⁷⁹

NTCA governments’ punitive response to gangs fuels their growth and belligerence. Imprisoning gang members in overcrowded jails accompanied by a policy of separating gang members to reduce prison

⁷⁶ This is a subject of some debate. See Kenneth Roth, “Defending Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Practical Issues Faced by an International Human Rights Organization,” *Human Rights Quarterly*, 26:1 (February, 2004), pp. 63-73 and Leonard S. Rubinstein, “How International Organizations Can Advance Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: A response to Kenneth Roth,” *Human Rights Quarterly*, 26:4 (November 2004), pp. 845-865.

⁷⁷ On “brown areas” see Guillermo O’Donnell’s classic essay, “On the State, Democratization and Some Conceptual Problems.” Kellogg Institute Working Paper, #192, April 1993, available at: https://kellogg.nd.edu/sites/default/files/old_files/documents/192_0.pdf, accessed September 23, 2018.

⁷⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: A Threat Assessment,” September 2012, available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/TOC_Central_America_and_the_Caribbean_english.pdf, accessed September 12, 2018.

⁷⁹ Adriana Beltran, “Is Guatemala’s Fight Against Corruption Under Threat?” *Foreign Affairs*, June 6, 2018, available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/guatemala/2018-06-06/guatemalas-fight-against-corruption-under-threat>, and Francisco Goldman, “Why is Trump Tacitly Supporting Corruption in Guatemala,” op-ed *New York Times*, September 21, 2018, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/21/opinion/trump-corruption-guatemala.html>, accessed September 23, 2018.

violence contributes to their strengthening within and beyond prisons. Jails become “incubators” for gangs, serving as staging grounds for gang operations and for the recruitment of new members.⁸⁰ As noted earlier, government crackdowns concentrated in urban areas where both gangs and law enforcement are most entrenched, encourages the spread of gangs into rural areas beyond the reach of the state, most notably in El Salvador and, to a lesser degree, in Honduras.⁸¹ Their operational modus vivendi echoes that of organized crime; as one expert observes: “These territorial groups often act as a surrogate state in areas neglected by the government. They impose a monopoly on violence, offering security to those who cooperate.”⁸²

In 2007, Philip Alston the UN Special rapporteur on extrajudicial killings, noted, “Guatemala is a good place to commit murder, because you will almost certainly get away with it.”⁸³ That often-quoted observation rings true today throughout the NTCA, where weak and corrupt justice institutions condone violence by entrenching impunity. The results of a Global Impunity Index, measuring a “chain of impunity” from the perpetration of a crime through the conviction and sentencing of the offender, is striking. According to its 2017 data, NTCA countries have among the highest impunity scores among 63 countries surveyed. Honduras ranks 12th from the bottom, El Salvador 13th and Guatemala 19th.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Jose Miguel Cruz, “The Transformation of Street Gangs in Central America” *Revista, Harvard Review of Latin America*, (Winter, 2012) available at: <https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/book/transformation-street-gangs-central-america>, accessed September 12, 2018.

Steven Dudley and James Bargent, “The Prison Dilemma: Latin America’s Incubator of Organized Crime,” Insight Crime, January 19, 2017, available at: <https://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/prison-dilemma-latin-america-incubators-organized-crime/>, and International Crisis Group, *Mafia of the Poor: Gang Violence and Extortion in Central America*, report 62, April 6, 2017 available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/central-america/62-mafia-poor-gang-violence-and-extortion>, accessed September 12, 2018.

⁸¹ Insight Crime, *MS13 in the Americas*, 2018, available at: <https://www.insightcrime.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/MS13-in-the-Americas-InSight-Crime-English-3.pdf>, Insight Crime, *Gangs in Honduras*, 20 November 2015, available at: https://www.ajs-us.org/sites/default/files/research/honduras_gangs.pdf, and Douglas Farah and Kathryn Babineau, “The Evolution of MS13 in El Salvador and Honduras,” *Prism: National Defense University, The Journal of Complex Operations*, 7, 1 available at: <http://cco.ndu.edu/News/Article/1298326/the-evolution-of-ms-13-in-el-salvador-and-honduras/>, accessed September 12, 2018.

⁸² IDB blog, “Organized Crime, Eroding Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean,” June 1, 2017, available at: <https://blogs.iadb.org/ideasmatter/2017/06/01/organized-crime-eroding-democracy-latin-america-caribbean/>

⁸³ Philip Alston, “Civil and Political Rights, Including the Questions of Disappearances and Summary Executions,” United Nations, Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, February 19, 2007, available at: http://www.hr-dp.org/files/2015/08/03/Mission_to_Guatemala_2007.pdf, accessed September 23, 2018.

⁸⁴ GII -2017 Global Impunity Index, available at https://www.udlap.mx/cesij/files/IGI-2017_eng.pdf, pp. 31-35, accessed September 16, 2018.

Remittances

Northern Triangle governments may perceive the loss of citizens to emigration as more than compensated for by the inflow of remittance funds to remaining family members. The estimated size of remittances sent back to developing countries exceeds overseas development assistance and foreign exchange reserves. (data displayed in Table 3 below) The data below highlight a steady rise in remittances to the NTCA over the past several years, part “insurance mechanism” among migrants facing tougher enforcement policies, part reflection of the continued increase in migration from the region. Remittances are the single largest contributor to the GDP of the NTCA, and in 2017 remittances comprised roughly 11 % of GDP in Guatemala, and close to 20% in Honduras and El Salvador. Their rate of increase between 2016 and 2017 surpassed the 9 percent growth in exports recorded during the same time frame.⁸⁵

Table 3: Remittances to Northern Triangle Countries, levels, growth and % of GDP, 2015-2016

	2015	2016	2017
El Salvador			
Remittance in \$US millions	\$4,288	\$4,594	\$5,051
Growth from previous year in %	3.2%	7.1%	9.9%
Percent of GDP	18.5%	19.2%	20.4%
Guatemala			
Remittance in \$US millions	\$6,573	\$7,471	\$8,540
Growth from previous year in %	12.6%	13.7%	14.3%
Percent of GDP	10.3%	10.9%	11.3%
Honduras			
Remittance in \$US millions	\$3,666	\$3,864	\$4,322
Growth from previous year in %	8.7%	5.4%	11.9%
Percent of GDP	17.5%	17.9%	18.8%

Source: Remittance data come from Migration and Development Brief, April 2018, World Bank; GDP figures come from World Bank Indicators 2017.

Sources of remittances vary, although the bulk are sent by individual migrants to relatives back home, where most of the money is used to cover basic health, housing, and educational needs. There are also

⁸⁵ Manuel Orozco, “Remittances to Latin America and the Caribbean in 2017, The Dialogue, available at: <https://www.thedialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Remittances-2017-1.pdf>, accessed September 13, 2018.

Central American associations, especially prevalent and organized among Salvadorans and at times formally constituted as Hometown Associations, that send money to their communities of origin. Diaspora associations tend to provide for more general community infrastructure, health and education projects, and mobilize in response to disasters.⁸⁶

Central American governments meanwhile benefit from remittances without helping to multiply their impact. Migrants and their associations relieve the state from its responsibility to provide for the basic health, housing and educational needs of poorer communities. At the same time, the Central American political leadership hinders the productive investment that could alleviate the poverty that drives migration. Pervasive corruption, extortion, and weak rule of law provides a further disincentive to investing remittances in business opportunities, an obstacle compounded by a generalized lack of access to financial services.⁸⁷

Deportation and Reintegration

This final section addresses NTCA government and civil society responses to the deportation and reintegration of returning migrants to the NTCA. Data provided in Figure 4 (Section 1) highlights the steady growth in deportations of unauthorized migrants between 1996 and 2014. Despite a decline in subsequent years, almost 142,000 unauthorized migrants were returned to the Northern Triangle in 2017 and 2018 portends a substantial increase in deportations. 141, 828 migrants were returned to the NTCA during the first six months of 2018, the lion's share to Guatemala which registered a 64.5% increase and Honduras a 55.6% increase in deportations over the same period in 2017.⁸⁸

Challenges facing returning migrants:

⁸⁶ Manuel Orozco, "Diasporas, Philanthropy and hometown associations: the Central American Experience," IBD, March 2006, available at: <https://publications.iadb.org/handle/11319/3498?locale-attribute=pt&>, Daniela Villacres, "Beyond Remittances: Reframing Diaspora-Driven Development in El Salvador," Migration Policy Institute, March 5, 2013, available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/beyond-remittances-reframing-diaspora-driven-development-el-salvador/>

⁸⁷ Andrew Wainer, "Exchanging People for Money: Remittances and Repatriation in Central America," Bread for the World, Briefing Paper, no. 18, June 2012, available at: <http://www.bread.org/sites/default/files/downloads/briefing-paper-18.pdf>, accessed September 17, 2018. There has been surprisingly little effort by multilateral organizations to address this lacunae. The Inter-American Foundation, meanwhile, has made a concerted effort to work with rural communities on developing entrepreneurial capacity.

⁸⁸ IOM, <https://triangulonorteca.iom.int/honduran-statistics>, accessed September 21, 2018.

Returning migrants face severe psychological, social and economic challenges that hinder their (re)integration. Most return deeply traumatized by the abuse and dangers they face on their migratory journey, their lives as unauthorized migrants, endured in constant fear and complicated by frequently difficult family situations, and their experiences of apprehension and detention. This final US experience, in which migrants are ripped from their loved ones, was cruel and abusive even prior to the brutal family separation and detention policies enacted by the Trump administration. Deportation carries humiliating feelings of defeat. It is also degrading, with returnees uniformly treated as criminals as their hands and feet are cuffed until transferred to local authorities.

The social stigmatization migrants face upon their return exacerbates and creates new trauma. Children raised in the United States find it hard to reintegrate into schools, where they become frequent targets of bullying, while adults, especially those with tattoos, trigger suspicion and are typically regarded as criminals.⁸⁹ Deportees also contend with enormous anxiety, knowing the risks they face, notably the likelihood of reprisal from the gangs they fled or of being preyed upon by extortionists.⁹⁰

Returning migrants confront enormous economic insecurity. A minority with fluent English language skills are at an advantage, landing jobs in a mushrooming call center industry staffed by returning migrants. But the vast majority join the ranks of the formally unemployed. The scarcity of jobs is exacerbated by difficulties in certifying their educational and professional skills acquired abroad and employer reluctance to hire returning migrants lest they be criminals. Preliminary results of my research in Guatemala found that older returnees are especially disadvantaged. In a society where unemployment is rampant and the majority of the population young, employers prefer to hire younger workers.

A concerted effort by international organizations, especially the IOM, has generated greater official awareness of the challenges facing returnees, inculcated some sense of government responsibility and spurred modest programmatic initiatives.⁹¹ Governments have focused the bulk of their efforts on

⁸⁹ UNICEF, "Children returned to Central America and Mexico at heightened risk of violence, stigma and deprivation," August 2018, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/children-returned-central-america-and-mexico-heightened-risk-violence-stigma-and>, accessed September 17, 2018.

⁹⁰ Daniella Burgi-Palomino, "No Rights, No Dignity: Risks Facing Deported Migrants in Honduras and El Salvador, Latin America Working Group, January 11, 2018 available at: <http://www.lawg.org/action-center/lawg-blog/69-general/1977-no-rights-no-dignity-risks-facing-deported-migrants-in-honduras-and-el-salvador>, my interviews with returning migrants in Mexico and Guatemala and my research with returning migrants in Guatemala and Mexico.

⁹¹ Manuel Orozco and Julia Yansura, "Removed, Returned and Resettled: Challenges of Central Americans Back Home," Inter-American Dialogue, August 2015, available at: https://www.thedialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Central-America-return-migration_Final_Formatted.pdf, and Victoria Rietig and Rodrigo

reception services. Relying heavily on the assistance of international organizations (The Red Cross, the IOM, and international NGOs) in setting up reception centers, these programs are somewhat less rudimentary today than they were even two years ago. New reception centers, looking more welcoming than the old, have been established to assist deportees arriving by air and land in all three countries. In Honduras especially, to some degree in El Salvador, and less so in Guatemala, the facilities also provide a more comprehensive, though still cursory and limited range of services, including medical and psychological evaluations and a quick assessment of the security risks returning migrants are likely to face. Efforts are also increasingly made to tailor reception services to the differing needs of returning adults, family units and children.⁹²

Though official reintegration programs remain woefully inadequate in both scale and substance, they have improved somewhat in recent years, again largely thanks to international assistance and the dedication of local staff, often comprised of returning migrants.⁹³ Existing programs seek to assist returning migrants overcome the major psychological, social and economic challenges they face. Both children and adults receive psychological counseling, accompanied by some initiatives to nurture a more protective environment for returnees. Noteworthy examples include programs seeking to reintegrate children into schools and communities. A Honduran program focuses on training teachers to address the special needs of returning migrant children, while a Salvadoran initiative aims to alleviate alienation and foster solidarity through extra-curricular activities.⁹⁴

Dominguez-Villegas, "Stopping the Revolving Door: Reception and Reintegration Services for Central American Deportees, Migration Policy Institute, December 2015, available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/stopping-revolving-door-reception-and-reintegration-services-central-american-deportees>, accessed September 17, 2018.

⁹² Victoria Rettig and Rodrigo Dominguez-Villegas, "Stopping the Revolving Door: Reception and Reintegration Services for Central American Deportees," Migration Policy Institute, December 2015, available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/stopping-revolving-door-reception-and-reintegration-services-central-american-deportees>, accessed September 16, 2018 and interviews with Luis Argueta and Rodrigo Dominguez Villegas, September 2018.

⁹³ See for example, Government of El Salvador, "Plan de atencion integral a ninas, ninos y adolescents en su entorno familiar, desde una perspectiva de Derechos Humanos, Genero y Inclusion," December 20, 2016, available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/el-salvador/plan-de-atenci-n-integral-ni-ni-os-y-adolescentes-retornados-en-su-entorno>, accessed September 17, 2018.

⁹⁴ IOM, "Como Facilitar la reintegracion de la ninez migrante retornada desde las escuelas?" available at <http://rosanjose.iom.int/site/es/blog/c-mo-facilitar-la-reintegraci-n-de-la-ni-ez-migrante-retornada-desde-las-escuelas>, OIM contribuye a la educacion de ninez retornada a Honduras, February 19, 2018, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/honduras/oim-contribuye-la-educaci-n-de-ni-ez-retornada-honduras>, IOM, Programa Integral de Insercion para Poblacion Salvadorena Retornada, available at <https://www.transparencia.gob.sv/institutions/rreee/.../download>, IOM, UN Migration Agency USAID Build Protective

NGOs, at times working in collaboration with government agencies, are also helping returnees develop entrepreneurial skills and technical education.⁹⁵ For instance, the Honduran-based Mennonite Centro de Accion Social, combines psychological assistance with vocational training. It incentivizes participation by offering seed business start-up grants to graduates who have displayed the greatest commitment to the program.⁹⁶ El Salvador's INSAMI program is similarly focused, offering participants both counseling and assistance in starting up new businesses.⁹⁷ Guatemala's efforts in this regard are more incipient. The Guatemalan government is working with INTECAP in providing technical education and certification programs. Though well intentioned, the handful of Guatemalan NGOs assisting migrants (notably the Asociacion de Retornados de Guatemala and Te Conecta) tend to be chiefly focused on recruiting individuals with English language, typing and computer skills for employment in call centers.

The success of these initiatives and their massive duplication, urgently required to service the needs of the tens or hundreds of thousands of deportees flooding back to the NTCA, are hamstrung by NTCA governments and civil society who remain poorly prepared, ill-equipped and under-committed to reintegrate the influx of deportees. To cite just one example, knowledge of the scale or needs of returning migrants varies from country to country and is at best, incipient. The Observatorio Consular y Migratorio (CONMIGHO) established in 2015 in Honduras has begun to make a concerted effort to build a database of returning migrants that is a critical component in formulating service delivery programs.⁹⁸ Tracking remains more rudimentary in El Salvador and virtually absent in Guatemala.⁹⁹ Civil society has been equally deaf to the plight of returning migrants. Human rights organizations, for instance, do not track attacks on returnees, despite widespread knowledge of the special risks they face as a particular group.

The trauma and enormous challenges returnees face and the inadequacy of efforts to (re)integrate them create a situation in which deportees are vulnerable to recruitment by organized crime and gangs and keen to return to the United States. Preliminary quantitative and qualitative research with returning

Environment for Returnees to El Salvador, August 18, 2017, available at: <https://www.iom.int/news/un-migration-agency-usaid-build-protective-environments-returnees-el-salvador> accessed September 16, 2018

⁹⁵ Orozco and Yansura, op.cit.

⁹⁶ Interview Rodrigo Dominguez Villegas.

⁹⁷ Interview, Luis Argueta and Orozco and Yansuri, op.cit.

⁹⁸ Observatorio Consular y Migratorio de Honduras (CONMIGHO), available at <https://www.conmigho.hn>, accessed September 17, 2018.

⁹⁹ Romina Ruiz-Goiriena, "After Trump's Family Separation Plan: One Mother's Hellish Journey to Find her 8-year-old son," Newsweek, September 13, 2018, available at: <https://www.newsweek.com/2018/09/21/trump-family-separation-one-mother-fights-back-1118170.html>, accessed September 16, 2018.

migrants highlight their interest in returning to the United States. Returning migrants interviewed as part of a Migration Policy Institute project, emphasize their strong desire to return as soon as possible. Preliminary findings from my research with Guatemalan returning migrants provided more of a mixed response. Those separated from family members indicated the strongest interest in returning immediately, while others accepted their fate, hoping to make a go of it in Guatemala, although they did not dismiss the likelihood of eventual return. My research in Mexico reveals a similar pattern. Despite data highlighting a decline in attempted returns, 62.5 percent of the returning migrants our research team surveyed during the summer 2018 would not rule out return, indicating instead that they were either considering or intending to return permanently to the United States.

These data are significant given the heightened risks these migrants face should they attempt reentry. The journey northward has become both costlier and more dangerous. Furthermore, attempting reentry to the United States after being deported is a serious crime. Those without a prior criminal conviction are subject to a fine, two years in prison, or both. Convicted criminals who attempt reentry are subject to prison terms of between 10 and 20 years, depending on whether the crime was a misdemeanor or an aggravated felony.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Department of Justice, Office of the United States Attorneys, "Reentry After Deportation" available at: <https://www.justice.gov/usam/criminal-resource-manual-1912-8-usc-1326-reentry-after-deportation-removal>, accessed September 13, 2018.

Questions

- However impressive and necessary these efforts are, there seems to be an opportunity missed to harness the economic and social skills of returning migrants in ways that could help them integrate into their societies, allow them to feel that they are making a positive contribution and, by extension, temper their desire to re-migrate. Given their work experiences in the United States, they may require less vocational training and need more opportunity to ply skills acquired in the US. In a NY Times op-ed I spoke of my conversations with returning migrants, noting:

“During my visit, I encountered bricklayers and carpenters who undertook sophisticated home renovation projects, professional landscapers who worked on golf courses, a leather craftsman who oversaw a briefcase-making business and a young sushi chef who spoke fluent English and even rudimentary Japanese. They are eager to put their skills to work in Guatemala, either by opening their own businesses or by finding a private-sector partner.”¹

- Guatemalan deportees (much like their Mexican counterparts whom we interviewed this past summer) return with political skills that could contribute to improved governance. They value the rule of law that pertains in the United States. They return home committed to spread those values within their communities and are keen on gaining an opportunity to do so at a more regional and national level. Even deported gang members expressed an interest in working with the police, youth, and gang members to find ways of tackling and preventing gang membership.
- Mexico has a number of impressive NGO efforts to assist returning migrants. It is worth drawing on the Mexican experience and perhaps building a network of organizations so as to share experience, knowledge and capacity.
- Why are so many of these programs run by deportees and international organizations? What about local NGOs? Could human rights defenders and other human rights organizations include returning migrants